

The Maricopa Redemption

I was honored when Naomi asked if I was interested in presenting at the Spring 2000 Convocation. And, I confidently gave her an affirmative answer thinking in the back of my mind that if all the pundit's prognostications about Y2K were correct, I'd never actually have to give the address! But alas, the New Year has come, our computers did not crash, the world did not end, and it looks as if I have to give this presentation.

Our topic for Convocation 2000, or C2K, is "Conversations about Teaching and Learning for the New Millennium." I have been asked to represent the perspective of new faculty in the Maricopa District. As such, it was suggested that I address three basic questions about my experience within the district: first, What were my professional expectations upon being hired?, second, What motivates me to continue teaching?, and third, How do I think teaching and learning will evolve in the future? All of these are interesting questions, and I could talk at length on any one of them. However, because our time is so limited, I would like to take this opportunity to focus on the third question, How will teaching and learning evolve over the next decade, century, and perhaps even the millennium? I think this is a vitally important question for us to address, and a timely one, as we are all focused, to one degree or another, on the significant point in history at which we stand.

When thinking about the nature of education in the next century, I think the most important question we must all address is, What model of education will dominate our profession as we move forward? This is a question we must face, not just as Maricopans, but as academics on the world's stage. My comments, therefore, must be understood in the broadest possible context, and my criticisms should not be thought of as an indictment of my college, or our district, or any particular state system of post-

secondary education. Rather, I'm addressing academe itself; I'm raising a philosophical, not a sociological question.

What will be the dominant model for post-secondary education in the 21st Century? The short answer is, I don't know. Nor do I think anyone else does either! I think of political institutions as organic, rather than mechanical, and as such they have a tendency to take unexpected evolutionary leaps from time to time. Thus, it is practically impossible for us to say with certainty what educational institutions will be like in a hundred years. This is not due to the fact that events are random, rather there are simply too many variables for us factor to make accurate predictions about the future. Thus, as David Hume pointed out over two hundred years ago, our epistemic limitations make it impossible for us to make accurate projections about future events. And, as we have graphically witnessed over the past couple of weeks, the best prognostications, as often as not, come to naught! So, if causality is even remotely as elusive as Hume thought, the attempt to characterize the precise nature of education in the next century is little more than sheer speculation.

If we cannot make accurate projections about the nature of education in the future, we can at least evaluate where education is today. And, perhaps through a critical evaluation of the current model of post-secondary education, we can participate in the next developmental stage of post-secondary education. This brings me directly to the question I wish to address today: What is wrong with the current model of post-secondary education in America?

Throughout the 20th Century, but particularly since the end of the Second World War, post-secondary educational institutions in the United States have increasingly adopted the corporate or industrial model as the primary model of operation. There are numerous reasons that explain the adoption of the corporate/industrial model within American academe. For example, in the post-war period there was the political bifurcation between democratic and socialist societies, the radical influx of non-

traditional students attending college on the GI Bill, and the demands for a more technically educated workforce by the emerging military/industrial complex. There was a brief reaction against the industrialization of education in the 60s and 70s, but by the 1980s the corporate model was again in vogue, and it has remained the dominant model up to the present day.

The argument in favor of maintaining the corporate/industrial model of education is, in many ways, rather compelling. For example, it might be argued that the 20th Century, if it demonstrates anything at all, has dramatically demonstrated the superiority of Adam Smith's *laissez faire* principle that competition stimulates creativity and frugality which lead to more efficient institutions. If we compare the leading economic entities at the end of the 20th Century we find that of the top 70, 41 are corporations. As of 1999 Exxon-Mobil, General Motors, and Ford controlled more capital than nations of Sweden, Spain, and the Netherlands; Daimler-Chrysler, Mitsubishi, and Wal-Mart controlled more capital than Canada, Australia and Brazil; Toyota, General Electric and IBM controlled more capital than Mexico, South Korea, and Denmark; and AT&T, Philip Morris, and Sony controlled more capital than the nations of India, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Corporate institutions are quickly becoming wealthier, and therefore more powerful, than governments. It is reasonable to desire all of our institutions to be efficient and successful; hence, it might be argued that all human institutions ought to adopt the model that has served corporate interests so well. *QED.*

There are, however, numerous reasons to reject the idea that educational institutions are bettered by adopting the corporate model. The most significant objection is revealed when we articulate the goals of different human activities. As Aristotle pointed out over two millennia ago, different human activities have different goals, and it is the goal of an action that gives it meaning. The important point is that the goals of corporate institutions, the goals of business, are essentially different from

the goals of educational institutions. The goal of business is to accrue capital through commerce. The goal of education, is self-fulfillment, or what Aristotle called *eujlmonia*, or human flourishing. Because these two institutions have such radically different goals, it is implausible, to say the least, that the *modus operandi* of one institution will be the same as the other. That is not to say that educational institutions cannot learn from the corporate world, or that the corporate world cannot learn from academe, it merely demonstrates that the organizational model of each institution will be significantly different. Thus, educational institutions ought not to adopt the corporate model.

There are other reasons that should lead us to reject the coporatization of post-secondary education in America, as well. If we look at the consequences of adopting the corporate model, many of these reasons come to light. One obvious problem is the division which exists between management and labor. In the corporate world there is an essential distinction between management and labor as management is, or is representative of, those who control the capital. Labor is thus, very much in the service of management. This, however, bears little resemblance to the goals and functions of academic institutions. Faculty do not work for the administration, but rather it is the other way around. Faculty work for students, and the administration exists solely to facilitate the faculty-to-student relationship. The corporate model, when superimposed on academe, leads to artificial and unnecessary tension between faculty and administration.

The corporate model has had pernicious effects on students as well, both in terms of their understanding of the purpose and benefits of education. How often have we heard a student utter the phrase, "I only need this class for my degree"? In turn, they only need the degree for a job, and the job for the money, and the money for the sake of the stuff they can buy. But why do they want the stuff? Does human fulfillment, does our ultimate goal, lie in the accumulation of wealth? Does the person with the most toys at the end of life win the game? Our students, by and large, think the answer to

that question is yes. They are led to that conclusion by a corporate model which tells them that their goal, their function, is the accumulation of wealth through commerce. And we, by adopting the corporate model in education, have reinforced that message.

If our students are confused about the purpose of education because of the corporate model, they are even more confused about the benefits of education. This is evidenced by the marked increase of academic misconduct over the past two decades. If the purpose of education is to secure a good job, then the benefits I receive from education will all be derived from that end. Thus, there is nothing intrinsically good in the process of education itself. Therefore, if cheating helps me to get a better grade, and getting a better grade gives me an advantage over my competitors, that self-interest which is Adam Smith's invisible hand will guide me to download that paper, or plagiarize that source, or cheat on that exam. After all, competition is an essential part of the model we have adopted in our educational system. And, what counts as fair or unfair advantage is determined, by and large, by the most powerful social institutions. As corporate entities gain more and more power, they take on a greater role in determining the rules of social engagement. The benefits of education are, according to the corporate model, only instrumental.

One final negative consequence of adopting the corporate model in educational institutions is the corrupting influence corporate money can have on academic research. As universities and colleges receive less and less funding from local, state, and federal governments, they naturally turn to the corporate world for sponsorship. But again, the conflict between academic and corporate goals comes to center stage. Research which was once done for the sake of knowledge itself, or for the public good, is increasingly being guided by private corporate interests. The problem is that much research which ought to be pursued is left unattended because it is not cost-effective or conducive to short-term profits. Or worse, discoveries which undermine corporate interests are kept secret because the corporate entity which paid for the research "owns" the information.

If they choose not to make information available to the general public, that is within their rights.

I do not want to leave you with the impression that I am opposed to capitalism, or corporations large or small. Nothing could be further from the truth. My job today is to help spark some conversation about the nature of education in the next decade and century. All I am attempting to do in this paper is to raise, what I take to be an important question at the end of the 20th Century: How shall we conduct ourselves in the future? Who are we, and what is our goal as academics?

Let me end with a metaphor from the film “The Shawshank Redemption.” In that film we meet three interesting characters: Andy Dufrain, a new inmate convicted for the murder of his wife and her lover, Red, a lifer in the Shawshank prison who befriends Andy and who narrates the story, and old Brooks the prison librarian and courier for prison contraband. About a third of the way through the story old Brooks, a man who has spent the vast majority of his life in Shawshank is paroled. But once freed, he finds that he does not know how to cope with life outside the prison. In his frustration and inability to cope, he commits suicide. We are told by Red that he had become “institutionalized,” that his life was meaningful for him only in terms of the role he played within the society of convicts. Having become an “institutional man” he could not see how to make his way outside of the society he had known for so long.

Andy, we discover in the course of the film is not guilty of the murder of his wife, and finally decides that he cannot allow himself to spend his life being punished for a crime he didn't commit. He ingeniously plans and executes his escape from the prison, and succeeds in escaping to Mexico to live the remainder of his life. Andy's character is the antithesis of Brooks; he cannot be broken and he cannot be institutionalized. He is the hero and paradigm character we all aspire to be.

Some years later Red, now an old man himself, is deemed to be no danger to society and is paroled. Now freed from the regimented life of the prison Red finds life

as challenging as did Brooks. He compulsively asks permission to go the bathroom as he confesses to us, after 60 years of prison life he “can’t squeeze a single drop without being given permission.” He spends most of his time trying to think of ways of getting back into prison, back to his world, where he is safe, where he is somebody. In the climatic scene of the film, Red’s frustration turns to despair and we see him peering into the window of a pawn shop at pistols and compasses. It is important to understand the imagery. Red must choose what course of action he will take: will he, like Brooks, give in to despair and follow a course of self destruction, or will he keep a promise he made to Andy years before in the prison? He choose to keep the promise to Andy and that promise turns out to lead Red to his own redemption.

It seems to me that, as much as we’d like to think of ourselves as Andy, the idealistic hero who could not be broken, who was willing to “crawl through a mile of shit” to gain his freedom, we are in fact more like Red. We stand before the pawn shop window gazing at pistols and compasses. The question is, will we accept the role that has been given us by our past, will we be institutionalized and not allow ourselves to see beyond the current model of education, or will we be redeemed by daring to look beyond what we know, to what may be.