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Survival in a Time of Crisis: the Professional Faculty in British Columbia

The erosion of professional faculties in British Columbia in particular, but in Canada as a whole, is a process which will have much in common with the phenomenon as it occurs elsewhere. But, being Canadian does present some peculiarities. Some of the historic antecedents to the current era have lent a particular virulence to, what can only be termed, the all-out attack on all levels of public schooling which is occurring in that province.

Through the earliest terms of the British North America Act, now firmly entrenched in our new constitution, education is provincial business. There is no formal role allotted to the federal government in this most important task, the education of Canadian citizens. Be that as it may it would be expected that certain goals of federal regimes which could be forwarded by educational means, have been, and by quite a few diverse mechanisms, secured throughout our 117 years of nationhood. Thus the national government found ways to intervene when thousands of veterans of World War II returned home, or when a policy of bilingualism was invented for a nation which is essentially multilingual but functionally unilingual in 75% of its population. In fact, the game of federal intervention has become so widespread that over 200 programs, committees, agencies or departments of the federal government spend over 2 billion dollars annually on many educational programs at every level. Perhaps this is necessarily the case. The difficulty is that without a recognized office, or minister for education, there is little or no coordination or genuine accountability of the national effort.

The problem is worsened because of the necessary rhetoric emanating from both levels of government concerning the essential provincial jurisdiction over matters educational. The provinces never allow the federal agencies to claim credit for programs they fund. All such monies are laundered through provincial ministries. The federal actors never claim public responsibility for such programs so as not to bring down the wrath of the provinces upon them for contravening the constitution. And so goes the peculiar Canadian approach to educating the young.

This context is important when one considers the plight of professional faculties in Canada's provinces. Federal support for universities takes the form of a transfer of funds to the provinces under the Established Programs Financing, an agreement which has already run out, has been extended without renegotiation, and which yet may become a casualty of the recent election. The original intention of these transfers were to help the provincial budgets in the burgeoning areas of health care and university education. However, true to historic form, the provinces have never accepted, publicly, the right of the federal government to dictate such expenditures in the areas of health and education. This nicety is handled by having the transfer of funds made to provincial General Revenue Accounts, over which the province has, clearly, complete control. This has not been a problem financially. The money has reached universities accounting for some 75% of the provincial grant to universities in British Columbia, and ranging up to 100% in Prince Edward Island.

In July, 1983, in British Columbia, the Social Credit Government, newly returned to power

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announced sweeping financial restraint legislation accompanying its '83-'84 budget. For the first time in any province the federal transfer payment for higher education was reduced from the publicized intention of the national government. The transfer to all provinces in that year was claimed to be increased by 8%. In British Columbia the actual grant to universities was reduced by 5% from the previous year. The effect on the university system has been devastating especially in light of several preceding years of tight funding and especially in light of a promise that the next year would see a further 5% reduction.

These slashes in funding are not different from reductions affecting other areas of public education, the schools, colleges and institutes of British Columbia. For a professional faculty the more general context of support for public education presents difficulties in addition to the specific problem of university funding. Within the same legislative program the provincial government announced sweeping changes in their intentions for public education in the province. School expenditures are to be decreased such that over an eighteen month period some 3,000 current teaching jobs will be lost. This intention is explicitly directed to reducing the teaching force as was underlined during the 1983 ministrike by teachers in support of a Solidarity Coalition formed to oppose the legislative package. During the three days of the school strike, local districts had saved considerable sums of money from their projected payroll. Some announced the intention to use these savings to retain teachers who were otherwise scheduled to be terminated. The province promptly vetoed such action.

It was hardly necessary to spell out the implications for Faculties of Education in the province. Seen by this government as, primarily, sources of new teachers the question was raised as to whether British Columbia really needed three faculties with a capacity for graduating 3,000 new teachers yearly at a time when there were intentions to decrease teaching staffs. Thus on two fronts, the funding problems of the university system, and the general context of support for public education, the professional faculties have been posed a potentially precarious future.

Whenever the university suffers, the professional faculty suffers accordingly. In the remainder of this essay I would like to examine the differential effects of budget cuts in British Columbia upon one of the Faculties of Education and to postulate a rationale for these effects. The view will be somewhat cursory but sufficient to raise a number of important questions about the role of professional faculties on campus.

At Simon Fraser University, a Professional Development Program (P.D.P.) for the training of teachers, was among the first of that University's programs when the campus was built in the mid-sixties. It was created to be different from typical faculties. Teachers were to be educated in the university in traditional departments and would receive school-based practical training at the hands of master school teachers on temporary secondment to the university as Associates of the Faculty. Over time, there has arisen a small tenured Faculty which maintains the P.D.P. as its major program. A major characteristic remains in the differentiated staffing model which retains a significant portion of the salary budget for the hiring of temporary, non-tenured, Associates of the Faculty. This number can be increased or decreased according to student demand and/or financial support and is set each year in light of these competing factors.

It is not the purpose of this paper to claim greater or lesser success for one or other of the programs in British Columbia. Neither is it the purpose to compare and contrast the faculties in terms of cost, productivity, research output or any such indicators. But I will make claims in a much less secure area. I claim that the reputation and popularity of the Simon Fraser University

Faculty on its own campus is unique and enviable. Further, it is my contention that the ultimate fears of any faculty with respect to retrenchment, budget cuts, and erosion, relate, in the final analysis to the *on-campus* perceptions of that unit. If these claims have substance, it will certainly be interesting to speculate upon the critical factors presumed to be at work. It will be also useful to judge the consequences, or costs, which may be inherent in decisions relating to such factors.

The basic contention is obviously the continuation of the time-honored concept of the fortress academy. Let nobody doubt either the historic truth of academic freedom and university autonomy or the intrinsic validity of these concepts in western society. President Downey of the University of New Brunswick wrote, frivolously but most certainly sincerely, of the university's role as court jester in society. Like the clowns of the medieval court, the universities must be, for society, the one, protected source of analysis, criticism, and speculation about alternative values. Without the deliberate sponsorship of such a posture, society would certainly cease to be free. Ultimately societies and governments must realize and accept the value of these concepts. First and foremost, the university most certainly will defend their intrinsic merit. Not to do so is an untenable position. In the final analysis this means that no university administration, no board of governors, can afford to allow the erosion of a particular department or faculty to progress for the simple reason of its unpopularity with current political regimes. To concede to such interference raises the spectre of a totalitarian society — today the Faculty of Education, perhaps for reasons of economy; — tomorrow, which department and for what assortment of reasons? No, the university must protect "to the wire" its right to control its own resources.

The essential point for faculties, departments and programs, then, is obvious. In the words of Pogo, (a comic strip character whose disappearance has left the world philosophically the poorer), "We has seen the enemy and he is us!"

During the past seven years in the province of British Columbia, teacher training programs have been subjected to repeated inquiries. The rationales for these studies have ranged from an examination of quality, through a survey of program redundancy to a determination of capacity in light of projected decreases in demand. (One suspects, rather, that within this demonstration of unrest in the government bureaucracy were the hints of the devastating programs of educational reform which bloomed so dramatically during the past year.) Each inquiry shared a common attribute. They were pointedly unsuccessful in changing anything. The faculties proved remarkedly resilient to external pressures which attempted to force change. The most recent, a study carried out by a subcommittee of the Universities Council of British Columbia — the funding interface between government and university — seems destined for the same fate in spite of the potency of the mandate of its source. Even more striking was the unified commitment of all three campuses of The University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and University of Victoria to fight against an externally imposed "solution" to an undefined problem. This in spite of the fact that on at least one of the campuses there might be a reasonable level of popular support to solve some financial difficulties by significant cuts to a Faculty of Education perceived by some to be too large.

Meanwhile, the threat from within grows ominous. On all three campuses a continuation of government restraint has created a financial crisis of massive proportions. With laws preventing deficit budgeting it seems unlikely these problems can be solved without considerable distress.

At Simon Fraser University, in the Fall of 1983, President Saywell established, (with a most unpremeditated and unfortunate acronym — PACUP), a Presidential Advisory Committee on University Priorities. Its major goals are to define the current mission of the University, and to

assess both the centrality of each program to that mission and its quality of performance. With the intention being, ultimately, to solve a financial crisis, no process could be more awesome, more fearsome. Having seen the results of such inquiries, in Britain and the United States, one would have reason to worry about a Faculty of Education given the external, political context sketched above. Part of this committee's mandate was to recommend on areas of excellence to be protected or expanded during the critical period. Throughout the hearings and briefs, within statements from all over the University and certainly in the claims of senior administrators, the Faculty of Education was repeatedly identified as a centre of excellence along with one or two other programs. I wish to present the reasons for this success and, as previously stated, comment upon the consequences or costs attendant upon it.

There were several reasons involved in the establishment of a differentiated staffing model in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. First and foremost was the belief that a major focus of teacher training should be an intensive practicum, in a public school, and under the tutelage of a master teacher of suitable qualification and current experience. Secondly, there was acceptance that as a professional faculty with varying student demands there was greater viability in a core faculty of some critical mass whose overall size could be tailored to the laws of supply and demand by the addition of master teachers as Associates on short-term appointment. Third, the influx of seasoned, talented practitioners into the faculty each fall maintains a realism, a currency which energizes the faculty in matters of curriculum innovation and school-related research.

As mentioned previously, this feature is the major distinction between our faculty and others in the province. As a consequence, we have never had the typical problems of student teaching supervision: assignment of unlikely teaching examples from both professorial and graduate student ranks with little or no practical experience (certainly not "master teachers"); or the creation of tenured, student-teaching faculty whose commitment to field supervision or whose prior training make them uncomfortable colleagues with the traditional research university.

Using the Faculty Associate model creates enormous administrative burdens each year involving the recruitment and training of each new batch of candidates. The gains outweigh the problems. Our teaching instructors are not accused of being "out of touch with the classroom." Nobody has heard the phrase, "Those who can't teach teach teachers," on our campus where it is demonstrably untrue. Freed from the burdens of travelling miles and miles from school to school, the regular faculty has a great deal more time and energy to devote to their research. As a result their productivity increases markedly. The close contact with the Associates brings a large dose of practical realism to the problems selected, and the hypotheses tested. Finally, with the ability to match resources to demand we are not seen as a financial burden on the remainder of the university during the regularly recurring periods of low teacher demand. Within the past seven years, for example our faculty peaked with 35 regular faculty and 70 faculty associates serving 750 undergraduates, and currently holds the same 35 regular faculty with 35 associates serving 300 students.

There are other factors underlying our positive campus image. We insist that the university is the teacher trainer with the Faculty of Education carrying out a specialized function within this program. This is different from merely being a Faculty within a University. We would never create special "courses for teachers" in the core disciplines. The mathematics for elementary school teachers is taught, and should be taught, in the Mathematics Department. Our integration with the core disciplines is a deliberate feature of the program. Additionally, we have resisted the

attempt to demand myriad education courses. Our calendar shows a bare bones approach to required courses, a principle that flows from the belief that much of value in education is best learned in the school setting and, equally, from a suspicion that dominates our thinking — that much that is typically required in educational theory and methodology is unnecessary for the training of quality teachers. We worry that as professional educators we may have come perilously close to the problem of the emperor's clothes.

As a faculty we have always controlled student access. We accept about 50% of the students who apply for admission. We have a grade point average criterion for admission which is higher than any program except business administration. We accept other criteria relevant to teaching performance, but all things being equal our cut off is grade oriented.

One final and important factor is our acceptance of our role as a Faculty within the University setting. Universities may not be the only places where teachers can be trained. Some may not even think they are the best places. But they are unique settings which can be exploited in certain ways which can be beneficial to the overall education enterprise. One of the major features of this acceptance concerns the evaluation of faculty performance. We have resisted the urge to produce a special tenure statement for the faculty. We accept the traditional criteria of published scholarship and research grantsmanship. Given that anywhere from two thirds to one half of the faculty at any given time, i.e. the Associates, are fully engaged in teaching, giving workshops, producing local curriculum units, conducting in-service programs, etc., we feel fully justified in this conservative, traditional approach for the tenured faculty. The toughmindedness of our decisions is never considered weak or second rate in our sister faculties.

The result of all this is that we are a small, research-oriented and productive faculty but one which, yet, has a large commitment to very practical, school-based teaching and pragmatic service. We are highly valued on our campus.

There are consequences. Depending upon one's values they may be assumed to be costs. Some would say we have sold out professionalism. We admit to not being desirous of expanding curriculum into all of the areas commonly found in educational literature. While we offer a course called Classroom Management, we would never require it of all students. While we offer courses in methodology, we expect most students to achieve the competencies of instruction in the schools, under supervision. In another version of this same change we would admit to having difficulty rewarding regular faculty members for their professional engagements. Scholarship tends to be rather narrowly viewed. This is not to say that practical scholarship is never acceptable. It is to insist that no amount of fugitive material produced for a particular school setting meets the tests of peer review. If there are seeds of wisdom and new truth in those consulting reports, let them be teased out, placed in the public domain where they can be evaluated by colleagues!

The matter of student access is often quarrelled with. As a program, why should education be different from the core disciplines of Arts or Science where access is usually not denied? We accept that as a professional school we do not share the core of the traditional university. Our training program should be in some sense based upon the reality of supply and demand. To promote the idea that a teacher training degree is a useful general education, whether or not one ever teaches, seems to us little more than self-serving.

These then are the elements for survival on our campus. That our model produces excellent teachers has been demonstrated. That our faculty is productive and successful is a fact. The consequences of our choices may be difficult, but these are difficult times.