

BILL COOK COMMENTS

ONE MORE TIME – WITH FEELING

George Szymanski, my good friend and Associate for over 30 years, recently called, very excitedly, to tell me that one of my ideas was finally making sense – not that it was ever lacking in intelligence or reason. At the time it seemed too far-fetched to be taken seriously, but, now, as traditional systems of education have collapsed, that which was fantasy has become not only an epochal opportunity but also an absolute necessity if education, as we do not know it, is to be true to its name.

I have attached the source of the idea to which he referred. It is from **UnEncorporating Education**, 2005 (Chapter 20). If you find this worthwhile, please share it as you wish. Also, I would like to know whether you think George is right.

WJC

September, 2020

UNENCORPORATING EDUCATION

*Learning and Teaching
for a Free Society*

William J. Cook, Jr., Ph.D.

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CHAPTER 20

Human Organization

When a system's most dominant characteristic is its structure, it is a sure sign that the thing has fossilized. So it is with the U.S. system of education, only in this case the solidification is compoundedly rigidized by multiple layers of sedimentary bureaucracy. Inert, intractable, impenetrable, insensitive, it rightly deserves the name "monolith." The basic problem, of course, is the thorough institutionalization of the features and philosophies of rationalized production and the persistent attempt to impose them on the most creative of all human experiences, which is, by its nature, inimical to confinement and restraint. In short, education has been destroyed by encorporation.

Before looking for a way out of this predicament, it would be helpful to consider briefly what we have learned so far about organization and its effect on any human enterprise, specifically, education. There are at least four historical lessons. First, anything pertaining to the corporation-model organization is deleterious to any and all aspects of learning and teaching. Authoritarian systems only indoctrinate

and control, rendering people less than human. No one has ever realized his or her full powers in such a system. Second, reform is a fool's game. It is impossible to make something better unless it is first good. Furthermore, it is possible to be doing the wrong thing right. Sooner or later, all artifacts become obsolete and must be destroyed to allow for the creation of radically new systems. Third, scientizing learning and teaching is unnatural and debilitating. Research is past tense and tedious. Data are inconclusive, indecisive, and tendentious. Analysis is stifling and paralyzing. Fourth, organization is invariably the most overt expression of purpose: Either we organize to the task or task to the organization. In either case, one must always serve the other. Likewise, in a practical sense, we organize to action or allow organization or dictate action.

In the new organization of education these considerations will be counted mere givens, that is, not as principles to be built on but as facts to be acknowledged before moving on to something else. Just what that new concept of organization shall be will be determined first by its pronounced underlying philosophy, then by its applicability to actual human experience, and finally by its conducivity to human aspiration. As we have seen throughout this discussion, the current organizational structure neglects philosophy, ignores experience, and thwarts aspiration. All this makes it even more urgent that the new concept, in theory, practice, and hope, arise from and conform to that which is fundamentally human.

First, the philosophy. This in itself is a radical departure from the existing system, which is, in effect, an amalgam of thoughtless responses to the requirements of a corporation-model society. All organizational theory of the twentieth century was handmaiden to the corporation. It knew no other world, assumed no other reality. The major theories—scientific, social, humanistic, and contingency—all ac-

knowledgeed the critical role of the human being, but only in the organization designed for rationalized production. None saw the person as the operative agent in organization. In fact, all four theories dealt with people more or less as obstacles to the efficient and effective operation of the system. So most remedies were limited to only two problems: conformation and motivation of the worker—"getting work done through people."

The only way to escape this debilitating myopic view of the world and the people in it is to focus through new lenses on the idea of organization as a natural, eminently human phenomenon. Ironically, the history of organization provides the best first lens. Two insights are so old they are new again: one revealed in etymology, the other in grammar. Both assume that words still have meaning beyond any so-called real definition. Regarding etymology, by the time the word "organization" entered the English language in the late eighteenth century, the idea of a corporate social arrangement was already well established in the Western tradition. As early as the fifth century B.C. the Romans used the word *corpus* in a political context—literally, a political body. The metaphor was an apt one: many members joined together by mutual purpose if not common values. The word "organization," then, was a logical extension of the *corpus* metaphor, the obvious allusion being to the vitality of a living organism. Significantly, the word "function," as in machinery, had not made its way into the language.

Grammatically, the word "organization" belongs to a special class of nouns known as "action" nouns, that is, nouns that have a verb quality, implying the dynamism inherent in the idea itself. Organization, if seen in this light, is not a fixed, dead structure, such as that symbolized by the traditional organizational chart, but a living thing—active, ever-changing, consisting essentially of relationships among people who have come together to accomplish

something beyond any individual's capability.

In the previous discussion of systems it was pointed out that there are two kinds: natural, those that exist in a state of nature; and artifactual, those built by and for human beings. The artifactual range from utensils to metaphysics; the natural range the universe. Natural systems are irregular, approximate, and patterned but never repeated exactly the same. Artifacts are regular, precise, and infinitely duplicable. That is to say, artifactual systems tend to be constructs; natural ones, formations. Since the earliest days of philosophy, the question has been how human beings, living as they do on an isthmus between two cosmic realities, make any sense of who and what they are and which of these two kinds of systems serves them best. Even today, the world is divided by this issue. Not surprising, debate is most intense in societies dominated by the corporation-model organization. But the whole question may be moot.

The earlier discussion raised the possibility that there is a third kind of system: those that are uniquely human. These systems involve human beings as existing in but apart from nature, and engaging in social orders that, with the exception of the family, do not appear in a state of nature. If etymology and history teach us anything it is that at least at one time it was widely held that the most truly human systems, although built apart from natural things, nevertheless took upon the characteristics of formations, that is, systems that immediately conform to action and continuously evolve with discovery. The superiority of formations over constructs in any human endeavor is clearly evident in three great advantages. First, formations allow, indeed require, concentration of energy on intent. Second, organizing to action means the systems cannot only discover new possibilities in the action but will have the capacity to pursue them. Third, formations change as their language changes, discarding verbal relics that have lost

their meaning. In fact, changing the vocabulary usually means changing the system. American football is the best example of all three. That game is the epitome of thoroughly human organization. The play is drawn on a chalkboard, modified on the sideline, and signaled to the quarterback who calls the play in the huddle. But when the ball is snapped the actual movement of the twenty-two players is subject to infinite variations. Until the whistle, there is a continuous morphing of action as formation to formation as action.

It is that concept that must be restored in our thinking if we are to bring a suitable organization to education. Constructs may serve teaching, at least as it is currently understood, but only formations can serve learning. If organization is a construct, learning can occur only within that system. If organization is a formation, learning itself creates the system.

The present system of education has exacerbated the problems inherent within any corporation-model organization by trying simultaneously to adopt no less than three distinct, often conflicting, versions: business, political, and economic. So the damage is multiplied by as many factors. The business version is aimed at maximum efficiency and effectiveness in production, it is designed for the convenience of those in charge, and it insists that the ends be prescribed, thus proscribing absolute boundaries. Human systems, quite by contrast, are neither efficient nor effective, subordinate convenience to common purpose, and, because they are driven by values, chose principle over certain outcome. The political version combines both representative and direct democracy with territorial jurisdiction. Human systems, however, are never democratic by any definition and cannot be confined by geography. The economic version distributes wealth, as government largesse, toward homogenization in the name of equalization.

Human systems, on the contrary, differentiate based on individual uniqueness and ability and directly reward personal achievement and merit as recognized by the system. Any one of those corporation variants would be detrimental to the autonomy of the individual, but taken together they completely eliminate the possibility of a person realizing his or her full powers. The ultimate effect is that education is, at best, reduced to insignificance; at worst, to a destructive farce.

Second, the practical. Any new system must be an expedient for the realization of the full powers of each person, but it must also be conducive to the individual's realization of the full benefit of organization. Remember, the only practical purpose for organization of any kind is to allow the person to accomplish what he or she cannot do alone. Both ambitions require that organization proceed from the inside out, substance to form, morphe to schema. That means, in education, the learner is the organizing agent; learning, the discipline. The learner first chooses, then designs, and finally pursues his or her own learning agenda. Agendas are as numerous and as varied as the learners. Choice means not choosing from a menu of available options identified by some external authority, but actually creating one's own options. Immediately everything about the existing system is made obsolete, including the concepts of curriculum, grades, and graduation. Emphasis must be on what a person wants to know and be able to do, and what he or she actually knows and can do, not on the tedious, dutiful compliance with the expectations of others. This is ultimate democracy, ultimate humanism: life defined by the person.

Practically speaking, this kind of personal autonomy was hardly feasible before the advent of the Internet. There were too many social, legal, cultural, and economic barriers to allow universal access to knowledge and freedom of ac-

tion. But now learning is virtually limitless for anyone, assuming of course the person knows language and is at home with ideas, concepts, and projects. Yet learning, if it be true to its name, requires discipline—a system without being systematic. The most important thing we can learn from the study of human enterprise is that nothing creative happens until energy is directed into a discipline. In fact, that is the only purpose of order of any kind: to foster creativity. Otherwise, the energy is dissipated through license. The most important thing we can learn about the nature of systems, natural or artifactual, is that the only purpose of control is to increase the capacity of the system. Any control that does not do that is perverse. So the question is what the organizing system shall be for individual learning. The only defining stipulation for the answer is that whatever the organization, there can be no limits placed on the variety or extent of learning experiences.

Earlier, it was suggested that any system of education must (1) both be and provide the context for learning, (2) be predicated on and be conducive to the connectedness of individuals to each other, (3) conform to the learner as opposed to conforming the learner, and (4) espouse the highest humanistic ideals. The only social formation that can satisfy all those demands is community, in its purest form.

Community in that sense is not defined by geographical boundaries, city limits, or corporate charter, but by common values. Community is simply a place, metaphorically, where a person sees himself or herself reflected back by others. Communities are the most basic, perhaps the only true, human formations, now ranging from home to Internet. When communities give themselves to some mutual purpose, human system(s) emerge, thus making values and purpose indistinguishable. When education is the purpose, in ancient as well as modern times, "schools" have been deemed the most practical, the most reasonable, and the

most effective means of validation and perpetuating community values, achieving mutual purpose, and magnifying the individual.

In recent years much has been made of community in education, so much, in fact, that sophisticated programs have been developed and quasi-political movements begun to advance the idea. Those attempts, struggling with definition, demonstrate at least three interpretations: learning communities, community schools, and the town as a learning community. The first, in its most precise application, encourages communities of students and teachers in existing and/or otherwise traditional schools, based on common interests. The same motivation that inspires extracurricular activities (and gangs) is sought in shifting the focus from instruction to participatory learning with mutual benefit. The basic idea is that everyone is a teacher and everyone is learner. The second, community schools, has actually become a prescribed model advocated by influential universities and foundations. In it, the school (building) becomes the center of the community by providing both learning and social opportunities for everyone, adults as well as children. The intent is not only to meet specific needs and aspirations of the learners but to gain creative synergy among them. The third concept, although only vaguely realized, is an ingenious, if far-fetched, extension of the second. The village or town—or, one supposes, even the city—is itself so dedicated to learning that every municipal, business, and religious entity is actively involved in a coordinated scheme of teaching and learning aimed at ensuring maximum benefit for all its citizens. Education becomes the unifying force. Obviously, size and complexity are critical conditions in actualizing this version of learning community.

Each of those interpretations represents an understanding of the vital connection between the concept of commu-

nity and learning and each no doubt is a sincere attempt to realize it in practical terms. Even so, each makes two erroneous assumptions. The first is that the traditional structure of education is flexible enough to accommodate the dynamics of communities engaged in learning. The second, and by far the more detrimental, is the assumption that collective learning results in community. That is the fatal flaw. No artificial or forced grouping of people can ever become a community. In such collectives learning is severely restricted if not rendered impossible because of the absence of common values and the disparity of purpose. When a person is compelled to a specific education and is "assigned" to a school, his or her chance of success, by any standard, is directly proportional to compatibility. The very fact that success is a matter of chance is sufficient reason to be skeptical of this practice.

Communities are self-defining and self-forming. They form around common values based on conviction or need, and sometimes both. So they appear in infinite numbers and no two are alike. Obviously, those based on conviction are more permanent. Typically, these communities are bound together by ideas, expressed as philosophy, faith, or culture. As one would expect, the schools of those communities reflect and sustain the ideas as the context for learning. Although in an age interested more in celebrities than ideas, schools of philosophy are now confined to colleges of liberal arts where ideas are only analyzed and categorized. At one time these schools were the only source and repository of humanity's best thinking. Those of ancient Greece and Rome conceived the ideas that captivated the Western mind for all time. Even today many private schools are founded on a sincere devotion to the classical tradition, both the thoughts and the thinking.

Religious schools are as old as religion itself. It should not be surprising that a nation that constitutionally guar-

antees religious freedom and whose majority practices denominationalism has ten times more religious school options than the number of public school districts.

Nor should it be a surprise that, in a country pledged to diversity, cultural schools would multiply to preserve the heritage, traditions, and language of ethnic and nationalistic communities. In most cases these schools merely supplement public education, but in many instances they exist within the public system or supplant it altogether, often with public funds. Cultural considerations alone are convincing evidence that no single nationalized, normed system of education can serve a free, democratic society—certainly not those within those cultures. The great divide between blacks and whites has already been pointed out, yet the range of cultural diversification is far more dramatic, from Cuban-American neighborhoods in Miami, to Chaldean communities in Detroit, to Inuit villages in Alaska, to remote Anglo-Scot hamlets in Appalachia. Who will say that the same system of teaching and learning can ever be relevant to all these cultures? Who will say that such a monolithic system is even desirable?

Communities formed around needs are significantly different and, therefore, present different possibilities. They range along Maslow's hierarchy from survival needs to self-actualization, good or evil. As they move up the hierarchy, needs become interests, or, more accurately perhaps, interests become needs. So there is an increasing sense of community. That is because communities based on the fundamental human needs (food, shelter, safety, security) are connected more to purpose than to each other. They are committed to the same purpose but not necessarily to mutual purpose. Community does not exist merely in common need, but in the collective expedient created to satisfy the need. The sense of community arises from common pursuit. The only exception is the pursuit of profit.

Such communities are only as permanent as the need; in the case of a perpetual need, they will last only as long as each person holds the prospect of satisfying his or her own needs. In the most practical terms, the commonality is founded in some immediate task or it lies within a continuing occupation, vocation, or avocation. If the common task is "acquiring skills, knowledge, and ability"—the mantra of contemporary curriculum—to be successful in a given trade, profession, or hobby, then there are two interpretations of "community" at play: Communities of learners are prerequisite to learning communities. That is, a community of learners engaged in schooling, training, or even research in subject-related matters is the best means of ensuring the continuing vitality and relevance of a learning community made up of competent practitioners.

The current system of public education has no real sense of community by either interpretation, nor can it have because, contrary to all its pious declarations, it is not concerned with the actual needs and interests of students. The only community is to be found in extracurricular, even anticurricular, activity. When a student is required to earn "credits" in a subject in which he or she has neither interest nor need, the only possible formation of community will be with other dissenters in the same predicament. Learning of any kind is diminished accordingly, if not thwarted completely. The great fallacy of traditional education is that it presupposes that all have the same needs and interests and, therefore, mandates the same learning. Quite literally, that is democracy turned on its head.

Whether communities form around ideas or needs they will identify from among themselves individuals who personify their ideals or purpose. Those persons are considered examples for others to follow, or, with those of superlative accomplishment, leaders, and those of mythical proportion, heroes. In any case, they are granted influence and

power by the community. When the gift (charisma) is violated, the bestowed honor is withdrawn. There must always be a kind of surety bond between those called and those who call them.

The point is that role models and leaders depend on community for their existence. But teachers can create community, not by force or election, not by defense of orthodoxy, but by provoking others to discovery and creation. The great ones teach us understanding of ideas; the greater ones teach us to know ourselves; the greatest teach us to live for truth.

Since the dawn of civilization, communities have formed around teachers. It is a testimony to the shallowness of the age that we no longer have teachers such as Hillel, Seneca, and Ignatius. We expect the gurus of popular culture to do our thinking for us. Herein lies the tragedy of modern education: Although teachers may be the source of community, that cannot happen unless what is taught resonates within those willing to learn. When gratification, superficiality, and ignorance are the highest aspirations of the general population, teachers (and teaching) are reduced to meaninglessness. Ball players and rock stars have their communities, too.

Real teachers are not workers scientifically trained to implement a scientific process. Real teachers have four characteristics; these are the only attributes that inspire others to learn. The first is character. This is more than personal trustworthiness or even the integrity of words and deeds; a real teacher is the embodiment of that which he or she professes. Credibility is the teacher's only credential.

Then there is knowledge. Not the mere accumulation of facts, not even the possession of what others might consider knowledge, but being so possessed of the subject that he or she delights in disputation, challenge, even rejection, and is serenely confident in ambiguity. A truly great teacher not only knows what is between the notes, but that there will

always be other notes. Teaching is not a craft; it is an art.

Third, the love of learning is the essence of teaching. That passion is the greatest bequest any person can leave another. The old adage says, "If the learner has not learned, the teacher has not taught." The implication, of course, is that something by way of knowledge or information is imparted and received. But it would be more accurate to say, "If the teacher is not learning, the teacher is not teaching."

The fourth characteristic is so rare that it is necessary to recall an obsolete word to convey the idea. Although awkward by the rules of morphology, the word is "servantship." The meaning, both the disposition and commitment to serve. In the case of teachers, this would not mean being consigned to the slave class, as in ancient Rome, but belonging to a special class of individuals who are willing to give themselves not only to the best interest of the learners but also to the honest exploration of the subject. The teacher is always the mirror, never the lamp. Never a "master" teacher, always a servant learner.

Communities formed around teachers, although more subtle than those based on ideas and needs, are nevertheless evident today even within the public education system. Servant learners still draw disciples to themselves. Where choice is allowed, they are the teachers of first choice for both students and parents.

Although those three concepts of community are distinct and severable, when they are merged the resulting organization may be most fittingly described as an "educational community." In fact, the practical harmonizing of these concepts is the dominant characteristic of the ideal educational system, a system at once human and humanizing. That such a triune community is the most human system for educating is borne out by the fact that historically this was the nature of schools until they were incorporated.

The use of the term "educational community" rather than "learning community" is not just a matter of semantics. "Learning community," as already noted, suffers from ambiguity both in definition and practice. But the real distinction is that "learning community" implies, or rather assumes, that learning is more or less an individual experience undertaken in the company of other learners. "Educational community," on the other hand, indicates both context for and guidance in learning. That is to say, the community actually has a formative influence on the learner toward mutual benefit.

It is difficult to tell whether it is the failure of the traditional education system or the resurgence of educational communities that is forcing the epochal shift in the world of education. There is little doubt that were it not for the stifling effect of the adamant and intrusive government-corporate juggernaut, educational communities would multiply and flourish as the system of choice. It is ironic, indeed, that the current education establishment, from Congress to bargaining units, has closed ranks in a last desperate attempt to ward off the inevitable.

There are three reasons why educational communities will emerge as the new order of learning and teaching. These are the same reasons why they should. First, this is the only way that education can again become relevant to the individual and vital to society. Anything without context is devoid of meaning. Form does not guarantee substance, but substance provides its own form. Second, because the range of educational communities would be impossible to predict and their variety impossible to control, this approach would be the essence of a democratic society. "Multiculturalism" would become a practical reality. So would differentiation. Local control and personal autonomy would represent democracy in its purest state. Anything that restricts or confines choice compromises free-

dom. Third, only through educational communities is it possible to achieve the unapologetic validation of truth, because only here will we find the constant collision of ideas necessary to discover that which can reasonably be held as true. Truth is far more likely to thrive in the intellectual marketplace than in prescribed answers to prescribed questions.

Bringing about an asystemic system of educational communities throughout the nation will require radical thinking but simple action. The very idea of a system that is not systemic is the first mindbender. Even more boggling is the notion that such a system cannot be centrally designed and universally controlled. But the most wrenching of all is the thought that human beings can be trusted with the truth. Changing the minds of those in education will be difficult, perhaps impossible, even though these ideas were the founding principles of our democracy. That raises an interesting question: Why are those ideas now considered radical? Is it because of education or the lack thereof?

The action required to create the conditions for the emergence of a new system is twofold, yet simple indeed. First, the existing system of public education must be demolished, thoroughly and utterly. The attempt to salvage any part of it would only lead to contamination. Dismantling the current structure, with all its appertenances, would mean the following:

- The immediate uninvolvement of the federal government in any aspect of education. As we have already noted, constitutionally education is the responsibility of the states. Yet federal lawmakers, in many instances, have leveraged a 7-percent contribution to local operating budgets into 100-percent control, without any real understanding of or concern for local situations.
- The demolishing of the U.S. Department of Education. This clumsy, confused behemoth is without doubt the

most pernicious agency in government. There is no evidence that education has in any way benefited from any of its activities. In fact, it cannot pass the performance criteria it places on school districts.

- The dissolution of all state departments of education, including intermediate units, service centers, and the Bureau of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES). Reduced to abject ineffectuality by politics, these bastions of the status quo survive only because of the habitual necessity for compliance, emitting endlessly streams of insignificant data. It is a sad commentary indeed that seldom, if ever, has a state department of education initiated any real innovation in learning and teaching. They are the establishment's first line of defense.
- The eradication of all school boards, state and local, and the erasing of school district jurisdictions. As already noted, this obsolete perversity of democracy is probably the efficient cause of the dysfunctionality of the American system of education. Nothing about it any longer makes sense.
- The obliterating of all unions associated with public education. The reason is obvious: Unions exist strictly to support the interests of their members, not the interests of students or the nation. Teacher unions are the only overt enemy of public education; they must be treated as such. Unfortunately, there are no unions of students.
- The gracious disappearance of accreditation agencies. Those are a throwback to the genteel era of gentlemanly mutual admiration and protection among peer institutions, a type of early "best practices" practice. But surely by now it is painfully obvious that the only test of quality in goods, products, and services is not peer standards but customer satisfaction.
- The elimination of school districts. School districts are a quaint but ineffectual concept of organizing. Adhering

strictly to a democratic political model, this design has produced such incongruities as Los Angeles Unified School District (746,852 students) and Silverton (Texas) Independent School District (249 students). Adhering to the corporation model, this design ensures that no one is allowed to reach his or her full capacity. Beset by social problems beyond control and cynical to apathetic staffs, they are the miserable last resort for those students who cannot afford better. Most teachers are working for retirement. Most administrators hope to get bought out—progressively. Students are more or less on their own.

The destruction of the superstructure and infrastructure of the existing system would result in at least three major collateral benefits. First, it would precipitate the diminution and gradual disappearance of all the supplier-support industries that feed off the moribund corpse of the traditional system: publishing, testing, transportation, technology, architectural, construction, communication, legal, insurance, training, consulting, lobbying, and any number of other carrion-hungry profiteers. Ridding the world of these predators would result in an incalculable financial windfall for actual learning and teaching.

The second collateral benefit is that all other public agencies—such as health, social services, and economic assistance—would immediately gain true meaning and purpose. For example, competitive sports, which now for many traditional (high) schools are blessed sacraments providing faith in the past, joy in the present, and hope for the future while symbolizing their identity and reason for being, would be organized and administered by public sports leagues. The benefits would far surpass school rivalries. There would be more opportunity for participation, more balanced competition, greater socialization by both partici-

pants and fans, and less loyalty to school buildings, all at considerably less cost because all coaches and staffs would be volunteers and all facilities common. At present, so many needs like these ostensibly are met by the public school system that schools have become a catch-all for every necessity a child could possibly experience, including legal matters. So not only is the purpose of education obscured, its resources and energies are dissipated. Correspondingly, the purpose and performance of the other social support agencies are marginalized.

But the greatest benefit arising from the obliteration of the existing systems will be the greater good. Once the current artificial system, in all its manifestation, is gone, conditions will be right for the emergence of what can best be described as a "free forum," in which demand for learning, predicated on values and need, will quickly precipitate the formation of educational communities exactly commensurate with the demand. In crass economic terms, supply will always meet demand.

Understanding and accepting the practical aspects of a free forum presents somewhat of a challenge, that is, how is it possible—is it possible—to create an asystemic system? Particularly in light of the lingering memory of the overdesigned systems of the past and the unchartered course that must be taken in the future. Ironically, the critical issue will continue to be the question of autonomy. Who will have it; who will not. The answer may not be easy to come by given the historical confusion and general abuse surrounding its interpretation and application. But the answer, and subsequently the whole system, can be made quite simple. The practicality as well as the desirability of this kind of asystemic system is already being demonstrated throughout the country. For example, this description was provided to *The Economist* by a contributor:

There are now secondary schools in Minnesota where students use computers to enter the web as a resource library for work on their projects. The schools have no courses or classes. The teachers are advisers—in essence, coaches. The schools also have no employees; teachers have formed a workers co-operative, a professional partnership through which they contract with the school to design and run its programme. The new model has appeared in the chartered sector of Minnesota public education and is now spreading into other states.¹

Maintaining simplicity may be difficult because ensuring the availability of education for all citizens must remain the responsibility of the respective states. But, here again, it must be remembered that the issue is not control but context. No one can or should presume to construct a template for a state organization or to prescribe the specifications by which it will be built. That would merely recreate the old system. Rather, for the sake of both context and authenticity, certain principles must be translated into actual organizational features.

First, education must be removed from the political machinery of state, country, and municipality and put under the purview of a relatively small professional group made up of the best and brightest among educators and parents. Professional bureaucrats, double dippers, and political lackeys need not apply. This group, perhaps in the form of a council, would have limited responsibility and even less prerogative in all affairs of educational communities.

But some practical format would be required to keep the free forum working and to ensure legitimacy. For example, the council would likely provide licensing for both teachers and educational communities. For teachers, the licenses

would be roughly equivalent to those granted to other professional groups, such as physicians, attorneys, and accountants. Like other professionals, they could practice independently, in affiliation, or in association.

Recognition of educational communities would be similar to that now given to any nonprofit organization, except that incorporation (i.e., 501C3) would not be required. Requiring any kind of incorporation would be a retrograde action. Recognition would be based on three requirements: (1) evidence of intent to serve the common good, (2) a stated purpose with the apparent capability to achieve that purpose, (3) a pledge of fiscal responsibility and legal compliance, and (4) a disavowal of any political agenda contrary to the Constitution of the United States.

The council would also monitor the educational communities to ensure that each teacher and educational community is conforming to agreements and, on a broader scale, to identify and report to the public any gaps that might exist in the states' total educational offerings. It would not be the council's responsibility to fill those gaps, although it might provide a virtual clearinghouse for teacher demand and supply.

The council might also from time to time publish reports on the general condition of education throughout the state, but no comparative data or external mandates would be used as criteria for evaluation. Demographic categorization would be verboten. Emphasis would be strictly on the actual achievement or accomplishment of students as learners and the effect on the larger society.

Educational communities may take any form. So, here again, no template is possible—or desirable. Those communities will be self-identifying, self-controlling, and ultimately responsible only to those for whom they exist. They must create their own system of learning and teaching, determine what is to be taught, and how and when it is

taught. They would be the final arbiters of learning. Cooperation or affiliation among educational communities would be by mutual agreement.

Ideally, they would eschew anything resembling the corporation model, although that must remain an option. One would hope that, as human organizations, they would emulate the features of human systems—in both dimensions and dynamics. Thriving systems, that is, those based on human relationships, have four dimensions and two dynamics. The dimensions are common values, mutual purpose, excess capacity, and immediate action. The dynamics are commensuration and essentiality.² This is the only kind of organization fit for human beings.

Understandably, many critics will see these proposals as sheer lunacy. They will say, for example, that an asystemic system would be uncontrollable, that it would be too confusing, that it would lead to gross inequity, that it would encourage failure, that it would create widespread disparity, that its results could not be measured, that it would promote individual differentiation, that it would unlevel the playing field, that it could not deal with the myriad social issues facing the states, that it would be susceptible to malfeasance and corruption, and on and on.

It is strange, indeed, how failed systems seem always to take revenge on the future. They either preemptively debunk anything that would reveal their inherent evils or they cynically disparage the idealism that sees beyond them with hope.

NOTES

1. Ted Kolderie, Letter to the Editor, *The Economist*, November 9, 2002, 20.

2. For a thorough explanation of dimensions and dynamics, see William J. Cook Jr., *The Evolving Corporation*, Westport, Conn., Quorum Books, 2000, 306–318.