

Alternative Scenarios for Managing Educational Contraction

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Demand for more teachers has declined just when faculties reached the capacity to overcome the shortage of well-prepared professionals. Adjustment to the new realities will be difficult and overreaction is possible. The background for current management decisions is reviewed. Then four scenarios for negotiating cutbacks are proposed. All reflect initiative by the profession and particularly by faculties of education. Response is anticipated by government and other sectors of society. Taken together, the scenarios represent substantial departures from current means of coping with over-capacity.

La demande d'enseignants diminue au moment où les universités sont en mesure de combler le manque de professionnels bien préparés. L'adaptation aux nouvelles réalités sera difficile, et des réactions excessives sont possibles. Nous examinons d'abord le cadre dans lequel s'inscrivent les décisions actuelles des autorités intéressées. Nous proposons ensuite quatre scénarios pour la négociation des réductions qui s'imposent. Ils sont tous le reflet d'initiatives de la profession, et en particulier des facultés d'éducation. Nous les soumettons à l'appréciation des pouvoirs publics et des autres secteurs de la société. Pris ensemble, ces scénarios innovent sensiblement par rapport aux solutions actuelles au problème de surcapacité.

In most industrial nations the long decline in birth rates has led to over-capacity of primary education; secondary schools are now cushioned against the same declines only by extending their services to a larger part of the population (King, Moor, & Mundy, 1975). The consequences for higher education as a whole can be predicted on the same basis, but colleges and faculties of education are likely to confront an unusual and relatively prolonged decline in their enrolments. Those colleges which are most narrowly vocational will be more vulnerable than faculties of education which have significant liberal education, research, or graduate teaching programs. Of all Canadian provinces perhaps Ontario faces the greatest problem because of its concentration of research in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education with the operation of many facilities essentially as post-degree certifying programs. Similar jeopardy may face particular institutions in several other provinces.

An earlier paper (Ray, 1978) discussed reasons for the decline of teacher preparation in England and Wales, the United States, and Ontario. In that analysis the decline was termed a "collapse" because of the coincident effects of declines in birth rate, popular demand for more schooling, and short-term professional careers. Although there remain

significant differences in the relative impact of these variables, they are sufficiently persistent to undermine plans for "steady state" professional programs (Shapiro & Stevenson, 1978, pp. 3-10). Taylor (1978) referred to the need for long-term plans because many teachers will retire in a decade, leaving a new gap to be filled. In the meantime, to justify steady state and plan for no reduction despite evidence of overenrolments would promote public outrage, editorial attacks, and political recriminations. In the long-run interests of both the teaching profession and of society, the appropriate present priorities, adjustments, and sacrifices must be identified. If these cannot be devised by the profession through co-operation between teachers' associations and boards, they will almost certainly be imposed from without.

It is appropriate to identify the assumptions which might direct the possible educational changes. In this conjectural idealized plan there are six important initial assumptions: Teacher retirement will remain low for several years; public education should serve students rather than employees; society rather than particular sectors of it provides the ultimate source of security; education is perceived (both as a whole and in each of its parts) as a model of how rational and just decisions are made; scholarship or other measures of competence rather than seniority should determine job retention; and an effective ceiling to financial support for the education sector of Canadian society has been reached. In discussing these assumptions, education is represented by the special case of teacher education.

THE BACKGROUND

An oversupply of teachers (many not employed at present) exists in most communities, and for particular subject areas this oversupply is large. This reflects a decline in demand for teachers just after the system had been geared up to meet the shortage of a few years ago. The birth rate has fallen steadily since about 1960, perhaps never to return to the cradle-filling of the interval 1945-1960 (Jackson, 1978b, pp. 30-42). There has not been sufficient immigration to offset the decline in enrolments. Data on class sizes are highly imperfect because qualifications (teachers employed) rather than function (administration, counselling, library, etc., rather than teaching) may determine the size of the teaching force (p. 187). Although class sizes may again be growing (pp. 199-200), the total number of teachers, especially of new teachers, is declining. This change can be refined slightly by looking at particular qualifications. Demand for Latin and history has declined, French has increased. Traditional subjects like physics have lost ground to newcomers like environmental science. Teachers now tend to remain longer with the profession, thereby earning higher salaries (p. 202) and increasing the financial costs of education. Fewer persons now regard teaching as a stepping stone to careers as housewives, business owners, or lawyers. Overall the numbers

of new teachers annually required have been halved since the beginning of the decade with dramatic implications for the profession. Interprovincial migration implies continued growth in western Canada with loss by Atlantic provinces and Quebec. Urbanization may mean an oversupply of rural teachers. These problems are likely to be particularly severe wherever the optimism of the previous interval was prolonged, but warning signals have reduced registrations so there are fewer opportunities to select candidates. It is probable that the experience of other nations can be used to advantage, particularly in attempts to visualize and dampen the oscillations likely to occur from an overenthusiastic correction of the present oversupply of places (Taylor, 1978).

PARTIAL SOLUTIONS

Several proposals for coping with the immediate problems of declining need for teachers have been introduced, each with their attendant difficulties.

1. Attempts to maintain enrolment in preservice programs result in an oversupply of certified teachers, consequent unemployment and downward pressure on salaries. School boards are not able or prepared to hire very well educated graduates because of their commitment to their existing employees despite a possible desire to improve their overall teaching staff. "Overqualification" became a possibility. Alternatively, low qualifications may become unusable if school boards determine to hire only teachers with potential flexibility.

Certain parts of the United States have for several years opted for this approach, with Vietnam providing an additional reason for increases in enrolment. Maintaining grossly inflated enrolments probably damaged the reputation of many of the institutions concerned: They were deemed socially and financially irresponsible. There is also the potential for grade inflation and closed networks for jobs on graduation, neither of which are highly regarded in professional literature (Ray, 1978).

2. Attempts to reduce enrolment without large reductions of faculty result in limited savings which may be rationalized as improving the qualifications of the graduates through closer supervision and individualized instruction. But this approach is likely to be perceived by other sectors of education and by society as featherbedding, for others will argue with much conviction that they have better claims for any available resources. Such claims will quickly exceed the probable supply of funds, leading to damaging internecine quarrelling.

3. Attempts to reduce selected sectors should in principle be able to achieve economies of scale, depth of teaching expertise, and reduction of total costs by eliminating only cost-ineffective programs from institutions. Particularly if such reductions were planned in concert by several institutions, cost savings would be theoretically possible without sacrifice either to variety or quality of the programs available somewhere. Certain diffi-

culties arise in practice: Courses still depend upon specific ancillary services, in the case of teacher education, libraries, practice teaching, foundation subjects, etc. As a result it may be very difficult to arrange the collapse of only certain sectors: German without undermining enrolment in French, theatre without affecting English. In addition, rival institutions may compete for viability in many fields rather than take the risk of placing all their prospects in a limited number of functions that might later be terminated. The spectrum of programs now existing does not easily lend itself to rating (Calam, 1977, pp. 129-146). Institutions, like individuals, can become overspecialized and unable to adapt to change. Imposing such cutbacks by provincial fiat would be perceived by academics as a dangerous invasion of university autonomy (Horowitz, 1979, pp. 2-4).

4. Retiring or retaining faculty on the basis of seniority has its problems. No one pretends that the present salary of particular members of faculty is justified precisely by their present contribution but by a combination of past achievements. In fact training and experience serve as proxy for this measure. There may be some consensus that long-established and hard-working employees should not be dismissed as cost cutting measures until all other economies have been exhausted. Such senior employees may be assigned to new duties or even retrained rather than dismissed, and where possible will in the last resort be cushioned with early retirement or severance allowances. This attitude reflects common-sense management for maintaining morale or a general social view that long years of service earn protection in lean years. It also indicates the foresight and power of unions and federations at previous bargaining sessions.

Seniority is undermined by changes in job descriptions over the years. The list of the "best" employees is therefore likely to change. In any given year a few persons who have long since gained tenure and promotion would be unlikely to be short-listed if they were now able to apply for their own jobs — a device that enabled the weeding of many marginal employees when colleges of education in England and Wales were merged with adjoining polytechnical colleges. The job descriptions no longer matched their credentials, their old jobs were terminated and the persons were offered severance pay or work in various other educational institutions without loss of pay (Department of Education and Science, 1975). In effect, the same process took place in Ontario when teachers' colleges became parts of nearby universities (Ray, 1978).

5. The cost/benefit approach must be introduced where income is actually cut or predicted to fall below a level that could sustain existing levels of expenses. Expenditures must then be cut quickly and firmly in ways that will have the least effect upon program, possible future responsiveness, and the morale of remaining employees. This process produces a different outcome from that of seniority systems. Under cost/benefit

management, high salaried employees may be at a disadvantage. For example, a department with many impressively qualified and experienced professors but very few students, research grants, or other sources of income may be sacrificed to maintain and even to improve a popular (income generating) program. In simplistic terms neither the quality of the program nor the job prospects of the dismissed employees would influence the decision. In principle, every member of faculty, or at least every department, regularly justifies their cost to the institution. Zero budgeting is the extreme application of this principle.

Realistically no accountant or dean can apportion costs — particularly in advance — with the desired precision. There are too many areas which cannot be precisely controlled. Nor is it really possible to compare accurately the costs of preparing teachers who are qualified in physics and chemistry with those for history and economics or for primary and kindergarten classes. There is the problem of distinguishing pure from applied scholarship. For example, professional education need not be justified solely on the assumption that society will require those qualifications for teachers in the future. The importance of such education to other vocations may be underestimated. At best the books can be closed a year or two after the fact, too late for any comfort to the administrator attempting to be precise in cost/benefit planning (Atherton, 1978, p. 17).

CONSENSUS ON OBJECTIVES

All of the partial solutions reflect the difficulty of applying management principles appropriate to the period when expansion and growing budgets made it possible to cushion shocks, even to protect fully those who were no longer necessary to a program that had evolved. However, a decline of 30-50% for the interval 1976-81 in the demand for newly certified teachers, i.e., the enrolment targets for B.Ed. and certification programs (Jackson, 1978a, pp. 77-98), requires the re-examination of these principles. In Ontario the decline could be partly compensated because slip year (using enrolments to determine grants for the following year) and revolving average procedures predicted future incomes for the university. However, slumping enrolments for initial years in other disciplines mean that university resources may not be available to support education for a reasonable interval. Expectations and arguments must now be adjusted to the new realities. The potential for generating other income (graduate studies, inservice, contract research, consulting, etc.) became important to professors who were hired with teacher training as their function.

Every planning model uses nearly identical objectives: save money, maintain programs needed to give long-run validity to faculty, ensure vocational competence to the graduate, and continue fair practices for all employees. These are not easy combinations, for in practice they lead in the short run to minimal hiring, depressed salaries, reduced building programs, and restrained purchases. Pessimistic assessments of future en-

rolments and incomes lead progressively to bargained retreats on most previous priorities.

CHALLENGED OBJECTIVES

Canadian society as a whole has undertaken to provide vocational and basic economic security for all its citizens. Because of the imperfections of this system, it has been customary for individuals, institutions, unions, professions, or even provinces to ensure their long-run security against substantial reverses in their fortunes. Such security is still imperfect. The case of teacher education is instructive. In earlier periods teacher education subsidized other faculties in most Canadian universities. Where such training was paid or conducted directly by the ministry, the low per-pupil costs released dollars for other forms of higher education. Now teacher education may in many instances need subsidizing for several years. Ideally such assistance would be unstinting lest professors of education found it prudent to spend much of their time searching for alternative work.

The human rights argument concerning job security for those with tenure may be partly offset by the plea that opportunity is being unjustly denied to others: for example, highly qualified younger persons who are unable to gain initial appointments or persons who have not yet gained tenure but are proposing to justify their contribution on alternative grounds such as working with minority groups. Very often funding for hiring such persons is not associated with an established program but comes from an external source. The official languages policy, multiculturalism programs, education for Indians, Métis, and Inuit, special education for handicapped and gifted are all expensive, politically vulnerable, and difficult to defend in a cost/effectiveness argument. Although evidence of actual cutbacks in such minority-based programs in teacher education is still scattered, there is a problem securing funds to implement programs which have long been planned and approved (Pepin, 1979, pp. 93-113; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1976, pp. 54-64).

The proposed scenarios assume relatively severe cutbacks. All attempt to maintain most of the academic capacity of institutions affected. All assume that their application will be discussed openly and applied fairly. All are consistent with the six assumptions identified and discussed earlier. Because they are not intended to be applied simultaneously but sequentially, the order of presentation is deliberate.

PROPOSED SCENARIOS

1. Accommodate persons who would like to accept lower salaries and fewer obligations. In the past the pressure to maintain total commitment to the faculty has meant that some professors had to neglect their avocations and could not serve for short terms with other employers. As a result

there were sacrifices in attitudes as well as possibly useful skills, knowledge, or contacts to their work. Under present conditions employees may still be interested in dividing their responsibilities — provided that they can be assured that they will be adequately protected against becoming completely severed to shield those who stayed full-time, and that their pensions would be adjusted according to their new situation. These adjustments can be negotiated and should not be confused with imposed retirements.

2. Terminate contracts of those professors who year after year fail to justify their present salaries. This involves demonstrating to the satisfaction of the faculty association, the academic community, the public at large, and, if necessary, the courts that these individuals were not active or effective in their professional responsibilities. Canadian universities have been successful in dismissing tenured but non-productive professors, either by negotiation or where necessary by firing (“Firing followed,” 1975). Probably reassignment of responsibility and opportunity for retraining at university expense would be questionable rights for such persons, although in some cases it might be a viable alternative to dismissal.

3. Rent, borrow, second, exchange, or share needed highly qualified personnel from other faculties, the ministry, school boards, or similar employers to avoid long-term obligations that may prove constraining (Shapiro, 1978, pp. 6, 10). Use graduate students to augment the teaching of overextended members of faculty. In the short run, new appointments would be confined to positions required by specified, expanded, and funded programs. Even this lifeboat mentality may be unable to secure certain institutions, but sharing of highly qualified persons may be appreciated by both of the systems seeking relief. The salary saved may enable either or both to hire other faculty members, thereby maintaining the flexibility and quality needed to keep up the confidence of students, employers, and governments.

4. Negotiate reduction in pay for remaining faculty members, based upon the new job descriptions made necessary by enrolment and program cutbacks, while seeking to maintain principles of social justice like protection of pensions, minimum income protection, and the need to provide extra income for particularly outstanding contributions to the profession. The amount and duration of any reductions would depend in part on what happened to other sectors of society. It is assumed that special attention would be paid to the long-term needs of education, implying that the human resources now available would not be dispersed for short-term economies, and that programs needed now would receive adequate financing (Shapiro, 1978, p. 4).

APPLYING THE SCENARIOS

Many professional educators will feel these proposals to be offensive and unnecessary. They have been proposed despite personal misgivings by

the author in the belief that they represent a more professional response to current conditions than to await imposed changes and fight their application (Ray, 1977, pp. 43-57). The principle of consultation and involvement of a faculty association in the practical use of each scenario may make the hard but inevitable decisions more palatable.

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