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What's Ailing Ontario's Colleges and What Can Faculty Do About It

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Ontario community college faculty have been very successful in equipping successive generations of students with the knowledge and skills they need to find sustainable places in the Canadian economy. This success, however, often exists in spite of, not because of, the institutional structures that have evolved in the college system over the last forty years. College teaching frequently takes place between a rock and a hard place—between college managements fixated on management rights and more focused on securing funding for education than education itself; and a faculty union fixated on the terms and conditions of employment and frequently mistaking the quality of terms and conditions of educational work with the quality of education. Given this predicament, there are many college faculty who are, in the words of Howard Beale, the disaffected news anchor in the 1976 movie *Network*, “mad as hell and...not going to take it anymore.”

Invoking Howard Beale puts me in mind of another Howard, a colleague at Seneca College, Howard Doughty, who, I hazard to guess, has been mad as hell for almost the entirety of his career, but I can't think of a time when he has stood passively by and “taken it.” On the contrary and to his considerable credit, he has consistently exercised an academic freedom not guaranteed by the current collective agreement, and has spoken out doggedly and incessantly about the various deficiencies in the community college system in which he has lived his professional life. Howard is nothing if not persistent. Every time he calls me he catches me in the same joke. I pick up the phone. Howard says “Howdy” and pauses. Clever bugger. In so doing, he effectively turns the table, eschews all responsibility for making the call, and makes me think that I have called him and should have something to say. Swallowing the bait—as I do every time—I say in the most sincere manner possible “How are you?” And he always says “as good as it gets.”

“As good as it gets.” It is a question we can ask of the Ontario college system itself. Is this as good as community college education gets? Despite all of its many accomplishments, there's pervasive sense that something is missing. That the system doesn't get the credit it deserves. There was an article in the *Toronto Star* a few years ago that likened the college system to the late comic Rodney Dangerfield who always complained, “I don't get no respect.” As good as it gets—Howard doesn't think so, and over the last forty years has become one of the system's most persistent gadflies.

And here is where things get a little scary.

What if Howard—and let me be clear, this Howard is more a creature of my own imagining not to be confused with the real Howard who is remarkable in the civility and good humour with which he excoriates his targets—what if this imagined Howard, this Falstaffian, cynical, dyspeptic curmudgeon who buttonholes faculty young and old and accuses them of being naïvely gulled by college management and government, who accuses those of us who have moved into administration of being co-opted by the very forces that have gulled us and of having sacrificed students and society's needs on the altar of our own ambitions) what if this Howard has been right all along about the ills of the college system?

Scary thought, indeed, and not far off the mark.

We need to get a conversation started about the problems facing Ontario's community colleges' faculty as educators: not as employees of particular colleges, or as public service workers, or as union members, but as educators whose "craft" is to teach. And, I contend, that the problems you face as educators haven't really been the focus of the three constituencies that have dominated the conversations about the colleges: college management, the Federal and Provincial government and OPSEU. College managements have been focused on demonstrating that public funds have been expended in an accountable fashion, that the various consumers—students, parents, employers—are satisfied, and that future funding can be secured in order that the institutions remain robust. The Federal and Provincial governments has been focused on securing public favour for the investments they have made in the Ontario college system, and OPSEU has been focused on securing the best employment terms and conditions it can for its membership. I'm not taking issue here with the priorities of these constituencies, I am merely observing that given these priorities, there has been inadequate attention paid to the "craft" that defines your profession and qualifies you to be called professors: education.

This calls to mind a story.

A few years back, I was in a meeting with two culinary professors who were mad as hell at their dean because he wasn't giving them enough recognition on their standard workload forms (SWFs) for various College functions that their students participated in and which they oversaw. The dean had also raised a whole series of questions about travel expenses, per diems, cutlery that was allegedly disappearing and re-appearing, and an excessive number of bottles of wine that had been opened at College fundraising dinner. They insisted on meeting with me to sort this all out, and in the course of a rather heated conversation, one of the culinary profs said the dean just didn't understand the "craft." At this, I thought I had an opening, as the dean in question was a pretty good educator. He had an MBA, had taught for many years before becoming a dean, had an interest in

pedagogy and showed it during our faculty meetings. Of the deans, he seemed quite on top of “the craft.” I pointed this out, perhaps a tad too pedantically, and the more vocal of the two looked at me and said with withering contempt: “Craft? What are you daft? He doesn’t know how to cook?” My point? It’s easy in the college environment to lose sight of what we are here for. Even those who are employed as educators can forget what their real craft is: teaching, not cooking and event planning.

The conversation that we need to engage in as educators is the means to a very specific end: reforming the colleges so that they provide learners, and thereby society, with the knowledge and skills that both need to navigate the future. As my contribution to this conversation, I want, in the spirit of Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, to offer a very preliminary diagnosis of what he would have called the “distempers of learning” troubling the system, and to offer some very tentative suggestions on how we might go about seeking a cure. Bacon named three distempers: fantastical learning, contentious learning and delicate learning. The first, when we study things that aren’t true; the second, when we study things that are outright lies; and the third when we focus on style rather than substance. Now, these are not the distempers of college learning I want to focus, though if one were of a mind to view the college system through the lens of *The Advancement of Learning* I am certain that these perspectives would be illuminating. Instead, I want to focus on three rather different distempers of college learning:

1. The inadequacy of prevailing conceptions of student-centred education;
2. the dominance of an institution-centred, rather than an education-centred, model of governance;
3. The dominance of an industrial model of workplace organization.

Every community college has it written somewhere in its vision, its mission, or its values that it is committed to student-centred learning. In some quarters, the term “learner” is favoured to “student,” and an explanation that is often given for the preference for “learner” is that it calls attention to the teaching–learning process, reminding us that our focus should not be what teachers are teaching but rather what learners are learning. These complexities aside, I think all of us would acknowledge that every college is committed to student or learner-centred education.

This commitment was fully apparent during an interview I had for a senior administrative position at an Ontario college. It was a pretty grueling process. The selection committee had close to thirty people on it, and on the first day of the interview we went around the table and each of them asked me a question. I must have answered the questions reasonably well because they invited me back for a second day. On the second day, I met with various groups, the senior team, the union leadership, the college’s academic council, and after lunch I

was invited to give a plenary address to the college community. Following the plenary, I was asked a series of pre-scripted questions by members of the audience who represented various stakeholder groups. Some of these were tough questions. The OPSEU president asked me what I would do to raise the percentage of faculty in the bargaining unit from its current 70/30 full-time /part-time split. I responded, much to her consternation, that in the world I was coming from where the ratio in certain faculties was approaching 50/50, 70/30 looked awfully good. The most challenging question, however, was posed by an up and coming staff member. She asked me the following question: "How would you support the College's commitment to student-centred education embodied in its philosophy of just for me/ just in time/just my way/ education. Please provide specific examples."

I listened attentively, composing a look on my face to suggest I was mulling over the countless specific examples I had at my disposal, but inside I was going "What? What? Just for me/Just in time/Just my way. What the hell does this mean? Oh god, they've turned a slogan borrowed from Harvey's into an educational philosophy." I knew this was a decisive moment. Do I give the answer the question solicited, promise all that they can have it their way and that's a beautiful thing, and thus toss off what ever thin veneer of integrity I have, or do I put it out there, say what I really think , and likely get the heave ho? In one of those rare moments in my life where principle has trumped opportunity, I swallowed hard and said: "I'm sorry. I don't know exactly what you mean by 'Just for me/Just in time/Just my way,' but it seems to equate students with consumers in an unhelpful way. I am committed to students as students. The needs I am committed to meeting are their educational ones, and sometimes doing it just for them, just their way, according to their schedules isn't conducive to them achieving their educational goals. So 'no' I can't support this."

An awkward silence descended on the auditorium. I look to the president and say something like, "We'll that's probably a career-limiting move." To my surprise, the president breaks into laughter, and the room follows suit. I leave elated—an institution that could laugh at itself, indeed laugh at its own naïveté, innocence, and gullibility. This was promising. I later learned that I was the credulous one, who wanted to believe that a college would take education more seriously than its marketing slogans purported.

My point? The institutional structures we have created at our colleges incline us to see students for something other than what they are. When they become members of our communities, they do so as students. Not clients. Though there are other communities in which they are clients: social service agencies, banks, lawyers' offices, insurance offices, etc. Nor are they patients. Though, there are other communities in which they are patients: doctors' offices, dentists' offices, hospitals, clinics, etc. Nor are they customers. Though, there are a whole host of places, like Harvey's, in which they are customers.

But here they are students. We are teachers. Those that we teach are students. Our identities are reciprocal.¹

We have got to get this word “student” back into the centre of our conversation. Not just for the improvements it will make to their lives by allowing us to see correctly and precisely what responsibilities we have to them—and I stress these responsibilities are only educational responsibilities (teaching and evaluating) and those directly related to their educational experience (academic advising)—and by allowing us to see what responsibilities they have to us; but also because it will allow us to reclaim the educational nature of our work. Yes, we are public sector employees; yes, we are service providers; yes, before becoming teachers, we have been accountants, artists, cooks, engineers, historians, nurses, marketers, psychologists, mechanics, sociologists, doctors, dentists, lawyers, and writers, etc. But here, we are teachers first and foremost. And it is to the ethical relation that obtains between those that have knowledge and skills, and the expertise to teach, and those that don’t have the knowledge and skills but want them, that we have turn our attention. And turning our attention here, putting teaching and learning at the centre of our concern means that other elements of our work will get moved to the periphery—things like labour-management relations, public relations, terms and conditions, and SWFs. I am not saying these are incidental matters. Far from it. They are critical elements creating the context in which we teach and in which students learn. It is just that these concerns have dominated the central conversation of our colleges for too long, and have diverted our attention from our primary concern: education.

Every one of you knows that education is properly a student-centred activity. And one of the moments in which you know it most intimately is when you close the classroom door and its only you and your students. Here’s where the ethical relation is forged and negotiated. Have you arrived with the knowledge they seek? Are you a master of what you are about to teach? Have you arrived with skills necessary for them to acquire that knowledge? Are you a teacher that can enable the learning of others? Terry O’Bannion whose work has on the learning college has received a great deal of attention among community colleges, has argued, and I think quite persuasively, that the key to reforming education at all levels rests with one very simple question: how will whatever it is I am about to do improve student’s learning? This is a question that everyone involved in education needs to be asking themselves. But for you it has a very specific focus: how will whatever it is you are about to do improve improve your students’ learning. As the Ontario colleges go about the business of transforming themselves into learning colleges, everyone who works at a college is being asked to play a role in the learning college. And yes, every one in the college should be concerned with creating favourable conditions for learning to take place—and this means that the snow needs to be shoveled, the garbage taken out, and the accounts receivable received. But only you have the ethical tie that binds you to your students. And it is you, and you alone, that is

primarily responsibility for meeting the obligations that that tie implies. You are the teacher. They are –your students.

Please note the question is not: how will whatever it is I am about to do improve my students' satisfaction? Only their learning. Customers need to be satisfied. Students need to learn. These are very different things and they are often confused, especially by our students. I am sure we have all had that conversation with a student, or worse a parent, in which we are told that they have paid good money to go to this college and they're not satisfied with their grades or how they have been served by their teachers.

So pervasive is the consumerist ethos of contemporary North American culture that is very easy for us to regard all relationships as primarily commercial relationships. Transactions. We pay for goods and services and we expect to be satisfied. Moreover, we expect a money-back guarantee of our satisfaction. But while there is a transactional base to our relationship with our students—they do pay tuition—the good or the service that they receive from their teachers is of a fundamentally different character than the usual goods and services we purchase. What they pay for is an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skill, and that their satisfaction rests ultimately with them. It's like buying a book. You can be satisfied with the cover, the binding, the font, but unless you read it, you haven't got the primary benefit the book the book is designed to provide. One of the things that many—not all, but many—students need to learn and that we need to teach is that they did not come here with the ultimate goal of being satisfied but with the goal of learning, that we are committed to helping them learn, that we can't make them learn—only they can do this, and that they may not achieve their goal of learning for a whole host of reasons for which we are not, and cannot be, responsible.

It is not surprising that we keep mistaking students for something other than what they are. During the last forty years, a number of public institutions—colleges, universities and hospitals, most notably—have increasingly adopted business-oriented governance models, and managers, rather than practitioners in the institution's areas of specialization, have assumed responsibility for running the organizations. And with the rise of the business model, we have seen increasing attention paid to customer service. There are colleges in the province where customer service training has been mandatory for all employees. Now certainly, the customer service has its place—I am not condoning rude or uncivil behavior. But we need to be careful when we emphasize customer service in institutions such as ours, because it may make the task of recognizing our students as students more difficult. Seen through the lens of customer service, all relationships ultimately become commercial relationships. We all become customers of various sorts. In such a world, all relationships become instrumental. Others become means rather than ends. Customers are provided with service because they are the means to the end: the sale. Now, we know it is unethical to treat our friends and loved ones as means to our ends. They are ends in themselves.

Similarly, the teacher/student relationship is not fundamentally commercial, but, like the relationship we have with friends and loved ones, ethical: a relationship based of upon an explicit set of commitments that the parties make to each other. As teachers, we commit to teaching our students and evaluating their performance, and as students they commit to the course of instruction we have put in place—the classes, activities, readings, labs, assignments, shops, tests and examinations. The student purchases the opportunity to acquire knowledge through this course of study; the student does not purchase the outcome.

Earlier, I said that the teachers and students define each other reciprocally. The more students see themselves as consumers, the more faculty are seen by them as simply the providers of goods and services. Both can begin to regard each other as simply means to various ends. Here's a cautionary story:

Two students in a technology program arrived in my office towards the end of term and complained that they had failed the final in-class shop assignment and the instructor wouldn't let them do it over. Both were angry and pointed out to me that this meant they wouldn't be able to graduate, and that they would have nothing to show for the two years of tuition, accommodation, and books. They alleged that another student who also failed the test was given a second chance and complained of differential treatment. I asked if there was any reason why they would be denied the privilege afforded the other student, and they said the instructor had it in for them all term and that they often skipped class because they didn't like him or his class. I told them that it was well within a instructor's right to treat students differently based upon their performance in the course, and that if an instructor afforded a committed student a privilege, it didn't mean that he had to extend this to all students. Nonetheless, I said I would speak to the instructor about the situation.

They then said that they would pay. "Pay for what?" I asked. "Pay the instructor to write the test again." And I said, with a tone a great indignation, "Oh no, it doesn't work that way. This isn't about money. Either you are entitled or you are not. Money doesn't enter into it." They left my office perplexed, not understanding at all what I was getting so shirty about. In their minds, they were simply suggesting an alternative that was perfectly compatible with the rules of the game as they understood it.

I then went to see instructor. He told me that they just didn't deserve another opportunity; whereas the other student did. I said I could stand behind that, but noted that were the students to appeal, he should be prepared to explain why he had treated the three students differently. He was concerned about this matter going to an appeal. He then told me that he had only given the other student a second chance because the dean had agreed to pay him overtime for running the test and that were the dean to do the same for these two students, he would be happy to give them a second chance. I ended

the conversation quickly and got into my car fuming. I called the dean. He told me he had met with the three students as a group initially, as all three had been denied the opportunity to redo the assignment. He had then gone to the instructor to see what, if anything, could be worked out, and the instructor refused to give any of them the opportunity to do the assignment again unless he got paid. The dean said he'd pay for the "good" student. And the instructor said fine.

What disturbed me about this incident, and disturbed me about the instructor, the dean, and the two students, was the degree to which they were either or unaware of, or indifferent to, the ethical issues at play here. For the instructor, this was business as usual. The issue for him was not the students' eligibility to redo the assignment, but payment for services rendered. I don't think he saw the ethical problem of putting his professional judgment up for hire. The dean thought he had addressed the central problem by arranging the overtime payment which allowed the "good student" to redo the test. It never occurred to him that in authorizing an additional payment to secure a privilege the student had earned in the course, his actions might muddy the waters, making it harder to see the difference between an educational relationship and a commercial exchange. The two students who offered to pay for the opportunity to retake the test believed they studied in a place where you could buy at least part of your way to a diploma. There's a complicated nest of issues here which I certainly won't claim to have sorted out, but clearly they are symptomatic of a culture that is having challenges seeing students as students. Of seeing students as ends, not means.

This brings us to the second distemper of college learning: the dominance of an institution-centred, rather than education-centred, model of governance. It is ironic that those who most often intone the mantra of student-centred learning— college management— are rarely student-centred in the way I am using this term here: centred on students as learners as opposed to students as customers. The focus of college administrations has been the development of the institutions. And to certain extent, this is right and proper. The role of college administration is to secure the conditions in which faculty can do the work they have been hired to do: train and educate successive generations of learners. And in order for you to do this work, college management has to be concerned with budgets and buildings, the things that you need to do your work. Yet in their pursuit of the means for you to do your work, they can and do lose sight of the ends: student development.

I don't blame them for this, because the causes for this reversal of means and ends are structural. In order for college management to secure the funds necessary to sustain and, ideally grow, these institutions it is critical that they satisfy those who provide funding. And there are two principal sources of funding: grants coming from provincial and federal governments and tuition. Of the two sources, tuition is the most dependable and predictable. There is a petty clear

public understanding that higher education is necessary for individuals to be competitive in today's economy and in the economies of the future, and that higher education provides a positive return on investment. Whether these returns are as great as is claimed in the key performance indicators is a subject of another paper, but, by and large, those that pay tuition are largely satisfied with their purchases, and if we continue as we are, shaping our programs in anticipation of future labour market needs, they are likely to continue as returning customers.

Government is less easy to satisfy. Governments need and want more immediate returns on their investment. The key performance indicator (KPI) data provides some justification for government's continuing base investment in the colleges. But it isn't sufficient for them. Given the pressure of elections, given the opportunity to demonstrate through the colleges the value of current policy initiatives, and given that the colleges do not have an arm's length relation to the government as universities do, the colleges are frequently pressed into service in corroborating government agendas. And here's where college management can veer off the student-centre, and—unless very cautious—respond to government the way Pavlov's dogs initially responded to food. Give us a treat and we'll jump, whether or not jumping has anything to do with our core concern: teaching and learning.

About eight years ago, the federal government wanted to expand literacy programs and made funding available to organizations, like the colleges, that did literacy work. The request for proposals identified a series of priorities that applicants would be expected to address. These included the literacy needs of newcomers to Canada and aboriginals. The request also asked applicants to address how they would use educational technology to assist with the initiative. Well and good. A proposal from a college that shall go nameless was developed, submitted, and funded that proposed a series of computer-based literacy modules developed for people in First Nation communities who didn't have ready access to college facilities. I was asked by some of the faculty that had been assigned to the project to comment on the curriculum and its mode of delivery. The curriculum was pretty standard stuff, moving learners along the literacy continuum, but I queried how this was going to work with learners who didn't have computer skills or the literacy levels to acquire those skills. I also asked how this program was going to work without trained literacy teachers to assist the teachers. The faculty involved already knew that this was wacky stuff, but they were in a squeeze because they had been assigned to work on project that they knew was unlikely to assist the learners for which it was designed. Nonetheless, the project did succeed, though in ways the teachers hadn't imagined. It succeeded because it got funding. And this was the primary goal. The work was assigned, the modules were developed, the CDs were sent to the First Nations communities, and there were media releases and media events involving community partners, municipal, provincial, federal and First Nations' government

officials. Whether this program assisted a single student in learning how to read or write is completely unknown. There was, to my knowledge, no assessment done on the program. The administrator who initiated the funding request and set the program in motion was likely applauded and likely received his performance bonus at year end. The instructors who had to see this boondoggle through to completion were demoralized and began the slow slide into cynicism.

My point? Initiatives like this are not student-centred. Rather, they use students, in this case aboriginal students, often the most needy of all, to secure funding, using them as means to ends which are at best loosely related to teaching and learning. Initiatives like this are institution-centred and they divert time, resources, and attention away from the only work that is student-centred: teaching and learning.

Let me provide you with give another story showing how management's pursuit of funding can take us off centre.

Five years ago or so, growing out of meetings of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, a request went to the federal government, asking how colleges could access tri-council research funding. This is the funding that comes from SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR to support research. There was frustration among the College presidents that colleges were ineligible for this funding, and that it was going almost exclusively to universities and hospitals. So began talk of "applied research," research that could be conducted by colleges and which would provide industries in need of innovation with access to knowledge existing within the colleges; or which could be applied by the colleges themselves in developing new products that could be brought to market.

At the time, the Ontario Innovation Trust was one of the few funding agencies that made research funding available to the colleges. The funding opportunity was there and could be had if a proposal could be developed. Another college that shall go nameless had assigned a Chair of English, likely because of his expertise in writing proposals, the task of searching for funding opportunities and writing proposals in the hopes of securing funding. He came across the OIT request for proposals, and working with a Forestry Technology professor developed a very interesting proposal for using aerial photography to assess forest growth rates and harvest yields. An industry partner was found who saw considerable potential for cost-reduction, as previously this work was quite labour intensive and costly as it involved sending people into the forest to assess the inventory. The proposal with all its associated goals, objectives, timelines, benchmarks was submitted and the proposal was funded. Success! Media releases and media events ensued. Much cause for celebration! The professor who consulted on the proposal was given a workload reduction on his SWF to carry out the project. Much equipment was purchased. The fall term started and the project went

on the backburner. Then there was the winter term. Then there was vacation. The faculty member met with his dean and said he wasn't able to make much progress in the previous year and without a course reduction didn't think much would happen in the coming year. The dean provided the workload reduction, and the faculty member got going on the project, and used the time allocated on the SWF to prepare the compliance reports explaining why no progress had been made to date and submitted a revised plan and timetable for accomplishing the work. He then met with the dean at year's end and told him he was running into complications with the project. The aerial photos couldn't be taken in the winter and during the summer there was vacation. The dean and the faculty member agreed that another download wasn't warranted. The faculty member was pretty much relieved to be left off the hook. A year went by. No compliance reports were submitted because no time has been allocated on the SWF for their completion. OIT started calling and asked what was happening with the project? Promises were made. And nothing happened. OIT then called the Academic Vice-President and a host of meetings ensued. The faculty member was frustrated. He felt he was being held accountable for a project he didn't initiate and for which he hadn't been given sufficient time or support for its completion. The college had already received the lion's share of the funding, allocated it in various ways, didn't see a ready way to get the project completed, and was not highly motivated to invest anymore in a project which appeared to be going off the rails. With the virtual collapse of the forest industry, the project was no longer a priority for the industrial partner. As it turned out, the government decided the Ontario Innovation Trust was an experiment it no longer wished to extend, and the OIT staff seemed more interested in closing the books than making further investments in a project that appeared unlikely to yield results. Everyone separately agreed to walk away for this car wreck.

I'd doubt that anyone entangled in this tale asked themselves question "how will whatever it is I am about to do improve student's learning?" Because if they had, they'd have to conclude that that their various actions had little, if anything, to do with teaching and learning. What did their actions have to do with? Securing funding that would go to support the institution and that goal was achieved.

Our concerns for means rather than ends—securing funding rather than teaching and learning—inclines the system to privilege style over substance: interestingly, one of Bacon's original distempers of learning. In order to secure funding, we have become very good at showing our funders how good we are. And our colleges have become increasingly preoccupied with marketing. A few years ago, I spent a day with the then new appointed head of Colleges Ontario, "the advocacy and marketing agency of Ontario's 24 colleges." She was fresh from her position promoting the Ontario Vintners Association, and having changed brands she spearheaded the campaign to "Brand the Sector" and "Develop the College Brand." Now, I am not disputing the need to market our colleges—they are often misunderstood and often under-valued—but the overarching

concern with marketing has the effect of making us more concerned with the appearance of success rather than success itself. The two stories I just told were not successes but failures, though the insidious bargain we have struck with our funders caused us celebrate them as successes. This preoccupation with marketing and communications detracts from the work of teaching and learning. It distorts the colleges, turning them into public relations entities designed to justify government investments in education and training. The concern with protecting the brand creates a culture of confirmation rather than a culture of analysis and investigation. Everything must appear to be good therefore everything is good. And faculty who are concerned with student success and who become critical of College initiatives that interfere with the teaching and learning become branded, though in unflattering ways, as oppositional or cynical.

The pursuit of funding rather than the pursuit of learning can unless we are very careful take us off centre. Funding is critically important. Education must, of course, be sustainable. But unchecked, the over-riding concern with funding can incline an institution to use the education of students as an alibi for acquiring funding—the end becomes the means. The College's become self-centred, concerned primarily with institutional sustainability; and successive governments use the Colleges as a means to secure their own political sustainability under the delusion that they are providing funding that will improve learning.

This brings me to my third and final, and most controversial, distemper of learning: the dominance of an industrial-model of workplace organization, which is ill-fitted to the work educators do. I want to argue that the solutions to the most pressing problems our colleges face rest with faculty and with faculty assuming control of the organization of their work as educators. The educational work of the colleges needs to be put in the hands of those who have expertise about teaching and learning. I am persuaded that the only way to make students the centre of the institution is to put those who have as their exclusive focus the educational interests of students, and who have knowledge of how to meet students' needs, at the centre of institutions. The first step in becoming student-centred is to become faculty-centred. But how do we do this in institutions in which government, college management and OPSEU have cooperated in the development and perpetuation of a model of workplace organization which explicitly denies faculty the academic freedom necessary for them to do their work?

As it currently stands, faculty in Ontario's community colleges do not currently organize and control their work. That right belongs to management: Article 6.01: "It is the exclusive function of the College...to manage the function of the College... and to "plan direct and control operations." This arrangement is uncontested by both management and OPSEU. It was re-asserted in an Ontario arbitration board ruling, cited by Ralph Barrett in 1994, which concluded "that a

professor does not have the final authority with respect to the selection of teaching materials, the determination of areas of studies, the designation of methods of evaluation or the choice of mechanisms of delivery of a course of study. The final authority in regard to these matters rests with the management of the college." (College Quarterly 1:4, 1994).

Nor did this arrangement change with the introduction of the SWF, which followed the back to work legislation that ended the strike in 1984. Barrett claimed the strike was a victory of trade unionism over "passive professionalism, which sees quality education, curricula and professional development as separate from union issues [and] promotes an artificial distinction between the teacher as a selfless academic and as an educational worker struggling for autonomy in the workplace." Barrett argues that through the strike, faculty "won a workload formula that met teachers' demands around quality education."

I agree with him that faculty won a workload formula, but I am not so sure about the quality education part. The SWF has reinforced management's appropriation of the control of the curriculum, its execution and delivery. Rather than being part of the professoriate's craft, and within the professor's control, curriculum is organized and controlled by a management which often has a very tenuous grasp on the curriculum. Program standards and defined learning outcomes are established by the Province. Course outlines prescribing delivery methods and assessment instruments are increasingly developed by instructional design units and approved through externally controlled quality assurance processes. This separation of conception from execution is often accelerated by the introduction of emerging learning technologies. Through mechanisms such as, college teachers are relieved of the responsibilities that define them as teachers.

If the SWF was a victory at all, it was surely pyrrhic. Yes, it saw an end to the paternalistic, exploitative command and control management that preceded it. But it did so by turning the Taylorism of scientific management that faculty had been resisting into a fetish, whose minute particulars (evaluation ratios, what counts as a new course, what counts as repeated, what's in and out of the "five alive," etc., etc) management and union would obsess over for the next twenty-five years.

As I contemplated returning to the college sector after the better part of twenty year absence, I often wondered what had happened to the SWF. I understood precisely what it was a necessary response to, and I imagined that the conversations it created had evolved over time and that the SWF too would have evolved. Surely, twenty-five years later, we couldn't still be arguing over the evaluation factors of such things as typing tests. Were the appropriate evaluation factors, essay-style or routine? Were chairs and faculty members still forced to meet across a table each term—the one manipulating the various attributes and factors to squeeze as much on to the SWF as possible; the other

doing the same hoping to lose a section or to acquire overtime—engaged in a potentially fractious bargaining process which invited bad faith on both sides, which made the conflation of workload quantity and educational quality almost inevitable, and which ensured that collegial relations between administration and faculty would always be fragile. When I first met the Chief Grievance officer at Confederation, a brilliant dedicated unionist and a good teacher, I asked him to bring me up to date on the changes to the SWF that had occurred during my university slumbers: “How had the SWF changed?” I asked. He stiffened and said “Not one wit!” Like the fetish it had become, the SWF was untouchable.

What the SWF does, in my view, is cause us all to focus on things which are very important (workload conditions, remuneration, management rights, union rights etc.) but which are not the central concern of educational institutions. The SWF has assisted in moving our central concern—teaching and learning—to the periphery, and there it sits. Where do we really get to talk about our craft? Faculty are often distrustful of management talk about teaching and learning, fearful that other motives are at play. Faculty are very guarded going into PD sessions with titles such as “teaching large classes,” “Improving Students Writing,” or “Putting your course on Blackboard,” fearing that it will mean doing more with less. New faculty hopeful of preferment and part-time faculty looking for future work attend the sessions hoping to be recognized by administration. Experienced faculty frequently try to duck. Similarly, management rarely believes the conversation is about education when the union talks about class size and educational technology. Both parties sit in the room pretending to be talking about educational quality, but everyone knows it’s really about terms and conditions of employment.

Yet, at the same time, there are innumerable classrooms in every college where these matters are largely regarded, if they are regarded at all, as an irrelevance, a perhaps necessary annoyance that distracts teachers from their real work. Here we find faculty with expertise that nobody else in the institution has or really understands—very frequently the case in skilled trades, in technology-related studies and health studies; less so, in human services and liberal studies—passing it on to students some of whom have an interest in learning something. I suspect that many of your classrooms are these spaces. The critical question then is how can we create a space in which what’s going on in these classes becomes the centre of our conversation, and in which these other matters move to the peripheral locations they belong?

The title of this talk is “what’s ailing the colleges and what can faculty do about it.” This was one of two titles I suggested to the organizers. The one rejected was rather more provocative: “What’s ailing the colleges and why the remedy isn’t SWFable.” I think it is self-evident that the reforms that are required cannot be assigned on a SWF, and the reforms that are required can’t be assigned to faculty by management. The SWF is a very effective tool for assigning

piecemeal tasks that need to be completed. What it doesn't do so well is assign responsibilities. And when we teach a class, we don't just perform a series of tasks assigned to us by our superiors, we assume responsibility for the learning of a group of students. And this requires that faculty, not management, assume responsibility for the development and delivery of curriculum and the assessment of student learning. This empowering of faculty applies with even greater force to the research work that college faculty, especially those involved in applied degrees, are increasingly being asked to engage in. It just isn't feasible to assign research on a SWF. Putting five hours for research on a SWF confuses input (time) with output (research productivity). In this area, all the college can do is convey the expectation, establish a workload that supports the expectation, evaluate whether the expectation has been met, and then respond appropriately. In their research work, as in their teaching, faculty need to have the autonomy and authority their work requires, and management's role needs to shift from telling faculty what to do to holding them accountable for what they have done.

So where does this leave us? Is there a way to address these three distempers of learning? Let me close, by suggesting one very practical way college faculty can reclaim their proper place in this educational enterprise, gain the respect they deserve as professional educators, and in so doing make their work truly student-centred: Give up the SWF in exchange for academic freedom and intellectual property rights.

In the last round of negotiations OPSEU tried to negotiate academic freedom. Management resisted, likely because it was unwilling to cede this right without securing from faculty an assurance that they were willing assume the responsibilities that would be commensurate with this right. If faculty were granted the right to organize and control their teaching, then management would need to be assured that faculty would be willing to accept these responsibilities. What I am suggesting is a trade off. In the next round of negotiations, faculty could urge OPSEU to put the SWF up for negotiation in exchange for a clause providing them with academic freedom. Such a clause, while recognizing the existence of provincial curriculum guidelines, would include language asserting a faculty's member control over the development and delivery of curriculum of a fixed number of courses. A framework for establishing limits on the specific number of courses assigned would have to be negotiated between management and OPSEU, and these limits would have to take into account such factors as class size and the instructor's familiarity with the course material. Working within this framework, academic managers and the faculty reporting to them would determine specific teaching assignments. In this model, faculty would not be assigned discreet tasks as they currently are through the SWF, but would be given responsibility for teaching a specific group of students and for ensuring that those students had been given an adequate opportunity to accomplish the course's learning outcomes. As part of the exchange, faculty would also want to insist upon a

clause delineating the extent of their intellectual property rights over any curriculum that they have developed or research that they have accomplished. As it currently stands, any intellectual property developed by college faculty arising from work assigned to them on their SWFs belongs entirely to the college.

It is uncertain whether management would be willing to cede control in this way. They have something lose: their right to organize and control the workplace. However, they also have much to gain: an empowered faculty who are prepared to assume the responsibility for making the colleges the institutions of teaching and learning they aspire to be. OPSEU may also resist such a radical rethinking of the way college work is organized and controlled. OPSEU has worked with the SWF for the last twenty years and is very familiar with the rules of the game and is, like management, adept at playing it. However, if the Colleges are to become the high quality educational institutions they want to be and the student-centred institutions they claim be, and if faculty are to become the educational professionals they want to be and recognized as such by the broader community, then faculty need to work with each other, and with management and OPSEU, to extend their academic freedom and their intellectual property rights. Whether this happens or not, depends largely upon college faculty. Management isn't likely to take up the charge, nor will OPSEU. But this shouldn't surprise us because this is a struggle for increased freedom. And like other struggles for freedom, this struggle is one that faculty, practicing their craft as educators, will need to lead on their own.

Note

1. On the reciprocal nature of identity formation, see Alexandre Kojève, **Introduction to the Reading of Hegel**, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

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