"The sky is falling, the sky is falling." Chicken Little is on the run again and his friends are beginning to panic. After all, it is quite acceptable to be a pessimist with a downturn in the economy. Actually it might be said that to ignore the economic trend would be tantamount to the rationalization of a cock-eyed optimist. Why is the figure of a chicken associated with pessimism while the optimist is accused of having eyes of the same species? It may be because the chicken doesn't know whether he is coming or going, whether he is a pessimist or optimist. I'd have to join the species. I don't know either. Perhaps my fear of being prematurely optimistic in an era of slowed educational growth types me as a pessimistic optimist. This view is not for the purpose of hedging in an unsure market, nor is it for the purpose of buying futures; instead, it is merely my perceptions of the manner in which education faculties are coping with changes occurring in their environment.

Education faculties live off the imports of energy and information from their environment to survive. They must rely on energy in the form of money, students, and staff to stay in business. The energy money brings light, heat, buildings, equipment, and staff, while the energy students bring the money and the excuse to spend it. To the key decisionmakers of education faculties of the 1960's, energy inputs were more important than information inputs. All that was needed was quantification of the energy. Information inputs such as market demand and supply were of less importance in an era when the market demand for an education faculty's graduates was high and the number of students demanding entry was also growing quickly.

Actually, faculties of education were enjoying a situation of what I shall call "double happiness of demand." The environment wanted their services and the faculties grew in size and quality; but alas, to no avail. As the 1970's approached, the population growth slowed, demand for services decreased, federal money sources dried up, the general economy slowed, property tax payers balked, the rate of increase in primary and secondary school teacher-student ratio slowed and the bubble of cock-eyed optimism broke. The "double happiness of demand" became doubly unhappy. The super-highs became super-lows. And here we are today.

Our role in the 1970's is in response to a different orientation, not to that of educational inputs, but instead, to the marshalling of those forces which greatly affect the efficiency of the system itself. This may be construed as an attempt toward educational isolationism which manifests itself in conveniently ignoring the unpleasant environment. Faculties of education are now turning inward by emphasizing quality programs. The emphasis of the 1960's was on quantity. Here is the rub. Educational academics are welcoming the change toward an emphasis on quality; while at the same time, they are pessimistic about their economic future—truly an era of pessimistic optimism.

Quality vs Quantity
The shift in emphasis from quantity processing to quality production at the turn of the decade need not be thought of as simply resulting from an intellectual eureka, or even from a tedious process of decisionmaking. The political and economic factors of the time affected the switch to such an extent as to activate automatic coping mechanisms within the entire education machine. A slowed population growth may have signalled education faculties to slow the output of teachers. However, the strong belief that such faculties could not survive without continued input growth resulted in the rationalization that an increase in the number of students within faculties of education leads to increased competition and therefore increased quality output. Such a concept becomes ridiculous when rates of failure among teacher aspirees were so low as to cause a decrease in that need to compete.

The decrease in the demand for output and the decrease in the demand for student spaces, led to a decrease in the amount of hard money avail-
able for continued quantity growth while the continuing decline in the national and local economy led to a decrease in the amount of soft money available for academic positions on grant projects and thus a decrease in research into quality resulted. Within ten years, the entire education machine of the United States changed from a system trying to cope with its tremendous rate of growth which received its impetus from the Sputnik era to a system trying to cope with an environment of decreasing economic base and a political reality that their services may be less desirable in the future. In the four years between 1968 and 1972, the number of states reporting an excess in teacher applications for available positions climbed from zero to twenty-two (Sharpes:28).

Public and non-public school enrollment in grades K-8 actually declined in 1972-3 from the previous year (Hartley:1972). A declining enrollment coupled with both a declining inner-city tax base and a declining suburban willingness to pass bond proposals really forced metropolitan areas to trim the frills from their educational programs. Ancient concepts of efficiency became manifest in relatively new concepts of accountability and program budgeting. Thus, planning, programming, and budgeting systems (PPBS), management by objectives, and other accountability plans came about not as a result of brainstorming on how to improve old education systems; but instead, mushroomed out of an attempt to save whatever could be saved from the invading hordes of a recessed economy. The thrust has turned toward cutting the losses to a minimum rather than speeding the process of gains. It is kind of like a Southeast Asian approach to educational decisionmaking.

**Gearing Down**

The cutting of losses often means a scaling down of all or selected programs within the faculty. It may begin as a mere end to expansion and finish as the shutting of the entire plant. A reduction in force (RIF) is agonizing to those who are dismissed and to those who decide on the specific personnel to be involved. The process can become more agonizing if it is immediate. A directive to a faculty dean that he curtail his salary budget by 25% within six months can be disastrous to staff morale and organizational climate. It means that commitments to students, community, and professional organizations must be coincidentally curtailed or simply lost by default. It means that many tasks normally completed by those unfortunate 25% will now have to be completed by those who remain. More work for fewer staff will be looked upon as a less desirable working atmosphere. A computer simulation exercise at the University of Wisconsin concluded that a substantial saving would result from closing entire institutions and parts of them as long as the staff was not transferred to another part of the system (Magarrell:6).

The gearing down process can be less agonizing if it is anticipated and planned for. The faculty may find that it can save a considerable amount of money by offering early retirement incentives to those staff members who are only a few years away from voluntarily leaving the organization. If an early retirement incentives plan is not sufficient, priorities for a further reduction in force must be set. Staff might be ranked in order of seniority with the least senior members being served ample notice. One western U.S. university which recently engaged in a forced RIF opened decisionmaking to the entire staff as to which programs were to be seen as more important than others and which staff members were to leave. Surely personality variables entered the decision-making process; however, the staff felt that the final decision was their own. Albeit the dean’s administrative support staff was the first to go followed by a few least senior assistant professors.

Planning for force reductions is more difficult when the institution is one which is further removed from its environment than others. The faculty which is isolated from that information which is crucial in planning is usually the faculty hardest hit by RIF directives. This means that large state systems will find more hardship during RIFs than private colleges or universities. Faculties in private institutions seem to be more aware of market demand and supply. The flow of funds is likely to be more direct from student tuition than in the case of state supported faculties. Therefore, information as to a drop in demand coupled with a drop in available funds arrives earlier at a private faculty than a public one. Large state systems receive much of their funding from income tax treasuries which, as they dwindle, signal state capital agencies to start processing cut-back directives. Thus, RIFs in state university systems come much after-the-fact instead of as part of planning for the future. Although private colleges and universities are seen to offer less staff security, the staff holds the strange, advantageous position of seeing the axe before it swings.
and can attempt to avoid it.

Many faculty members have been spared the axe through their own entrepreneurship into newer areas of higher education research, occupational education, adult education, and public lecture series programs. Continuing education departments have enjoyed particular growth in the past few years as a result of the public's awareness of the continual need for retraining and intellectual updating to control the future-shock of the changing economic marketplace. Many universities have opened survey research centers wherein studies are performed for contracting university and non-university institutions. Such centers are staffed by experts in education, sociology, statistics, and computer science as well as paraprofessional card punchers coders, and hardware operators. Graduate students and professorial staff in education are finding that grant and private project funds may be available at such centers for temporary employment and thus refuge from RIFs in their former departments within education faculties.

Accountability

Educators were used to having intangible goals the completion of which was immeasurable; thus, we could always argue our way out from under the guillotine of accountability. After all, who could argue against our assertions that we were producing "good citizens," "rounded personalities," and "future leaders"? Certainly we had more specific objectives regarding Reading and Mathematics comprehension, but we were not having very much difficulty accomplishing those objectives. It was the purpose of the collective objectives that was confusing. They were stated as goals with a built-in undetectable failure rate. No one could possibly prove that we were producing graduates with high reading comprehension at the expense of "good citizenship." In other words, we measured what we wanted to measure and assumed success in all the immeasurables. In fact, whenever we admitted failure, the public stepped in with more money with which to attack the problem. The political climate of the 1960s was surely on our side.

It is less desirable in the 1970s to state overall goals. If we have no goals, they can't be measured by the measuring instruments developed in the 1960s. The converse is also true. Since goal attainment is immeasurable, why state goals? Thus, the accountability trend of the 1970s is aimed toward attainment of lower order objectives such as reading level, mathematic comprehension, and college entrance. Couple such a trend with the rebirth of the Dewey-Piaget movement, and the result is a move toward measurement and accountability on one continuum and a philosophy of environment on another continuum (see Graph 1).

GRAPH I

1970s Education and Measurement Philosophy

open education

Laissez-faire Accountability

classical classroom school

At the present moment it looks as if education faculties will take their position in the upper right quadrant at least until the 1980s. The reasons are pedagogical, economic, and political. Most educators are committed to giving open education a fair try. No one is sure that open education is a panacea; however, there seems to be sufficient benefit to warrant a try for a few years at least. Also, open education is less expensive to the consumer because of the manner in which it has been marketed. It is less expensive to build a school with no interior walls than to build one with them. The savings can be used for carpeting, lighting, air conditioning and media resources. This is not to say that it should be less expensive, but it is indeed sold to the public in a fashion which transcends the political problems of passing bond issues and raising school taxes. It is sold as an inexpensive, high quality educational package which meets financial and pedagogical accountability demands.

Education faculties are more interested in measurement than ever before for similar reasons. Measurement is most certainly more sophisticated than non-measurement especially during a resurgence in economic and political demands for accountability. Although the "if it moves, measure
it” syndrome has not completely taken hold, it is most certainly a driving force of the decade. The increased availability of computers has also tempted us toward further quantification. We now have computer programmers that professionally specialize in educational problem solving.

Trends toward measurement and accountability are hardly new. S.S. Pattern in a 1911 Educational Review demanded school teacher accountability:

“The advocate of pure water on clean streets shows by how much the death rate will be altered by each proposed addition to his share of the budget. Why should New York support inefficient school teachers instead of efficient milk inspectors? Must definite reforms with measurable results give way to an antiquated school system may grind out its useless product? Educators must produce results that can be readily seen and measured.” (in Callahan:48)

So much for accountability. Like a tennis ball in water, the further accountability is suppressed, the quicker and more forcefully it emerges. It can be expected that economic and political pressures will continue to have an effect on perpetuating the recurrent accountability syndrome at least until the 1980s.

Summary

Coping with a slowed growth rate seems to be the most difficult problem to overcome. In fact, there seems to be less anxiety about the effect of slowed growth on students than there seems to be on professional staff. There may be more concern about the economic effect on the educational industry than about effects on students. Certainly the student is the one most immediately affected by closing programs. However, the trends in our profession’s coping have been to the tune of P.P.B.S., Accountability, R.I.F. programs, M.I.S., efficiency, and entrepreneur. Granted that all such programs have as their goal the improvement of learning; however, the Catch-22 is that they are promulgated solely as a possible solution to shorter term objectives. They are concerned with the control of the means rather than achievement of ends. Their function is more homeostatic than teleologic. As such, their philosophy is rooted in maintaining control of the old, not in coping with the new.

This is not to say that educational faculties should create entropic conditions for coping with change; but instead, that serious thought be given to creating different structures for educational organizations. Most attempts to cope have been at the primary and secondary level in the form of open classrooms, team teaching, differentiated staffing, and multi-media approaches. Relatively little has been done at the college or university level to change organizational structure. Historically we have merely moved within a matrix similar to that of Graph 1 instead of developing new matrices.

It is also possible that we are falsely using a Horatio Alger approach to a fait accomplis. Although it is admirable for us to assume we can solve our problems, we may indeed be harnessed in a cyclical do-loop which we must ride to the end. In order to remain passive one would have to believe that we are at a point in a cycle which will eventually return to educational prosperity. I am optimistic about the possibility of hurrying the cycle if a cycle does indeed exist. Then again, Chicken Little may be right.

References


