

Chapter 3

From Crisis to Vision: Educational Leadership, Globalization, and Inequality

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ABSTRACT

Higher education now faces the critical role of partnerships, linkage, and strategic joint ventures to achieve shared goals in a transformed external environment. This environment is itself shaped not only by the pressures of neo-liberal competition, but by a set of crises emerging from the contradictions that is producing greater levels of inequity and social division. It is in this context that the chapter evaluates the importance of global learning as a critical tool to understand, engage with, and potentially transform a globalized socio-economic environment and engage proactively with existing multiple crises. Academics and educators are now intimately connected to the need to articulate and demonstrate globalized learning models and reflective practice founded on explicitly international perspectives. Given the urgency, internationalization alone is insufficient to achieve transformation. A re-appropriation of purpose and values is also required within an emancipatory and social justice model that asserts human needs, not corporate efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in today's world represents a powerful and evolving set of relationships, a networked web of public, private and social factors that respond to an ever-increasing set of change factors. From being the most visible element in the assertion of rank, hierarchy and elitism in past centuries, higher education represents a market of competing ideas and visions concerning the role of academia in the communities of which it is part. Changing conceptions of higher education are held by governments worldwide, but we also have higher education institutions increasingly behaving like actors on a crowded stage searching for scarce resources among many other competing interests. In this context, if none other,

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higher education now faces the importance of the critical role of partnerships, linkage and strategic joint ventures to achieve shared goals in a transformed external environment. This environment is itself shaped not only by the pressures of neo-liberal capitalist competition, but by a set of crises emerging from the contradictions inherent in a system that is demonstrably producing greater levels of inequity and social division. Education now finds itself in a world enmeshed in economic, political and environmental challenges of unprecedented scale and import.

This evolving scene has profound implications for educators. The neat congruence of interests between academics, administrators, governments, enterprises, students and communities in the past meant the emergence of a stable set of assumptions. These were themselves based on an understanding of society and power that reflected rather than challenged bias and subjective assessment of the balance of socio-economic power matrixes. The University as the servant of the State, and the academic as the servant of the University were unchallenged norms. In similar manner, universities produced graduates designed to fit the labor market and its requirements – providing both personnel and research findings to facilitate prevailing socio-economic systems.

A key issue throughout this identified discourse is economics. The interdependence of education (and associated schooling systems) and dominant systems of economic organization has long been acknowledged. In an age of globalization, however, the connection is immediate and apparent. Certain forms of education have been identified as ultimately surviving or failing based on their economic rationality rather than technological development or learner relevance.

From the outset, universities were characterized by partnerships between various interests and agencies. In this, there is nothing new. Universities have served rich and complex roles not simply in generating and directing research, particularly research that feeds into social and economic policy. Universities and other research and learning agencies (public, private and philanthropic) populate a complex landscape of ideas, investigation and teaching which, in turn, is profoundly affected by external change, socio-economic pressures and technological transformation. The need for enhanced quality (not least because of competitive processes between educational institutions) has become critical. Quality and standards themselves rely on structured linkage which situate learning and its outputs in a matrix of socially desirable outcomes and outputs.

The globalization process gives a special flavor to this. In many ways, it is a short journey from collaborative partnerships to a set of special interests and capacities which need to be protected in an atmosphere with increasing competition for scarce resources. Universities and other Higher Education Institutions now find themselves subject to huge competitive pressures in everything from comparative league tables to outsourcing, institutional amalgamation and rationalization. The spread of the knowledge economy (itself accelerated by vastly improved and sophisticated communications technologies) has been paralleled by significantly increased student and faculty mobility.

In this scenario, knowledge-based societies have to overcome a number of barriers, challenges and tensions that impede focus on a common good being achieved. This shift to less hierarchical notions of knowledge production has been underpinned by new social model thinking. This highlights the need to understand local contradictions and promotes the value of interaction, dialogue and reciprocity. At the center of this shift has been the aim to overcome borders, whether disciplinary, geographic, institutional or cultural.

Such a shift raises questions regarding structures of learning, working and production and how they link innovation and creativity. It is necessary to consider and compare different types of organizational structures that contribute to creativity, learning and innovation. This should make it possible to identify

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