
ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

a very occasional paper

by Michael Coote.

Something that has been a bone of contention, a topic of (sometimes) acrimonious debate and (also sometimes) a source of unease is the subject of professional development. Professional development means two things. Firstly, it means developing our skills as teachers; secondly, it means those things which we do above and beyond the call of immediate duty (like teaching) to extend our professional and academic wisdom. To deal with the second meaning first, whether we call this consulting, practice, research, or the publication or delivery of scholarly works really doesn't matter. They are all ways of developing ourselves. What matters is that we do expand our professional and academic capabilities. My argument is that to teach is not enough, and unless we make a deliberate and self-conscious effort to extend ourselves, we run the risk of evolving by default into a tired band of 'lifers' (the slightly perjorative word that I have borrowed to mean tenured faculty).

The position is this: whilst the school is entering adolescence (13th year), the collective faculty is fast approaching a rotund and tenured middle age. The average age of tenured faculty is presently 46.5. In ten years, i.e. in 1990, the situation could be that fifteen of the existing faculty still remain, with an average age of 54.4. Whilst the probability is that the future situation may develop differently, there is also a possibility that it will not be so different. Job opportunity and mobility have decreased in the last five years and may well decrease further, which means that we may be together for a long time and

the faculty council around the turn of the century will have many grey hairs and/or bald pates. In my experience, elderly faculty fall into two general categories. Those who have become the wise men, the elders, the pundits and, occasionally, institutions in themselves; and those who have degenerated into geriatric - I use the word loosely - incompetents who are an embarrassment to the institution and struggle to maintain some distant status quo which existed only in their imaginations.

I exaggerate, if only moderately, to make the points.

To return to the question of professional development, I am all too familiar with the various defensive arguments which allegedly mitigate the reasons for a minimum of activities other than teaching; or arguments which define professional development in the rather narrow sense of practice or near practice. Argument one is that we in the school are so overloaded with teaching and administration that there is no time for anything else, and that the summers are needed for contemplative navel watching to recover. Superficially, this argument seems well founded and plausible. (I have been known to use it myself). We do have heavy teaching loads and teaching can be exhausting. Upon reflection, though, the argument may well turn out to be specious and, if pursued to a conclusion, defeats the purpose for which we are here. If indeed there is little time left over to pursue regenerative activities, then we have a moral responsibility to take time out every two or three years to recharge; or, quite

simply, we become tired and ineffectual. However, I believe that the real problem is not that we are overloaded and overworked, but that the line of least resistance is to give that impression. By this I mean that we can spend sixty or seventy hours a week here dispensing (declining) wisdom, but that this may be, in fact, the line of least resistance and merely overindulgence in what (I hope) we enjoy doing best. It becomes a question of priorities - we either spend longer and longer saying less and less; or we acknowledge the problem, use our teaching time more efficiently, and pursue other things.

The other defensive argument relates to what is generally held to be an acceptable pastime in the university - scholarly research. This has been perjoratively defined by some of us as writing and delivering papers on non-problems in obscure (but referred) journals for academic survival, and is for those who are less fortunate than ourselves - i.e. non-professionals. Whilst I would not for one moment suggest that we are all scholars, I do believe that to eliminate scholarship as a possibility is to miss the point. I go further and suggest that the alleged contempt is actually based on reluctance or fear. Fear that, by stating publicly to our peers (rather than our proteges) what we are thinking and doing, we might fail, and discover that we are inadequate. It is perfectly natural for professionals who have not been brought up in the university system to feel this fear, but we should acknowledge it and not use derision as a weapon of defense. I believe that entering into a dialogue with our contemporaries is an essential component of professional development; that it is an important way in which we can expand our knowledge and wisdom and that, if we fail to do it, we atrophy ('waste away through imperfect nourishment' - Concise Oxford). If we can overcome our reluctance and think positively about traditional academic pursuits, then I believe we shall improve ourselves and the quality of our teaching. After all, what it really means is that we have to

read, think and, by exposing our thoughts, put them in order.

There is one further issue on this aspect of professional development which should be discussed briefly - the issue of remuneration. The probability that we will be paid - either in fees or grants beyond our normal salaries for these types of endeavour is in direct relation to our established competence and reputation. I have heard it said that research or whatever cannot be done because the funding is not available. Conversely it can be argued that the funding is not available because the credibility of the person seeking money has not been established; a circular argument which leads nowhere but down. Two points emerge from this. The first is that it will be necessary to do considerable work for no extra money to establish a reputation in the first place. The second point is that a good deal of academic work must be done without extra funding purely for intellectual satisfaction (and, occasionally, a free trip and/or a little glory).

The other aspect of professional development is that of teaching - a professional occupation in its own right, which we engage in with no training at all and with no experience other than having been taught ourselves (by people who had no training at all etc.....self-perpetuating incompetence?). We learn on the job, relying on our own experience as students and the examples of our peers. This is a fact of life here (although not in Australia and New Zealand, for example, where they have teaching clinics. At the University of Wellington, apparently, the clinic is run by marriage counsellors; an interesting twist..).

There are three principal components of teaching. Firstly, the knowledge and wisdom which I have discussed already. Secondly, there is translating this knowledge and wisdom into pedagogy. Thirdly, there are the issues of presenting the pedagogy in understandable terms, delivery and empathy with students. In

short: content, form and method. I believe all three aspects are important, but I intend to dwell principally on the second - pedagogy. (this literally means the science of teaching). As I have said, we learn on the job and from our peers. We develop structures, programmes, projects and delivery packages by a process of collective, and often conventional, wisdom. These evolve, or change, partly in response to perceived student needs; partly in response to new insights or experiences and partly for the sake of change itself. The collective wisdom is only as good as the experience of the individuals who make up the group. Put more bluntly, if the group remains more or less constant, as it does with a mostly tenured faculty, and if the individuals teach only within that group, then the probability of pedagogical stultification increases accordingly. Such resurgence of inspiration as might take place will come mostly from those few outsiders that we can bring in. This certainly helps, but is not enough - mainly because of limited exposure to other faculty. I believe that we can only expand our teaching experience and therefore pedagogical expertise - by teaching with other people at other places. This can be done in several ways, ranging from the short-term exposure of being visiting critics at other schools, to the medium term of several weeks giving an intensive lecture course or project, to the longer term of teaching for a term or a year on exchange or a visiting professorship. (The longest term of all is not to settle down until one has taught in several schools, serving an apprenticeship as it were; after which the other, shorter terms still apply.) All these are possible, but become probable only if the individuals concerned have established some credibility. It is seldom, especially in these hard times, that schools want another hired hand (if they do, they employ sessionals) and the only reason that another school would go to the trouble and expense of bringing in a visitor is for the same reason as we do it ourselves; to gain real expertise. Once again the circular argument emerges; if you haven't demonstrated to the outside

world that you have expertise then it is unlikely that you will be invited, and if you are not invited then it is unlikely that your pedagogical experience will grow. In the first instance, then, it could mean short-term participation in crits by offering your services for nothing.

This leads to the whole question of initiatives. Who is responsible? There has been a rather wistful assumption, or hope, that the institution - our institution - through the medium of the director or the graduate office will somehow magically provide opportunities for these things to happen. My position on this is quite clear. The institution, however it is embodied, is not entrepreneurial and participates only insofar as it expounds its own needs (as I am doing now), suggests possibilities, and once individuals have taken their own initiatives, gives encouragement through advice and support.

There is one final point that I want to make. Schools of architecture gain reputations in two ways; by the quality of the students that they deliver and by the extent to which faculty members are known outside the university for their expertise. It is essential that we build up our reputation as a first class school so that we attract (in competition with, for example, Toronto) the best students and also attract, for those few opportunities we have for visitors, the best visiting faculty. Carleton where? is not a joke. furthermore, I do not believe that school reputations should be built on a few individuals, but on the basis of collective wisdom as exemplified by each member being a knowledgeable and dedicated professional.

What I have tried to do in this paper is to outline the problem of the school as an established and possibly rather static body and emphasize the need for professional development. If we remain static and we do not exert ourselves beyond the immediate teaching demands, then we will be a very dull school indeed at the end of this decade. □