My friends and acquaintances know all too well that I can't be kept quiet. Indeed, a former boss, reacting to my fast, frequent, and voluminous communications, called me the fastest ever draw with memos. And so it is again. Stepping down as editor of this journal does not mean silence. I am delighted that Barbara Holland is giving me an opportunity to continue to speak up, and I plan to do so on a regular basis, pursuing my interests and riding my hobbyhorses across a range of topics—all, I hope, germane to metropolitan universities. Today's column is a report rather than a reflection, because I have recently returned from attending two interesting conferences in Great Britain.

The former polytechnics there have many similarities with American metropolitan universities. Created in 1969, they are, like most of the latter, fairly young institutions, located in metropolitan areas and responsive to regional needs for instruction, knowledge dissemination, and technical assistance. As Anthony Dickson described them in his journal (Dickson, 1994), the polytechnics "were created to encourage wider access to higher education, and relate directly to regional industry, business, and the professions" (p. 79).

As further described in these pages by R. J. T. Wilson (1995) and Leslie Wagner (1995), the polytechnics bore the brunt of the explosive growth of British higher education between the early 1980s and 1994, a decade during which overall enrollment of full-time students in British higher education doubled without a corresponding increase in funding, resulting, especially for the polytechnics, in a significant decrease in support per student.

In 1992, the binary system of universities and polytechnics was fused into a single system including both the "old" universities and the polytechnics, which assumed the designation of universities. All these institutions are now funded through a single government agency that in principle allocates an equal sum per full-time-equivalent student to all institutions. However, a substantial amount in separate

funds for research isawarded on the basis of a research assessment exercise. This ranks university departments and institutions as a whole on a scale of one to five and can result in research funding ranging from less than one percent of an institution's total budget to thirty percent or more. As Dickson points out, the availability of this research funding "is drawing many of the former polytechnics in the direction of rethinking their mission to give greater prominence to research" (p. 3). However, most of the former polytechnics continue to be strongly committed to their regional missions, and view the possible availability of research funds as a way of enhancing the quality of their instruction and strengthening the professional services they can provide to their surrounding constituencies.

The drastic changes in British higher education during the past decade appear to have taken place on a somewhat piecemeal basis, without much of an overall plan or policy regarding optimal enrollment, mission, and mode of financing. A particularly urgent issue needing attention is that of whether and to what extent students should pay for their advanced education, and what kind of grant and loan policy should be instituted. A commission was appointed two years ago in a bipartisan manner and was due to publish in July a report (named the Dearing Report after the chairman of the commission) intended to provide a systematic and coherent policy framework for higher education. Its recommendations, especially those regarding student fees and tuition, will have substantial impact on the future of the British system and may be decisive with regard to the issues raised by Wagner about elite and mass education. Indeed, just a few days ago the British government announced the imposition of tuition fees.

In early July, a small group of vice-chancellors (i.e., heads) of English former polytechnics and of one "old" university, together with others from their institutions, met with a number of their counterparts representing the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities for a day of discussion at Leeds Metropolitan University. We came together to provide each other with background about the current state of higher education in our respective countries, to explore issues of shared interest and concern, and to identify possible areas for ongoing dialogue and collaboration. We all learned a great deal from both our similarities and our differences, and identified a number of areas in which a continuing exchange of ideas will be of mutual benefit.

Our English colleagues described a number of extensive and imaginative programs of outreach and professional service aimed primarily at human resource development and technical assistance to business and industry. Our host institution, Leeds Metropolitan University, places special emphasis on relationships with small and medium-sized enterprises that are seen as being of particular importance to the economic development of the region. The English institutions appear to have been very successful in developing bridging mechanisms linking universities with external constituencies. Challenges and barriers are much the same as those faced by U. S. metropolitan universities: the academic system of values and rewards; the tensions between centralized and decentralized internal organization of outreach activities; issues about who sets the agenda and who defines the problems; and questions of cooperation versus competition with other regional universities and sources of technical assistance. One interesting aspect of the English situation is the emergence of regional infrastructures for economic development, involving both government agencies and trade and industrial associations, and in certain areas fostering the creation of regional research centers.

At a more conceptual level, institutions on both sides of the ocean face similar questions as to the nature of a metropolitan university: how to balance global perspectives with an emphasis on local issues, how to become increasingly flexible with regard to time and location of instruction without losing a sense of place and community, and how to maintain long-term perspectives while responding to current societal problems.

Similar, as well, are many aspects of our student bodies, and the issues they raise. The English metropolitan universities, like ours, have a high proportion of older (or, as they say, "mature") students, most of them part-time and many pursuing higher education in an intermittent fashion. As is the case here, many of the traditional admissions standards and measures of student progress, student retention, and student achievement are not applicable. There is need as well for ways of assessing quality of education that focuses on value added and on acquired competence. Our English counterparts suffer from newspapers that publish institutional rankings based on traditional measures as much as we do from similar exercises in national magazines. In these areas as well as with to per-student costs, metropolitan universities in both countries (and elsewhere) could benefit greatly from the accumulation of data-

bases and analyses that are pertinent to our particular circumstances, and they expressed much interest in the coalition's plans for a common effort in that direction.

One area marked by some basic differences in spite of a good deal of similarity is that of distance education and the use of information technology. The activities of the English metropolitan universities in that area illustrate the point made so cogently in the latest issue of *Change* by Sir John Daniel, vice chancellor of the Open University: the difference between an approach that "targets individual learning" with one that "focuses on group teaching" (Daniel, 1997). Not only the Open University but also other British institutions tend to take the former, using information technology to make it possible for an individual to learn at his or her own times, places, and rates of progress. The emphasis is on *asynchronous* learning with no need to coordinate the schedule of either teacher or learner. Our emphasis is more on making the classroom movable: providing instruction that is *synchronous*, with faculty and students meeting at the same time, but at a distance. The difference is more than an operational one; in essence, it constitutes, as Sir John suggests, the difference between an emphasis on teaching and one on learning. Of course there are significant exceptions to this generalization in both countries, but the discussion in Leeds did indicate real differences in approach. One consequence is that much attention is paid in the U. S. to the preparation of instructional materials utilizing new technologies, whereas our colleagues in England appear to pay more attention to the support services needed by someone who learns at a distance. Clearly the area of technology is one in which we can learn a great deal from one another.

Some differences in approach also exist in the area of international programs. Our English colleagues on the whole find short-term internships and other foreign visits of limited duration to be more feasible for their students than entire semesters or academic years abroad, both because their students often find it difficult to be away for long periods and also because of frequent hassles regarding prerequisites and transfer credits. They also described a number of programs that provide short but intensive international study trips for businessmen as part of a general emphasis on helping small and medium-sized enterprises enter the export market.

The Leeds meeting has established some valuable personal ties that both sides want to foster and expand. Several of the English participants expressed an

interest in attending the forthcoming national meeting of the coalition in San Antonio in February (see the announcement elsewhere in this issue), at which there will be a session discussing the international perspective on metropolitan universities, as well as, it is hoped, contributions from UK and other international participants to other topical sessions.

To this account of our Leeds meeting I want to add a word about another international encounter in which I participated a short time before the Leeds meeting. Under joint sponsorship of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the British Open University, academics from many countries around the world gathered in London in late June for a three-day discussion of the topic, "What Kind of University?" Among all the topics discussed, I was most struck by the repeated emphasis on an issue that has long been recognized by many individuals in metropolitan universities as being of great importance, and that now appears to be emerging as a central issue throughout higher education. It is the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to give practical experience and workplace learning a central rather than a peripheral role. The issue is complex and has many ramifications, many of which were discussed at the London meeting: the limitations of a disciplinary organization, the definition of learning outcomes, and the tensions between competence and knowledge and between societal usefulness and academic criteria. It emphasizes knowledge created in the process of application and what Don Schon calls reflection-in-action. It raises fundamental epistemological, as well as pedagogical, questions to which, on the whole, we have not paid enough attention in our institutions. I was encouraged by the emphasis the topic received at the conference.

Suggested Readings

Daniel, Sir John, "Why Universities Need Technology Strategies," *Change* (July/August, 1997): 15.

Dickson, Anthony, "Brirish Universities: Regionalism and the Metropolitan Mission," *Metropolitan Universities* 5 (Winter 1994): 79-87.

Wagner, Leslie, "Change and Continuity in Higher Education," *Metropolitan Universities* 6 (Fall 1995): 79-90.

Wilson, R. J. T., "The English Higher Education System: Market Driven or Politically Controlled?" *Metropolitan Universities* 6 (Summer 1995): 93-102.

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