

I Would Simply Say, Keep Going

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It would be impossible for me to reflect on my tenure as President of the California Council on Teacher Education (Spring, 2004 to Spring, 2006) without commenting upon the circumstances under which I assumed this position. I was actually scheduled to take on this role in the spring of 2002. However, at that time my 21-year-old daughter, Sara, was fighting, and apparently losing, her battle with bone cancer. I knew that, given the likely outcome, I would not be in any condition to fulfill this important responsibility with the conscientiousness and integrity the organization deserved. Thus, I was prepared to offer the Board my resignation. However, the members came together and crafted an alternative proposal: Andrea Maxie, the newly selected President-Elect, would take over immediately as President, and I would continue as President-Elect, attending Board meetings if and when I was able. Then, at the end of two years, I would become President and Andrea would stay on the Board as Past President for four years, resulting in each of us giving the Board the expected six years of participation, though in slightly different forms. I accepted the offer, and for a whole host of reasons, I am and will be forever grateful to Andrea Maxie, Alan Jones, and to the Council for their magnanimity and wisdom.

I tell this story not only because it is so central to the nature of

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my personal experience as President of CCTE, but also because it is representative of the nature of this organization and the field of work that it embodies and champions. It is living proof that the scholarly, intellectually rigorous, and practically demanding work of teaching and teacher education can and should go hand-in-hand with caring for and about the individuals and groups with whom we work as teachers and/or colleagues. This has always been my experience of the organization and the special folks who populate it, but it was especially apparent to me during those years, which is all the more remarkable because the broader context was then deeply enmeshed in an almost opposite orientation. *No Child Left Behind* was in its heyday. The scramble was on, especially in places like Oakland, for scripted curriculum that completely ignored particular children and their needs, the narrowing of subject matter to reading and mathematics only, and escalated test focus and preparation. Despite that pressure, CCTE continued to give priority to issues of equity and social justice, which necessarily includes attending to the whole child/person and their intellectual, social, and emotional well-being and development. The titles of the four conferences that were held during my tenure are representative:

Fall, 2004: "Legislative Actions: Intended and Unintended Consequences for All"

Spring, 2005: "Artful Teaching in Testy Times"

Fall, 2005: "Teacher Education Alliances for Children: Getting Beyond 'Us' and 'Them'"

Spring, 2006: "Promoting Socially-Just Educational Policies & Legislation"

In addition to the core values and intentions embodied in these choices, the session foci were also indicative of the practical initiatives with which we were engaged. We were deeply involved in the finalization and enactment of the brilliant Strategic Plan that had been crafted during Andrea Maxie's tenure. We had selected for particular attention in these early days the following areas: Alliance Building; Membership Development; Policy Response and Initiation; and Resource Development, which resulted in a number of significant accomplishments.

Hoping to shift our policy work from the reactive to the proactive, we took advantage of the considerable expertise of our Legislative and Educational Policy Analyst, Elizabeth Jimenez, to do just that. Elizabeth and I, along with several members of the Board and other interested CCTE delegates spent a day in Sacramento meeting and talking with various state legislators and legislative staff about our needs and wishes

with regard to educational legislation. Though we did meet with some individuals who were not only knowledgeable, but also open to ongoing input from educational experts like us, we met others who emboldened our commitment to the need for direct involvement in the process both as an organization and as individual voters in our respective districts. I personally met with too many individuals who could directly influence educational legislation but who had limited, and often, inaccurate knowledge of the field and little respect for our expertise to allow me to assume that complacency in the policy domain for an organization like ours could ever be an option.

In a similar vein, Elizabeth and I attended a meeting of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing as representatives of CCTE where the discussion of using the examination system of the American Board Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) as an alternative credentialing route was under discussion. We shared the views of the organization as represented in a resolution passed by the CCTE delegates, which were in opposition to this proposal. Our input, along with that of many other groups, resulted in the decision by the Commission to not take any action on ABCTE and not to place it on any future agendas. It was a truly invigorating experience for me—to be a party to and witness of the power of informed, justified, organized, and collective resistance.

Due in large part to the very passionate and capable leadership of Ron Solorzano and Susan Westbrook, the chairs of our CCTE Policy Committee, this was not the only important resolution we passed during these years. These were some of the others: support for maintaining categorical funding for the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) and other teacher induction programs; support for the “Opportunity to Learn” bill which would hold the state accountable to provide students an equitable opportunity to learn, rather than just hold students accountable through high-stakes testing; a request for the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to give “thoughtful and serious consideration” to the proposal of the workgroup they had established and charged with the development of a proposal for a renewed accreditation protocol; and an endorsement of the Joint Organizational Statement on the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act as drafted by the Children’s Defense Fund and which argued, in essence, for shifting the law’s emphasis “from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.”

This last, along with the joint resistance to the ABCTE initiative, are exemplary of our simultaneous focus on the Strategic Plan’s area of Alliance Building. In these resolutions and testimonials we drew directly

upon a sound commitment to the notion of “strength in numbers.” If we were really to take a proactive stance in the policy domain of teacher education, we could not do it alone, especially because there was, and alas still is, a rather widespread and robust questioning of the “value added” by teacher education—a view which leads almost inevitably to the conclusion that if CCTE argues for the preservation and importance of teacher education on any level and in any form, the motivation is primarily, or even solely, self-interest. Thus, we pursued quite actively an effort to ally ourselves with other groups who shared our central commitment to the welfare and achievement of all children in schools and beyond.

A most memorable and significant accomplishment in this domain happened at the fall conference in 2005. The focus was very directly on the building of alliances between CCTE and other child interest groups, especially those with an existing or potential overlap with teaching and teacher education. And it wasn’t just a session for talking the talk; it was an opportunity for us to walk the walk. I still carry with me a most memorable image of our luncheon on the sunny lawn at the Shelter Pointe Hotel (now Kona Kai Resort) in San Diego, where at every table there were CCTE delegates (55 of our 66 institutional member organizations were present) engaged in lively conversations with representatives from many organizations, including the Alliance for Childhood, the Children’s Defense Fund, and the California School Boards Association, who did not normally attend our conferences. The talk was child-centered, passionate, and optimistic and resulted in some promises made for ongoing engagement, some of which were carried out by the organization and some by individual members ... and some are yet to be realized, though the potential—and the need—remains.

Other activities of CCTE during my presidency I would like to highlight, which were also energized by our Strategic Plan, have to do with Membership and Resource Development. One of our aims was to expand our membership, as well as more fully engage those already enrolled. As would be consistent with an organization of researchers, we decided we first needed to know what our current members liked and did not like about the organization; thus, we invited everyone to participate in an on-line, anonymous survey the results of which could be used to guide us in our future efforts to engage current members and attract new ones. Alas, I left office before analysis of these responses was complete, but I am confident the information was reviewed and incorporated wisely; at least the organization’s current healthy status is indicative.

A second aim was to develop additional resource possibilities, especially since teacher education institutions were then suffering from the

impact of the economic downturn and state funding cutbacks. One of the key roles I played, with the help of a husband who is an attorney specializing in tax and estate planning, was to encourage CTE to highlight and take advantage of its status as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization eligible to receive tax deductible donations. We tried various strategies such as silent auctions at our conference sessions and printing explicit solicitations in each edition of our *CCNews*. Though these only resulted in small additions to the coffers, at least the possibilities in that domain were highlighted and opened for pursuit.

Though not a named priority area in our Strategic Plan, a focus of this organization especially important to me has always been education, and by that I mean the education of the membership. We are clearly and overtly interested in the education of others—the teacher candidates with whom we work and their future students, as well as the policy makers and the public who elects them, but we are also involved in an effort to get smarter about the work of education ourselves. That, of course, is the central purpose of our semi-annual conferences—to share and interrogate new ideas from research and practice with the potential to transform our thinking and our work for the better. The important topics under investigation during these years were previously noted.

In addition to this regular self-education work, we also sponsored a California English Language Development Test (CELDT) workshop in the fall of 2004, a rather rare undertaking for the organization. Elizabeth Jimenez was the facilitator, since this is her area of expertise. The purpose was to bring members and others who work with teacher candidates and practicing educators up to date on the changes that had been made to CELDT and how to best convey those to our constituencies.

One final critical component of our mission to educate ourselves and others about teacher education that I would like to mention here is related to the two journals we generate—just the fact that we have two is extraordinary in and of itself. Of course, that accomplishment is not mine, and the President has limited influence over their functioning. Nonetheless, it is enormously gratifying to me that during my time in office Tom Nelson, then editor of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, made great strides in contributing to the development of that journal into a nationally, even internationally, well respected journal that embraced the need in our field for wide ranging types of articles. Too often in the world of educational research we pit genres against one another, most particularly quantitative vs. qualitative, when the truth is, to do this complicated work of supporting human beings in their efforts to pursue and realize their full potentials, we need it all—quantitative, qualitative, including self-study (a blatant plug for my personal research inter-

est), philosophical analyses and theories, narratives of practice, and so forth. They each, done well, provide us with valuable, though different perspectives and information. Tom and his colleagues did a particularly noteworthy job of discovering, including, and combining such variety in a rigorous and compelling manner to the benefit of us all.

It is this combining of multiple perspectives, multi-faceted aims, and attention to the whole that brings me back to where I began this piece, and to the essence of my experience of CCTE. CCTE is not a thing, a disembodied institution or bureaucratic structure. It is a group of people—good people trying very hard to do good work with integrity and care, or in the words I so often use with my students in referring to defensible curriculum—rigor and joy. It still amazes me how often people both outside and within the field automatically question a commitment to the former, when a commitment to the latter is embraced. I always ask myself in those moments, how anyone who has worked with, cared for, taught, loved a child could ever imagine that one without the other would be acceptable, let alone effective.

Thus, my most significant memories of CCTE both during my tenure as President and beyond will always be of individuals and individual moments—of valued colleagues and friends who were not only willing and able to challenge themselves and others to engage in rigorous research and theoretical exploration, but also to do the practical work. By practical work, I am referring both to the on-the-ground personal instruction and mentoring of preservice and inservice teachers, as well as to the really “dirty” work, in my view, of responding to, attending to, and where possible, influencing the structures and regulations that both enable and restrict our enterprise. Few of us actually like these tasks, but someone has to do them, and these are the people who do so. It is often time-consuming, unfulfilling, and little appreciated work, but again, it is necessary, at least for now. My hopes are still that there will one day be much less of this, and more time for the fundamental activities of teaching and learning, but at the very least we will always have to engage in policy work, because that is the route to regulatory reduction. That is why these musings included a somewhat dry listing of tasks completed; teacher educators must do these things, and should be applauded and respected for doing them so well, but they should also be supported in doing them less; it is not the best use of the considerable wisdom, talent, and compassion that our members possess.

In the end then, when I contemplate the future health and success of CCTE in relation to my experience of its past, I would simply say, *keep going*. Keep working toward your goals of greater educational equity and social justice for all children; keep asking yourselves and others the hard

questions in that regard; keep doing rigorous research both qualitative and quantitative that will contribute to improved understanding and teaching and keep sharing it with everyone else in a multiplicity of ways; keep holding yourselves accountable to the children and their families who are our most important stakeholders; keep filling out those forms and doing those assessments, while also pushing back on the need for so many, so often, and so disconnected from what really matters; keep trying to be more proactive than reactive; keep seeking out like-minded others who can join you in these efforts as contributors and/or allies; keep caring for one another, your students, and their students in deep and genuine ways; keep celebrating yourselves and your important work and achievements, even if no one else does so; and always, always, keep singing.