In Search of Excellence and Equity in Our Nation's Schools

Equity and Excellence in Education: A Comment

NATHAN GLAZER, *Harvard University*

If one is a politician, or a moralist, one can assert there is no conflict between equity and excellence—everyone can be excellent. And if everyone can be excellent, everyone can be treated alike, and there is no problem of equity. But that describes a utopia which is very far from ordinary experience. There, we regularly find conflicts between "excellence"—or encouraging and rewarding the highest achievement—and "equity," taken as equal treatment. I have in mind one such current conflict, that in New York City. There, one often finds skepticism expressed about the value or justice of New York City's specialized high schools: the Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant, Hunter, Brooklyn Tech, where examinations are required for entry, and where the percentage of Black and Hispanic students does not reflect their percentage in the New York City school system. The problem, of course, does not only arise in New York City: it arises in Boston where we have the famous Boston Latin School, in California's higher education system; and it arises at Harvard, one of the most selective institutions of higher education in the country, one most committed to the maintenance of excellence, and one in which conflicts with ethnic and racial representation inevitably arise.

It is interesting, by the way, that there are other high schools in New York which are selective on some basis other than academic achievement: the High School of Music and Art and the High School of Performing Arts, among others. These also strive for excellence in their fields, but the issue of equity is not as sharply raised. One reason certainly is that we do not find the same degree of underrepresentation of minorities as we do in the academically selective high schools. Might another be that we think the rewards of excellence in such fields as music, art, drama, are not as important, do not affect the society as much, as the rewards of academic achievement? Certainly, the earnings of those at the top in the various fields of artistic performance surpass the earnings of those at the top in academic achievement. But we see the danger of caste and elitism more markedly when the issue is academic achievement than when it is achievement in other areas.

Let me clear some red herrings out of the way before I consider whether there is any defense for the situation that prevails in the high schools of New York. I do not think there is any assertion that there is some hidden bias in grading the

Harvard Educational Review Vol. 57 No. 2 May 1987

0017-8055/87/0500-0196$01.25/0

tests one takes for entry into these schools. There is more argument that there is some bias in the tests themselves; yet I imagine that tests for Stuyvesant and the Bronx High School of Science are fairly straightforward, dealing with mathematics and science. I do not think the issue here is really testing; it is with the way the tests come out, where equity, defined in this case as proportional representation of all groups, seems in contradiction with the search for and the reward of excellence.

We have, then, by one definition, inequity in these arrangements; and it may well be asked, what is gained by the restriction of these schools to those who show high achievement on academic tests? What would be lost if we simply took in everybody who wanted to enter, as in the early days of Open Enrollment for the New York City colleges, expanding the high schools, as the colleges were expanded, to take in all? Or, if that were not possible, selecting by lottery from among those who wanted to enter these schools?

These are good, honest questions, and they cannot be dismissed out of hand. Does "excellence" need restrictions? Does it require narrow gates, small numbers? What are the arguments for selection by achievement? I have often thought about this. I have had to, as I teach the sociology of education at Harvard, where we always consider who—in terms of class, race, parental background—does "best" in school, gains entry into the selective and restrictive institutions, and who doesn't. Ironically, in this most selective of institutions, we find some of the most passionate criticism of such a system. Are there good arguments for selectivity, for—to use a word that is considered highly pejorative—"elitism"?

I think that there are, but it is harder to articulate them than one might think. It is so much easier to make an argument for equality than inequality. As the English philosophers Richard Wollheim and Isaiah Berlin write (as quoted in the article on "equality" by Irving Kristol in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Systems*): "If I have a cake, and there are 10 persons among whom I wish to divide it, then if I give exactly one-tenth to each, this will not, at any rate, automatically, call for justification; whereas if I depart from this principle of equal division I am expected to produce a special reason. It is some sense of this, however latent, that makes equality an ideal which has never seemed intrinsically eccentric."

In other words, it is easy to make arguments for equality; indeed, none need be made. It is much harder to defend arrangements from which a measure of inequality results. But I believe there are good arguments in favor of preference for achievement.

First, the development of excellence requires the company and the competition of the excellent, in whatever area we are striving for excellence. Good chess players want to play with other good chess players—they become bored otherwise. Not so good chess players want to play with players somewhat better, but not so much better that they are at a loss as to what is going on and why they are in losing positions after a half-dozen moves. This argument depends on our assumption that it is of value to advance excellence in every area: we want good physicists, good musicians, good historians, and so on, good individuals in every field of worthwhile endeavor. Two Nobel Prize winners at Harvard attended the Bronx High School of Science at the same time. Suppose that high school had not existed; they might have found good teachers and perhaps some good fellow students in other high schools, but they might not. There is a reason why, inequitably, not everyone is allowed to try out for the Olympics, even though it must crush some to be refused. This is an argument as to the effects of concentration of talent on the development of talent. It can be argued against if we think of the writers and artists

suffering alone and without recognition in some small town. But they leave for Chicago, New York, Paris. They want to be among their peers—and they believe, and I would not argue with them, that the company of peers is necessary for one's education and best achievement. And one cannot find peers if we deliberately set ourselves the task of scattering those who are talented, whenever they concentrate.

Second, assuming effort is necessary to high achievement, how do we encourage it? In some recent studies of parents and children and schools in Japan, Taiwan, and the United States—studies undertaken not because we have something to teach them, but because we think, in view of how well their children do in school, that *they* have something to teach us—a very interesting difference was discovered between parents' views in Asia and in the United States. In the two Asian countries, parents and children believe that achievement is the result of effort. They seem to have little belief in innate differences; if you work hard, you will do well. If you don't work hard, you won't do well. We seem to believe, however, that it all depends on how natively smart you are. So there is little pressure from parents on children, or from children themselves, to work hard. It all depends on something that is beyond effort.

I find this interesting. But if effort is important—and I think it is—how do we encourage it? Not, I am sure, by saying, "Regardless of effort, it doesn't matter—all rewards are equally available to all, or may be equally available to all by lottery." Why work hard to get into the Bronx High School of Science if you get in by drawing a lucky number—or if anyone can get in? If effort is important to achievement, it must have an incentive. Can one think of a better incentive than being able to enter a school where all have worked, all have achieved, and one finds oneself among peers who do not consider one a sissy or a nerd because of one's effort or achievement?

We want to give achievement the atmosphere in which it can most effectively strive toward excellence; we also want to provide an incentive to achievement by promising that high achievement will be rewarded by an environment in which achievement will be recognized. But, we also want to provide teachers for achievement. And just as students are not distributed at random through the high schools of New York, neither are teachers: some effort must be made at the Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant, and so on, to have teachers who can teach and motivate the very good students in their classrooms. At the minimum, they must be teachers who know the science and math involved, rather than being limited to the text in use. How these teachers are selected I do not know, but they are selected. If there is something they have that other teachers do not (I don't mean all other teachers, I mean that on the average they have more of whatever makes them good teachers of good students), they are in scarce supply. If they are scarce, is their effectiveness maximized by scattering them, or by their concentration? I think there is a good argument to be made that their effectiveness is maximized by concentration. They, like their students, have peers to talk to and work with and to motivate them.

And so we have arguments from the effects of concentration, from the role of incentives, and from the inevitable effects of scarcity. There are others. Perhaps the issue was put best by William James in 1903 when he wrote, in appreciation of Harvard: "Thinkers in their youth are almost always very lonely creatures. . . . The university most worthy of rational admiration is that one in which your lonely thinker can feel himself least lonely, most positively furthered, and most richly fed."

It might be well, however, to consider the counterarguments. There is, of course, a quite different explanation for these arrangements, which is that they exist to maintain privilege. There is no question but that it is a privilege to attend a selective institution; it serves as a kind of labeling, and one is therefore better treated in the market for jobs, or marriage, than if one does not bear the label. Certainly, this is one reason why we have to examine closely the bases on which individuals are selected and the arguments for such a selection. It is true that in certain kinds of selective institutions a kind of inherited privilege exists to some extent, and thus an ideal that we all accept—that neither the sins nor the virtues of the fathers and mothers should be visited upon the children—is transgressed. But perhaps the place where it is transgressed least is in the examination schools of New York, which have offered great opportunities to the poor and minorities in the past, and offer these opportunities today. I would argue that nowhere do we get so much for so little—little in the way of expense and trouble—than where we bring together the gifted and competent. They teach each other. They create an institution which provides them with an advantageous and costless (to society) label. They take probably less than their share of educational costs from the public treasury, since they require less in the way of remediation, discipline, and the like.

These schools give benefit to some, that is true—and that is the basis of the discomfort over selectivity. But society also has its demands. Our society needs the highest intelligence and competence to deal with very difficult problems, to maintain competitiveness in an age when many countries do better than we do in developing their human resources. It also needs racial and group justice. But we have to consider whether that justice requires the sacrifice of what we gain from the kind of selectivity we see in the New York City examination schools and similar institutions.

Remarks on Equity and Excellence in Education

HAROLD HOWE II, *Harvard University*

I take my text for this short sermon from Dr. James Bryant Conant, a distinguished former president of Harvard University. Dr. Conant had at least four careers—as university president, statesman, scientist, and education reformer. His best-known book in the last of these careers is *The American High School*, but I want to use for a text a statement from a volume he published twenty-five years ago, entitled, *Slums and Suburbs*.[1] Conant wrote that "the contrast in money available to the schools in a wealthy suburb and to schools in a large city jolts one's notions of the meaning of equality of opportunity." As a detached observer and a scientist accustomed to assessing evidence, he was appalled by the inequity apparent in the public provision of education for children and youth. The responsibility of states and localities for providing schools was being implemented by giving excellent schools to youngsters from well-to-do families and second-rate schools to those from poor families.

[1] Conant, *The American High School Today* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959) and *Slums and Suburbs* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

Since Dr. Conant made this observation, some important changes have affected the educational scene he described. A small-scale but vigorous effort has emerged to provide children in the slums with improved learning opportunities by increasing the resources available for their education. The main author of this effort was Francis Keppel. As U.S. Commissioner of Education in the early 1960s, he launched The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Its basic principle was the proposition that if schools are to overcome the handicaps of poverty for their students, they need additional resources to provide special help for the children enmeshed in those handicaps.

Social scientists at Harvard and elsewhere have conducted studies that prove this principle won't work. In the meantime, educational practitioners in slum schools have ignored the social scientists and increasingly focused upon helping children from poor families to be more successful in school. They have been assisted by Commissioner Keppel's legislation as well as by the Headstart program and the serious commitment of urban educators like Alonzo Crim. The results are that more Black, Hispanic, and poor children are graduating from high school and going to college than in the early 1960s and that reading proficiency among minority students has gained appreciably in comparison to that of Whites since the early 1970s. One can say with certainty that some progress has been made on the problem Conant identified, which was essentially the equity problem.

Another development since Conant looked at American education has to do with the concept of *excellence*, which has been simplistically viewed by the American media and, therefore, by the public, as a matter of test scores. If scores go up, the schools are fine, if they go down, the schools are losing quality. During the 1970s, Americans became increasingly aware that the average scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) of the College Board were declining, and they assumed that the schools were doing a less effective job of teaching. This assumption persists, although it is partly erroneous. More than half the decline in the SAT scores came from a most hopeful source, the participation of many more minorities and women in taking a test that opened for them the doors to college. The young women were low scorers on the mathematics portion of the test and minorities, on both the verbal and mathematical. Their growing participation naturally lowered the average score and was at the same time an important piece of educational progress. The same phenomenon, in reverse, is observable today in some schools with improving test scores and increasing numbers of dropouts. If you can persuade the students with learning problems to leave school, the school's average score will go up.

It is certainly true that our high schools suffered significant difficulties in attempting to assimilate in a short period of time thousands of new and unfamiliar young people. The schools are still learning to be effective with students whose experiences in home and community are totally different from the norms of middle-class America. Initial efforts to help these youngsters were often erroneously based upon limited expectations for their success, denying them from the start an advantage other children could assume. No doubt their presence in high schools eroded learning opportunities for some other children, creating the tension between equity and excellence. But when all the qualifications have been laid out, there remains important progress for American society and American schools in terms of both equity and excellence. Each successive generation of youth continues to be more literate than the generation before it. At the same time, significant problems remain.

The first of these is that the changes wrought in schools since the early 1960s constitute an unfinished agenda that has lost its momentum. If Conant were to look today at our slums and suburbs, I think he would say exactly what he said twenty-five years ago, with the qualification that some useful initiatives have been launched and are beginning to have some effects. But his inspection of today's schools would uncover major contrasts in class size between schools in suburbs and schools in cities, where individual attention is still difficult or impossible to give, even for conscientious teachers. He would find the same disparity in expenditures in most city/suburb comparisons that he found years ago.

Looking at this evidence, Conant might wonder why promising programs like Headstart and Title I were being limited in scope, the former serving less than one-fourth of eligible students and the latter stretched thinner every year as the number of children from poor families grows. He might even observe that we had dropped the drive for equity and started a new push for excellence, defined mostly in terms of average test scores, a speculation that leads naturally to the reasons for and the nature of the school reform movement we are experiencing today.

Undergirding today's school reform movement is a significant shift in the nature of job opportunities in this country, as a larger and larger proportion of workers with good jobs are employed in the service sector of the economy. The Secretary of Labor announced recently that 90 percent of new jobs in the United States required skills in literacy and numeracy that many of our present population do not have. Apparently the change in the nature of new and well-rewarded jobs has taken place more rapidly than has the success of the schools in educating a larger portion of the population. Schools have improved, but they have not improved enough to meet the demands of the job market.

When we add to this situation the further fact that a growing proportion of our public school population will be made up of the children of poor, Black, Hispanic, and immigrant families, with whom schools are still less successful than with other groups, an interesting juxtaposition is created in the equity/excellence relationship. Suddenly, it appears that our future supply of well-trained workers, upon whom our economic well-being depends, is in turn dependent on our being much more successful than we have been with promoting not just equity, but also excellence, among the children of poor and minority families.

This economic argument is the engine that is driving the present school reform movement. It demands that schools produce excellence among the children of the poor for the sake of the nation's economic health. It wastes little time with concepts of equity or of our nation's need for independent-minded citizens to make a democracy and a complex society workable. Lip service is paid to these latter concepts, but after appropriate rhetoric has been supplied, school reform is back to the serious business of rescuing our corporations from Japanese competition. Very little has been said, in defining school reform's goals, about developing among youth an interest in international understanding.

I am not at all sure where this trend of doing the right things for the wrong reasons will take us. It could lead to substantial gains, as the inequities that characterize our schools are to some degree remedied by the initiatives of governors and business leaders who are increasingly committed to making our disadvantaged children more successful. If, however, the main reason for helping the poverty-stricken to succeed in school is a scarcity which has resulted from the small size of age cohorts for a few years, what will happen when the second generation of baby boomers appears, as it surely will? Will minorities and the poor again be-

come expendable? The answer would appear to lie in the nature of the strategies devised to bring improved learning to schools.

So far, the wide-ranging school reform movement has been dominated by efforts to legislate excellence by requiring more courses, more tests, more homework, longer school hours, and the like. Somehow, much of this activity seems akin to trying to reduce the growth in the divorce rate by telling uncongenial couples they must spend more time together. It will produce more divorces, and I think that legislated school reform may produce more dropouts. I doubt that educational excellence can truly be legislated. Instead, I believe that excellence has to be patiently *grown* in schools that are given the resources to nurture that process. Some of the most significant building blocks of excellence in schools certainly cannot be legislated, and they may be destroyed or diminished by the kind of legislation we have already seen. These building blocks are teacher morale, student motivation, parental interest, and a humane school climate supportive of learning. Such intangible but significant aspects of any educational institution are absolutely essential to both equity and excellence.

On Excellence and Goodness

SARA LAWRENCE LIGHTFOOT, *Harvard University*

Although the definitions of "educational excellence" have come under serious scrutiny and criticism in recent times, the term still conjures up classical images. We see pictures of a time long ago when teachers were well trained, students were motivated, and parents cared. We think of the purposeful pursuit of knowledge: rigorous, focused, and deep. We think, of course, about basic skill development, but we also hope that students will learn the art of inquiry, learn to suspend judgment, and learn to tolerate creative ambiguities. We think of the symbols and images of history that shape our present definitions of knowledge, morality, and truth. Precedent, anteccdents, the weight of traditional standards, create a template against which we measure our present pursuits. The images attached to "excellence" are primarily cerebral, dispassionate, and quiet. We rarely envision the kind of education that might be guided by impulse, provocation, or ambivalence.

Despite these persistent idealized images, the *practice* of education—in its finest form—is far more complicated. In contrast to the clear, comfortable portrayals, the practice appears complicated by contradictions that I believe are inherent in the educational process. Once you move from the image to the reality, the tensions come alive and create an educational form that is rich with conflict and discomfort. My comments will focus on three prevailing tensions that are expressed in the practice of what I will call a "disciplined education."

The first tension is one that I always envision as the contrast between quiet and noise. The classical image is one of an institution with clear boundaries drawn between the academy and "the real world." There is minimal intercourse between the quiet, peaceful environment that supports disciplined scholarly pursuits and the messy, noisy world that might distract students from the academic agenda. In this idealized image, education demands a safe asylum from the real world. But, seen from another perspective, education provides the perfect opportunity for engaging the tough questions of the wider world. The space and time for contemplation per-

mitted within the academy also offer the chance for reflection and criticism—the germs of inspiration for social action. The quiet may allow you to hear the noise more clearly and the reverberations may be felt more intensely. The cries of the poor, the threat of nuclear war, the struggles for justice and equality, the pain of the oppressed and powerless may be felt more deeply because they can pierce through the quiet without resistance.

But it is not only the chance for the noise to reverberate within the academy that creates the tension to which I have referred. The developmental themes of students also may invite the noise. Secondary schools and colleges are inevitably the places where the rumblings and roars are heard. Late adolescence, early adulthood is a time of risk-taking, criticism, and commitment. The student sees vividly the moral contradictions, the political struggles, the emotional hypocrisies in our society that we older folk may no longer notice or to which we have grown too callous to respond. The young adult has the antennae to pick up society's troubles, the piercing gaze to critically respond, and the energy to pursue newly formed commitments. The practice of a disciplined education, then, embraces the contradiction. It is the time for quiet retreat and focused scholarship and it is also the time for criticism, commitment, and action.

In my own research on good high schools, I discovered that their success was related to where and how they drew the lines between inside and out. These good schools erected what I called "permeable boundaries" which expressed their connection to and rootedness in the wider community, as well as their determination to be separate from it; a commitment to developing a school culture with clearly articulated standards and values that would not be wholly vulnerable to society's whim. The boundaries of the academy, then, are not rigidly drawn. The ecology requires a complicated series of movements that produce tensions within the hearts and minds of students and their teachers, producing questions about what is education and what is the real world, anyhow?

The second tension within the practice of a disciplined education centers on the contrasts between present and future. In its idealized guise, education is seen as the chance for living fully in the present. The pursuit of knowledge is energetic, concentrated, and presentist. The student is consumed by the demands and opportunities of the existential present. But lurking in the shadows are the requirements of the future, and students are distracted from the present by their pragmatic concerns for where this will all lead, what they will become, and how they will market themselves. The marketing questions can begin to shape and control the academic pursuits, as the future consumes the present and renders it less fulfilling—even empty. In today's schools, vocational education often represents the extreme capitulation to pragmatism. Sadly, it is rarely a productive pragmatism, because by the time the future arrives, the technology and skills, so doggedly taught and learned, are no longer useful or relevant. A key dilemma inherent in education; therefore, is the struggle for attention—the attention required to dig deeply into intellectual matters, to literally lose oneself in the work, is threatened by the attention required to become somebody in the future. Unfortunately, in recent years the demands of the future have clearly won out, and the pursuits of the present have been unquestionably impoverished.

Finally, the third tension embedded in the practice of education is commonly described as the battle between excellence and equality; between high standards and a more inclusive school community. Once again, the classical image portrays the embodiment of excellence—an excellence reflecting fairly narrow definitions of

achievement and potential; and an excellence traditionally defined by a rather small group of people in our society. This portrayal may fit comfortably with those students who have been raised with the same values and traditions as the setters of the definition. It may not, however, match the wide range of students who are not the progeny of those who have historically defined the parameters of excellence.

As our country's schools incorporate increasingly diverse student populations, the old definitions of excellence are challenged by the competing values, styles, and "frames of intelligence" (in Howard Gardner's terminology) of people from different origins. If only a token representation of culturally different students and faculty are admitted into the academy, then the definitions of excellence will remain unchallenged. The different ones will adapt and survive or fail and leave. But if more than just a token of strangers are allowed through the academy's gate, then definitions of excellence must be recreated to embrace the skills and needs of the newcomers. This does *not* mean an inevitable capitulation of standards. It does *not* necessarily mean an assault on cherished views of excellence (though it may at times be experienced that way by the defenders of the academy). It *does* mean an intelligent and critical reinterpretation of standards that incorporates a broader, more complicated view of intelligence and achievement. Once the definitions of excellence are removed from the grasp of a powerful few, then there will be tensions as members of the community seek to balance the old and the new.

When I embarked on the recent study of secondary schools, I was troubled by the nostalgia and idealization that seemed to surround the term "excellence," and I chose not to use it. Instead, I searched for a term that might promise to be less distorted by political rhetoric and might be more generous in its view of diversity in educational form, style, and substance—a term that would anticipate imperfection and conflict as key ingredients of organizational improvement in schools. I chose the term "goodness" and looked for its expression in public and private schools; in rich schools, poor schools, and those in between.

Throughout my inquiry, I was continually struck by how a shift in the *researcher's* lens, a shift of language and purview, changes the questions one asks, and the scene one sees and describes. If one is looking for "goodness," rather than "excellence," in schools, one sees a different reality. "Goodness" refers to the complex culture of schools—to academic achievement, of course, but also to the craft and aesthetics of pedagogy; to the moral tone of the institution; to the quality of human encounter; and to the nature of organizational authority. Using this more complicated definition of school success allows for the cohabitation of excellence and equality; because equality as a critical dimension of the human encounter becomes *part of* the pursuit of goodness; and because goodness permits excellence to shine in its myriad forms.

This does not mean that competing definitions of "good" do not struggle for prominence; nor does it mean that we can avoid the possibility that the educational endeavor threatens to be reduced to what John Dewey referred to as "easy beauty"—a comfortable, but superficial, prettiness; a compromised standard devoid of real substance. There is, of course, always the danger that, in trying to be inclusive, one becomes undisciplined. But I believe that the struggle for a disciplined and inclusive standard of "goodness" in schools is the only way for a pluralistic society to thrive, and the only way to rid our society of the troubling dissonance between our espoused values and our revealing practices.

My comments suggest the inevitability of contradiction and tension within a disciplined, good education. They also suggest emerging conflict between the defenders of the idealized image and the protagonists who struggle with the realities

of education in practice. Finally, I hope my comments suggest my bias—that the conflicts should be embraced, not retreated from; that the differences should be articulated, not silenced; and that if we take on the struggles that I have referred to, the more complicated, uncomfortable practice of education which follows will be richer than its purer, more comfortable predecessor.

When Excellence and Equity Complement Each Other

CHARLES V. WILLIE, *Harvard University*

Harvard College excludes about 80 to 85 percent of the students who seek admission each year. It is widely believed that Harvard has become one of the most competitive colleges in the United States and has achieved high standards because of its policy of exclusiveness. I disagree with this assessment of why Harvard College has achieved its educational preeminence. Other schools exclude 80 to 85 percent of their applicants but have not achieved the special status of Harvard College. Exclusiveness may convey the impression of high standards, but is not a condition for educational eminence.

Harvard today is more diversified than it was fifty years ago, when its 300th anniversary was celebrated. Today, 65 percent of the College's student body graduated from public—not private—high schools; 40 percent is female, and female enrollment is increasing. Minorities make up 20 to 25 percent of the student body. Few people realize how diversified Harvard is in the characteristics of its students. Not only is the College more inclusive; some of the professional schools of Harvard University also accept a wider range of students. In the Harvard Medical School, for example, 25 percent of the entering class consists of Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Any college or university that wishes to model itself after Harvard must recruit more minorities, must become more diversified, as well as maintain high standards.

Some claim that Harvard College's policy of diversification is the primary cause of its educational eminence. I also disagree with this assessment; other schools have diversified student bodies but have not achieved the educational eminence of Harvard.

It seems to me that the educational eminence of Harvard College is rather a function of its high standards and its diversity—not one or the other, but both. If one identifies high standards as an aspect of excellence and diversity as an aspect of equity, then excellence and equity complement each other. It is this combination of characteristics that results in educational eminence. Neither excellence alone, with its excluding policy, nor equity alone, with its including policy, is sufficient for the attainment of educational eminence. Indeed, excellence without a commitment to equity could result in arrogance. And equity without a commitment to excellence could result in mediocrity. Since excellence and equity complement each other to their mutual benefit, one wonders how they were ever thought to be contradictory or in opposition to each other.

It seems likely that the error in regarding these two as contradictory tendencies resulted from faulty conceptualization. Excellence is a quality, a deed, some would even say a virtue. As such, it is a property of an individual. Equity is a method or technique of distributing limited resources, opportunities, and services among many individuals in a way that is fair. As such, equity is a property of groups,

organizations, associations, institutions. Characteristics of individuals and of groups can easily be joined to the benefit of both. One of the purposes of education, for example, is to enhance individuals and at the same time to advance the community. This twofold goal, when it is achieved, fits into my conception of a double victory.

When excellence is erroneously conceptualized as a property of the group, the possibility of abuse is present. A group or institution that strives for excellence may slough off individuals who are likely to detract from its image of excellence. The well-being and freedom of individuals are at risk in excellence-oriented institutions. Moreover, an institution that sloughs off individuals behaves in a way that is contrary to a nurturing social order. In physical and organic systems, the parts are the foundation of the whole; their reason for being is to sustain the whole. But in the human social system, the whole is the foundation of the parts; its reason for being is to support and sustain each part. Sloughing off individuals is a way of sacrificing the parts of a social system for the good of the whole.

Nobody, nor any college or university, has the right to sacrifice another, or to demand that one engage in self-sacrifice. To sacrifice or not to sacrifice is a decision that one should make for oneself, since the consequence of each action is personally experienced. For this reason, an aspiration toward excellence is personal and should not be conceptualized as a social requirement. Anyone who aspires toward excellence must be prepared to make the necessary sacrifices. This is why excellence is conceptualized as the property of an individual rather than that of a group. Thus, I do not oppose excellence in education; it is commendable for one to aspire to be excellent and to work diligently for its achievement. However, the decision to sacrifice for its attainment is a personal one and should remain so.

Groups, organizations, and institutions have the privilege and obligation to certify that their affiliates and those committed to their charge are adequate, competent, and good enough to help and not harm members of the society. After such certification, this competent, adequate, and good person may decide to enhance his or her development to a level of excellence. This certifying privilege and responsibility of institutions applies to all, including Harvard University, Cambridge University, and other institutions of higher learning. They have not the right to require their students to attain excellence, but they can insist that they be competent, adequate, and good.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education suggested in its report, *A Nation at Risk*, that a public commitment to excellence could interfere with the attainment of equity and warned that this should not be tolerated.[1] Then the Commission violated its own warning in its recommendations. It opted for excellence over equity by recommending the annual administration of national standardized tests for high school graduates and the raising of college admissions standards. It is a fact that standardized tests have a negative impact upon minorities. If scores on such tests are used in college admissions decisions, and if colleges and universities raise their admissions standards, then the recommendations of the National Commission would disproportionately exclude minorities. This outcome would be unfair and would be evidence of choosing excellence over equity, which the Commission said should not be done.

The recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education are the core of the issue in this discussion. Most people would agree that excellence is fine and so is equity and that we should have both if possible. If it is not possible, then a real question arises. Should excellence be chosen over equity, or should equity be chosen over excellence?

My choice is to choose equity first. That which is equitable is fair. A school that is fair to all of its students will help the least among them and the brightest and the best in its student body. But a school that deliberately caters to the needs of the brightest and best often is found wanting in providing appropriate help for those who are less than able.

By educating the brightest and the best in the presence of those who are less able, no harm is done to students who are excellent if we develop pedagogical arrangements whereby excellent students can assist their less able classmates. My wife is a teacher of singing. She studied with Clara Shear, a wise professional, who counseled her students to teach others as a way of enhancing their own skill. Shear told my wife that she would cease to grow as a singer unless she gave to others what she had learned, for in the process of teaching others to sing, one enhances one's own talent. This principle of gaining through the process of giving probably applies to other forms of learning as well. If we wish to motivate students to aspire to excellence, then we must provide more opportunities for them to help their less able peers. By helping others, the brightest and the best doubly help themselves, since others, in accordance with the principle of complementarity, have much to give to the more able.

Educational eminence, then, is a function of excellence and equity, high standards and diversity—not one or the other, but both. A society can have both, but if only excellence or equity is possible, then equity should be chosen, since schools that are fair to all students help the more able when they help the less able.

[1] The National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).