

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

When Management Defines Leadership: High Demand x High Support in a Rural Community College

Author Note

Paula K. Clarke, Professor Emeritus, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Columbia College; W. Ted Hamilton, Professor Emeritus, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Columbia College.

We gratefully acknowledge editorial assistance from Nalatie Alpers.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Paula K. Clarke.

Email: clarkep@yosemite.edu or hdxhs@icloud.com

Paula K. Clarke and W. Ted Hamilton

Columbia College

Abstract

Drawing upon a diversity of data from efforts across almost four decades – the last two in the same rural community college – devoted to developing, implementing and studying the impact of a High Demand x High Support (HDxHS) teaching pedagogy, this paper addresses four topics: First, we briefly address the values and perspectives informing the HDxHS effort. Second, we sketch the HDxHS pedagogy and describe case exemplars, situating these in the context of a rural community college (CC). Third, we describe different leadership responses to HDxHS in terms of the use of strategic ignorance strategies (SIS), suggesting that these likely function more as a barrier than a conduit for understanding the challenges facing rural communities and CCs. Fourth, acknowledging that CCs are currently at a crossroads facing an uncertain future as legitimate public post-secondary institutions, we outline elements of a re-scripted more democratic CC leadership model. Part overview and part summary, the conclusion addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the HDxHS approach and the various bodies of knowledge to which it might contribute.

Keywords: democratic, critical cases, leadership, heterarchy, strategic ignorance, natural science

Introduction

According to Joseph Rost (1993), leadership “is the most studied and least understood topic of any in the social sciences” (p. 20). However, in spite of its popularity, there is no widely shared definition of leadership (Berube, 2000, p. 2). Furthermore, the most agreed upon synonym for leadership, “management,” is, according to those who have studied the issue, the opposite of what is meant by the idea (Berube, 2000, p. 26). In fact, conflating the terms management and leadership is in part responsible for many institutional problems, especially in times of change (c.f. Hecllo, 2008; Stark, 2009). While management is not intrinsically inferior to leadership, under conditions of change it usually represents an effort to preserve what has already disappeared and/or is fast disappearing. What is necessary, during times of upheaval such as the present, is leadership, particularly for a public institution like the community college (CC), beset as it is with a complex mix of long standing (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; McGrath & Spear, 1991; Richardson, Fisk, & Okun, 1983; Zwerling, 1976) and new challenges (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Beach, 2011; Brint, 2003; Levin, 2001; Reed, 2013; Riggs, 2016; Rogers, 2013). Unlike management, leadership entertains the vision to see beyond the programming of the past to envision a future, a task that may involve entertaining ideas that “cut against the grain of the mainstream” (Berube, 2000, p. 27).

The distinction between management and leadership is notably striking in times of rapid change. Under these conditions institutional legitimacy and self-correcting capacity greatly depend upon “intelligent creative disobedience” (Chaleff, 2015; c.f. Zimbardo, 2008), questioning the authority of existing norms, suspending (if only temporarily) moral judgment, re-thinking working assumptions (ethical and otherwise), definitions, and goals. Stated another way, leadership decisions/temptations to resolve the tensions of change by selective ignorance leave institutions at an impasse (Hecl, 2008, p. 11; Stark, 2009); this more “managerialist strategy ... entails the risk of foregoing the big opportunities” for innovations (Stark, 2009, p. 5).

Besides relevant scholarship, our presentation draws upon two additional bodies of work. First, our insights are drawn from more than sixty years of combined teaching experience, in a wide range of settings; one of us (WTH) has also been active in governance at the local, state, and national level.¹ Second, we also draw upon data gathered across several decades devoted to designing, implementing, and eventually studying the impact of a High Demand x High Support (HDxHS) teaching pedagogy, the last two decades (1997-2016) in the same small rural CC.

Although a comprehensive presentation of the larger HDxHS effort from which the current paper is drawn is beyond this paper’s scope, before moving on we briefly describe HDxHS’s most significant characteristic. Associated with Sanford (1967) in the U.S. and Anton Makarenko in the former Soviet Union (who was to Soviet education what John Dewey was to education in America) (2001/1955,

2004), HDxHS represents one of the organizing propositions in the bioecological model informing “Developmental Science in the 21st Century” (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 122-123). Neither Sanford nor Makarenko suggest that the idea can or should be reduced to a mechanical boilerplate recipe. Rather, the focus is on the complex task of creating maximum of demand – maximum of support environments (classroom, school, community). Based on a body of multidisciplinary evidence, the idea is that intellectual, emotional, social and moral development in human children and adults greatly depends upon such environs (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 122-123). The overall model acknowledges that “we are now living in a period of growing chaos in the lives not only of families but in all the day-to-day environments of people of all ages” (p. 123), and that creating environs where individuals have legitimate opportunities to re-cast lives is essentially a principal challenge confronting contemporary societies in the early days of the 21st century.

While selected features of our HDxHS effort are described later on in the paper, overall the pedagogy is designed to challenge more than accommodate common limitations of entering college students in a climate of support. Notable details about this work can be found at our substantially resourced faculty websites as well as the in-progress HDxHS website designed to accompany the authors’ post-retirement writing and public presentations about our long complicated professional effort.^{2,3}

We proceed as follows: First, we briefly focus on some of the more important values and perspectives informing our HDxHS efforts. Second, we briefly describe the HDxHS pedagogy and

¹ One of the authors taught in the CC for 44 years, the other for 20 years; governance activities of the former include president of the state faculty association, Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC), serving three times as academic senate president (twice at our college and once at our sister college), and president of the local bargaining unit (Yosemite Faculty Association). Other professional details can be found in our C.V.s (<http://hdxhs.com/paula-k-clarke/> and <http://hdxhs.com/ted-hamilton/>).

² Our faculty websites detail the provisions and expectations of the HDxHS environment: <http://clarkep.faculty.yosemite.edu/> and <http://hamiltont.faculty.yosemite.edu/>

³ See the in-progress HDxHS website, especially the Our Research section: <http://hdxhs.com/>

present transfer data and case exemplars from the experience in a small rural CC. Third, by describing different leadership responses to HDxHS in terms of their use of strategic ignorance strategies (SIS), we suggest that these likely function more as a barrier than a conduit for understanding the challenges facing rural communities and CCs. Finally, acknowledging that CCs are currently at a crossroads facing an uncertain future as public post-secondary institutions (McClenny, 2013), we sketch elements of a re-scripted more democratic model of CC leadership. Part summary and part overview, the conclusion addresses the strengths and weaknesses of HDxHS and various bodies of knowledge to which it might contribute.

HDxHS: Values and Perspectives

We are committed to John Dewey's ideal of an educational system whose commitments *include more than marginalize* a dedication to the cultivation of a democratic citizenry (Martin, 2002, pp. 250, 255-258, 279-280, 292). Like Dewey, we are committed to expanding access to education. And, also like Dewey, we recognize that in a democracy, educational institutions need to do "more than offer students access and award credentials" (Harbour, 2015, p. 7).

Though consistent with the CC self image, this democratic commitment is nonetheless at odds with CC history and current realities. Despite a self-characterization as "people's colleges," the democratic promise of the CC has never truly been a reality and those who have tried to make it so have faced formidable obstacles (Beach, 2011, pp. 125-133; Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 232). Though transfer to a four-year college or university was one of the original CC missions, "two-year institutions have throughout their history been less likely to send on to four-year institutions their *less* [emphasis added] socially and culturally advantaged students" (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 229); instead, CCs became "vocalized" (Brint & Karabel, 1989, pp. 11-17). In fact, transfer rates from CCs to all baccalaureate-granting institutions remain low

(Bailey & Morest, 2006, pp. 260-262), and to selective institutions almost non-existent (Dowd et al., 2008). Furthermore, even when students do transfer they are often ill equipped for success in upper division college work (Berger & Malaney, 2003). In rural areas, where we taught for two decades, these issues are often compounded by complex rural realities that we describe further on (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, pp. 53-106; Bailey & Jacobs, 2009; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010). Finally, though the accountability movement may appear to guarantee the competencies that credentials are presumed to represent, this matter appears more than open to debate (Adelman, 2010; Gilbert, 2018; Straumsheim, 2016).⁴

Thus, while CCs view themselves as colleges-of-the-people, CCs lack "a normative vision that organizes and validates commitments to individual growth and the development of democratic communities" (Harbour, 2015, p. 154). Therefore, though our HDxHS effort is in line with the "people's college" idea, it is nonetheless marginal to CC institutional culture. In other words, the formidable obstacles marking past efforts to realize the democratic CC promise remain in place.

As the following brief and by no means exhaustive overview suggests, the idea of normalizing the democratic CC promise is complicated by a mixture of CC history and current realities, including the complications of professionalism in an institutional culture tethered to the broader contradictions of American culture and to the conditions marking current rural realities. In the first place, however, it is important to note that CCs are not unique in falling short in their democratic promise investment. Deficits in citizenship knowledge and habits are widespread throughout American higher education

⁴ Overall, American schools largely reflect Woodrow Wilson's recommendation: "We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class of necessity in every society, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks" (quoted in Lapham, 1991, p. 10).

(c.f. Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2013a, pp. 77-200; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Mooney & Kirshenbaum, 2009; Perez-Pena, 2013; Silva, 2013; Smith, Mayer, & Fritschler, 2008).⁵ Moreover, we realize that unlike other parts of post-secondary education, CCs face an especially difficult education task, enrolling those who have “the most daunting educational, economic, and social barriers to their education, yet have the fewest resources per student to serve those students” (Bailey & Morest, 2006, p. 4).

Further still, CC history is marked by a dizzying maze of complexities and contradictions. Like “other institutions of higher education, [CCs] are subject to powerful constraints in their relationships to economy, the polity, and the rest of the system of higher education itself” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. vi). Reflecting America’s contradictory cultural commitment to *both* democratic ideals and capitalism places CCs on the horns of a dilemma (Dougherty, 1994), pressured to both extend and limit opportunity (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 9), the latter known as “Cooling Out” student aspirations (Clark, 1960b, p. 513). Thus, along with positive attributes (open access, local, affordable and flexible), CCs are also linked with unfortunate images such as, places where students reach “undesired destinations” (Clark, 1960a, p. 165), “default/better than nothing” (Draut, 2005, p. 35) and “second best” (Zwerling, 1976).⁶

Another more current complicating force is the increasing impact of private philanthropy on public institutions (Callahan, 2015, 2017; Mangan,

2013; Massing, 2016). Known by a number of labels, including “The Gates Effect” (GE), this movement, focusing on student success and college completion, has been described as an “efficient system designed for maximum measurability, delivered increasingly through technology, and focused on the short-term (Parry, Field & Supiano, 2013).⁷ Despite the widespread endorsement of such approaches to social and economic challenges, the movement compounds existing complicated CC conditions (c.f. Brown & Jacobs, 2008; Giridharadas, 2018).⁸ First, GE-type reform is driven by a *highly questionable* though very popular cultural belief that closing the achievement gap among the disadvantaged will solve social and economic inequities.⁹ Second, efficiency metrics are particularly unsuitable for under-resourced programs serving strained populations (Jacobs, 2003), the hallmark of the CC, most especially rural ones (c.f. Campbell, 1988).¹⁰ Third, incentives directing institutions to focus resources on short-term goals marginalize the call of other emerging novel, complex, and pressing demands associated with social and economic change. Fourth, the success of GE-type education reform is apparently more than open to question (Cody, 2014; Mangan, 2013; McGoey, 2015; Russakoff, 2015). And, fifth, perhaps among the most important concerns when

⁵ Political knowledge rises with education (college graduates can correctly answer an average of almost three more questions than those who never attended college, 7.4 vs. 4.5), age (people over fifty can answer about two more questions than those under thirty), and political engagement (registered voters know more than their unregistered counterparts). But no matter how one slices the electorate, the conclusion remains grim: Americans are as uninformed, disengaged, and disconnected in 2008 as they were fifty years ago (Freedman, 2008, p. 58).

⁶ According to Beach (2011), “CCs hold immense promise if they can overcome their historical legacy and be reinstitutionalized with unified missions, clear goals of educational success, properly trained faculty, sufficient numbers of support staff, and adequate financial resources (p. xxxv).

⁷ In California the impact of GE-type reform is reflected in the Student Success Act of 2012 (Dorr, 2012). Essentially stripping away the usual meaning of the college experience, strategies discourage student exploration of perceived non-vocational coursework, restrict total unit accomplishment, punish students for meaningful change of direction, and emphasize attendance much as in the fashion of high school.

⁸ Referring to GE-type strategies as “uncivic economism” Dahlgren (2009) explains that the approach emphasizes “the congruence between democracy and capitalism while downplaying the dilemmas” (p. 20).

⁹ According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) the impact of education depends upon the steepness of the social gradient (pp. 12-13, 103). Social mobility is not only lower in more unequal countries regardless of educational attainment (pp. 103-118) education seems to be both a cause and consequence of the gradient. As the U.S. has the highest level of inequality among advanced industrial societies (p. 15) this is an important factor to keep in mind when considering institutions (rural community colleges) and communities (rural) occupying a highly disadvantaged position on the social gradient.

¹⁰ The Harlem Children’s Zone Project is a good example of the lack of fit between efficiency-driven success metrics and reform efforts in disadvantaged populations (Tough, 2008).

it comes to leadership matters, although the size of philanthropic donations get attention, there is conspicuous silence surrounding the implications of the increasing role of private interests in shaping public investments (Callahan, 2017; Edwards, 2009; Kohl-Arenas, 2016; Massing, 2016).^{11, 12} When added to CC history, the rub in this situation is that, intended or otherwise, institutional success in serving GE-type efficiency comes at the cost of compromising CC institutional legitimacy and the capacity for moving the democratic promise from the margins.¹³

Responsible professionalism represents yet another complication, as institutional efficiency incentives are often antithetical to optimal professional practice (c.f. Khurana, 2007; Prothrow-Stith 1991). First, in spite of institutional incentives encouraging institutional agents to do so, catering to student desires is not without problems (for institutions, students, and broader society) (Bok, 2013a, pp. 24-25, 183-185). Second, graduate programs may be inadequate preparation for current conditions (Bok, 2013b). And, last, increasingly insecure employment likely functions as a barrier to faculty willingness/ability to engage with these issues (Bok, 2013a, p. 226; Fain, 2014).¹⁴

¹¹ Peter Buffett, son of billionaire Warren Buffett, described the inability of foundations to address the causes of inequality as the curse of "philanthropic colonialism" in which boardrooms in the "charitable industrial complex" are populated by wealthy trustees, "searching for answers with their right hand to problems that others in the room have created with their left" (Buffett, 2013).

¹² Of importance for underfunded public institutions like CCs, in the U.S. philanthropic contributions are tax write offs subsidized by taxpayers, diverting about \$40 billion annually from the public treasury, a source upon which CCs have traditionally depended (Massing, 2016, p. 74).

¹³ Located at Teachers College, Columbia University, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) was founded in 1996 with a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Since 1996, the center has received funding from numerous philanthropic organizations, including the Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Although the CCRA website describes itself as the "leading independent authority on two-year colleges in the United States," those familiar with philanthropy practices suggest that donors rarely give without agendas (Massing, 2016).

¹⁴ Some believe that throughout higher education, many faculties are unwilling/unable to defend their own political and economic interests (c.f. Bousquet, 2008; Ginsburg, 2011).

These professional dilemmas take on a special character in CCs. While a contradictory CC mission marks no other institution in quite the way that it marks the CC, no other institution is as likely as the CC to "serve" a population as uncritically accepting of such a contradiction (Labaree, 1997, p. 221). As this entanglement takes on increasingly troubling dimensions in the midst of current conditions, contemporary students are, according to Willis (2003), "unconscious foot soldier[s] in the long front of modernity, involuntary and disoriented conscripts in battles never explained" (p. 390). Besides having many problems including a well-crafted resistance to schooling, popular mobility ideology via credentialing is not convincing to many. Sadly, though their lack of confidence in credentialing has some legitimacy, the rejection of cultivating good mental habits, as Willis notes (p. 393), reconciles them and those like them to long spells of unemployment, even permanent unemployment (c.f. Haberman, 1997; Standing, 2014).

A related matter involves the long-standing CC commitment to the needs of business and the economy (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 14). While CCs have traditionally believed that serving economic needs also served the needs of communities and students, current conditions challenge this view. While the standard metric for assessing the health of the economy, GDP, suggests success, the same cannot be said for employment conditions; the main reason for this is inequality. "A small affluent segment of the population receives a large and growing share of the economy's bounty. As a result, statistics that sound as if they describe the broad American economy – GDP – mostly describe the experience of the affluent" (Leonhardt, 2018). Thus, according to Beach (2011), CC "credentials and certificates may become almost worthless commodities" (p. 67).

As problematic as these conditions are for CCs in general, rural CCs are likely to be particularly compromised by the complex rural realities mentioned earlier. Despite the idealized

images often associated with rurality in the American cultural imagination, many of these settings are sites of extreme strain, “increasingly fragile institutions serving increasingly fragile communities” (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007, p. 19). In fact, one source recently described rural America as the “new inner city” (Adamy & Overberg, 2017). In a study of the transition to adulthood in rural places, researchers Carr and Kefalas (2009) identified many areas where rural places are close to or well beyond the edge of what they know (pp. 14-16, 54, 82, 93, 171). Many young people they met were “tripped up when they try [tried] to play by twentieth century rules in a twenty-first century economy, and by the time they do [did] understand, it’s too late” (p. 82). Important for CC leadership, the researchers concluded, “key institutional actors in small towns are aware that what they do is flawed and self-defeating, yet they are slow to embrace the kind of thinking that will help them face the challenges ahead” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 161).¹⁵ Thus, the CC practice of reflecting the communities they serve (Grubb, 1999, p. 352) is unlikely, especially in rural places, to represent a road from ruin for either the CCs or the communities.¹⁶

These briefly reviewed values and perspectives, some variously stated elsewhere for at least half a century (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 232; Zwerling, 1976, p. 251) and others more recent (Beach, 2011, pp. 132-133; Reed, 2013; Riggs, 2016), demonstrate some of the complex formidable forces contributing to the marginalization of the democratic CC promise. In the absence of effective challenge, the result will almost certainly increase CC’s peripheral position relative to the rest of higher education. Therefore, while individuals are likely better off with

than without credentials, institutional incentives built on speedy credentialing for disadvantaged populations are more than likely to leave individuals unprepared for either 21st century work or life (c.f. Beach, 2011, pp. 59-60, 113-119; Levine, 2005; McClenney, 2013).

HDxHS: The Evolution of An Unintended Natural Experiment

The HDxHS teaching pedagogy that we have developed has been a professionally complicated (individually resourced) almost four-decade journey trying to understand and respond to the fragile competencies of entering college students, especially those in the nation’s CCs (Bailey & Morest, 2006, p. 10; Beach, 2011, p. 51). Although often calculated via standard assessment scores, these traditional college readiness metrics do not measure the full range of competencies implied by the idea of readiness (NCPPE & SREB, 2010, p. 5). Generally, though, it seems that about one-quarter of incoming students to two-year colleges are fully prepared for college level studies (p. 2).

As we teach transfer courses and transfer, as noted earlier, is one of the traditional CC *missions* that has been frayed at the edges for sometime (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 164), we tried to do what we could in our teaching to facilitate strong transfer potential (STP). More complex than instrumentally moving students along to acceptance at a transfer institution, the STP goal aims to increase student chances for moving out of the bottom of America’s educational hierarchy and/or graduating from a four-year college or university with more, rather

¹⁵ David Orr (2004) suggests the languishing state of rural places and their institutions will require a “spirit of innovation and renewal that is often not characteristic of small communities” (p. 197). Others have made similar observations (c.f. Bishop, 2008; Florida, 2012; Longworth, 2008).

¹⁶ Most of rural America can be found in the Midwestern and Eastern U.S. (van Gundy, 2006, p. 28).

¹⁷ Labaree (1997) describes CCs as the “lower track of higher education” (p. 216). Professor X describes CCs as “the basement of the Ivory Tower” (2011). Beach (2011) claims, CCs “were designed to be underfunded and marginalized institutions in hierarchical state systems of education” (p. xxxiv). A remedial/developmental CC instructor describing CCs, “They’re not institutions like the university; they’re looked on as kind of very low-status” (Grubb, 1999, unpaginated).

than fewer, of the expected competencies.¹⁷ Labaree (1997) might describe the goal as aiming to increase the exchange value of student credentials (p. 22).

The HDxHS pedagogy is the foundational anatomy in the 20+ transfer-level courses that we teach.¹⁸ Spanning several disciplines (biological, physical, social and behavioral sciences, and philosophy), the courses represent core lower division general education curriculum. Some are also vocational program requirements. Only two courses have prerequisites and these were externally mandated. As most courses taught in the HDxHS format are available in other venues (other instructors, online), enrollment and persistence in HDxHS courses reflects the *many* forces influencing student decision-making, a process we describe as “student-initiated triage.”

HDxHS: An Unintended Quasi-Natural Experiment

The HDxHS effort essentially represents an unintended quasi-natural experiment at the rural CC where we taught for two decades.¹⁹ Although the courses represent offerings in the core liberal arts curriculum, the low enrollments and/or high drop rates typically marking these courses mean that most students at the college have either never enrolled and/or have never persisted in a HDxHS course. In experimental terms, these conditions mean that most students represent the control group; the exceptions, the small numbers of individuals who have persisted in the HDxHS experience, represent what would be viewed in an idealized research setting as those exposed to the “treatment.” We use the term “quasi” in our

description because ideally group assignment would be random and obviously this has not been the case. Also, as pointed out further on, the groups are not entirely distinct and non-overlapping; among those persisting are individuals who were members of the larger more representative group at an earlier date – sometimes much (e.g. years) earlier.

We point out here that in the early days of our work we did not fully realize that our focus on transfer-related issues were marginal to CC culture. We were slow to recognize that the STP goal driving HDxHS represented a dilemma-in-waiting; in time coming into *stark* conflict with the “student success” metrics associated with accountability and the institutional incentive structures resulting from GE-type education reform goals. Thus, while HDxHS is concerned with long term, often difficult to measure, desirable rather than attainable goals, these other prevailing “success” metrics emphasize short-term, easy to measure, attainable goals (Jacobs, 2003). While our concern emphasized *student learning and development*, they were at odds with incentives emphasizing *productivity, efficiency, and cost effectiveness* (Beach, 2011, p. 107-108; Parry, Field, & Supiano, 2013).

HDxHS: Critical Cases

As it turns out, we were confronted with a professional ethical dilemma almost from the start. Within the context of the efficiency assumptions informing ideas about teaching and learning, low enrollments and high drop rates signal something other than success.²⁰ But, the small persisting HDxHS numbers told a different and more complex story. They were/are “critical cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 66-87), most likely or least likely instances, “cases which are likely either clearly to confirm or

¹⁸The courses we teach include team-taught courses (Cultural Anthropology with Cultural Geography; U.S. History 1877-present with American Social Problems; Introduction to the History and Philosophy of Science).

¹⁹As our employment history is part of the public record, we clearly cannot offer anonymity to the college where we have taught. Our efforts reflect our status as functioning members of an institution as well as active responsive witnesses to conditions in public institutions in recent decades. Many institutions (c.f. Hecl, 2008) and professionals (c.f. Hirschman, 1970) are currently struggling with similar challenges.

²⁰We were told directly by administration that good CC teaching is marked by high enrollment and persistence rates. Overall, enrollment management (class minimums) was applied in discretionary ways that reflect the current marginalization of the humanities and social sciences (Coleman & Hennessey, 2013).

irrefutably to falsify propositions and hypotheses” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 78-79). As demonstrated by a corpus of classic critical cases, non-representative data is likely to have strategic importance in terms of both theory and practice.^{21, 22} Thus, though plagued by misconceptions, favoring large samples over cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 66), both approaches are necessary for sound social science development.

The data we have collected on the transfer experience of students persisting in our HDxHS courses suggests that in the management-driven “accountability” culture, efficiency focused

incentives (Beach, 2011, p. 103) appear to create barriers and/or punish efforts outside the accountability calculus. Thus, although from the “student success” view, the HDxHS effort represents an institutionally inefficient, professionally suspect, teaching/learning failure, the *unexpected uncommonly successful patterns* uniquely associated with persisting in these on-the-margin-courses suggest something more complicated.^{23, 24}

Specifically, we find that persisting in two or more HDxHS courses is uniquely associated with *unusually* successful trajectories after moving on from our institution, courses of development that

Table 1. Enrollment and Persistence Pathways in HDxHS Courses, 1996-1997 to 2016

Pathway and Interpretation	Avoid	Drop Early and/or Late	Persist
Pathways 1-5	Intentional & Unintentional Avoidance — usually the former	Most enroll & quickly drop. A few enroll and drop later.	Complete the course regardless of grade.
Pathway #1 Most never enroll; some intentionally avoid	X	0	0
Pathway #2 Many enroll but never persist		X	0
Pathway #3 Most who eventually persist do so only after bouts of avoidance & dropping, sometimes failure.	X	X	X
Pathway #4 Those who enroll & persist without first avoiding or dropping are the exception	0	0	X
Pathway #5 Former Pathway #1 & Pathway #2. Those who make contact after graduating and/or transferring who avoided or dropped when they were in college.	0	0	X ?

Note. Pathway #5 includes a complex mix of mostly Pathways #1 and #2. Depending upon individual circumstances, some enroll and complete courses, others complete performance requirements and make use of HDxHS opportunities for success but do not enroll, and others utilize the HDxHS environment from distance via phone, email, etc.

²¹ Critical cases are also known as anomalies or freak occurrences (Blumberg, 2009), outliers (Gladwell, 2008), contrary to the accepted frame of reference (Sacks, 1995, p. 161) and Black Swans (Taleb, 2007).

²² As demonstrated by classic critical cases (Lane, 1976; Michels, 2018/1911; Whyte, 1943), data departing from the expected frame of reference reveals more information about a general problem than representative samples that typically focus on problem frequencies and symptoms.

would not be expected from student backgrounds. Although engaging and persisting with HDxHS via different, often messy, pathways (Table 1), in the language of critical case research, most individuals are “least likely” instances. Though small in number, they are associated with unique transfer trends²⁵ and/or unique experiences with transfer and well beyond; individuals who began the CC experience with low probabilities of success, but have beaten odds on many fronts, academic and otherwise.

What Critical Cases Look Like

Sketched from a “thick description” (Geertz, 1977) case, student stories demonstrate the complex forces at work in a single case. Overall, uncommonly successful outcomes are negatively associated with efficiency metrics and positively linked with uncommon institutional opportunity (HDxHS) and uncommon agency in the form of student decision-making.^{26, 27}

Becky, now in her late thirties, recently completed a Ph.D. at one of the most prestigious research universities in the U.S. Her early history, educational and otherwise, reads like the

proverbial rural youth train-wreck that included attending numerous (6) CCs and a transcript that, as she says, “makes counselors think you are a loser.” When Becky did eventually transfer from our college to one of the University of California campuses, she earned a distinguished award for interdisciplinary research and was invited by a demanding professor to take graduate courses as an undergraduate. She earned her first graduate degree at a well-known British university and also won a competitive internship with an equally well-known international aid organization. In spite of opportunities resulting from prestigious credentials, and to the surprise of her graduate advisers, Becky chose to teach in a CC where she hopes to “pay forward” her own HDxHS experience.

Like many other HDxHS students, Becky began her CC studies largely because of the social pressure to do so. Her original college expectations included a two-year degree, maybe. She also imagined a life in the community where she grew up, giving snowboarding lessons and perhaps making candles for a local gift shop. Like many rural communities, Becky’s hometown lost its backbone economy ages ago.

Becky’s case includes other common threads of HDxHS experience. Like many others, Becky encountered considerable social pressure from friends, family, and college personnel not to enroll/persist in HDxHS courses. Also, like others, support from family did not appear for Becky during, but after, her HDxHS experiences. Reflecting somewhat common local ideas about intelligence and learning, one family member suggested that the amount of time she spent investing in her studies suggested that she wasn’t very smart. Becky was the recipient of many hours (we kept records) of face-to-face

²³ Certainly, technical “causality” is tricky territory when assessing educational impact. Many confounding factors in student lives make it difficult to identify clear cause and effect pathways. However, the steady stream of highly unusual successful profiles over a period of two decades that are, as far as we can tell, essentially unheard of in the CC and/or rural literature, suggest something other than isolated chance “flukes.” Thus, while the unique correlation between unusually successful outcomes and persistence in HDxHS courses *does not* constitute technical causality, the link does represent what Meehl (1990, p. 108) and Salmon (1984) would likely describe as “damn strange coincidences.” Ergo, while HDxHS may not be sufficient for *causing* unexpected successes, it may represent a necessary condition for understanding the forces associated (+/-) with them (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 77-81).

²⁴ Although beyond the scope of this paper, the patterns associated with avoiding and dropping HDxHS courses add even more complexity to the HDxHS experience.

²⁵ One of the most significant transfer trends is from our college to U.C. Berkeley. In the 15 years (1980-1995) prior to the introduction of HDxHS on campus, there were 6 transfers; in the following 20 years (1996-2015), after HDxHS was introduced in 1996, there were 53 transfers. According to our in-progress follow-up, 40 (75 percent) of the transfers are individuals who persisted in at least one (usually more than one) HDxHS course (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011; The Regents of the University of California, n.d.).

²⁶ All names are pseudonyms.

²⁷ Each case invariably involves several of the more troubling features of rural life (family violence, homelessness, mental illness, ethnic/gender identity challenges, poverty, etc.). We have omitted some of these details in the service of protecting individuals who live in small communities where anonymity is difficult.

contact outside the classroom while enrolled in HDxHS classes as well as continued contact (electronically and otherwise) after transfer and well beyond. Furthermore, and also like others, Becky had numerous long-term unattended health issues while at our college, some of which were addressed by assistance from the HDxHS environment, while others waited for student health service opportunities upon transfer to the university. While work-related problems are common barriers for many, Becky benefitted from supportive employers while she was enrolled at our college. When asked if she would have enrolled/persisted in a HDxHS setting if she had encountered such an option earlier in her educational experience, she says that she really does not know.

Doug is in his early fifties. We met him around the time we first arrived at the college (1997). Like many students that we have met, Doug had complicated family relationships, equally complicated family caregiving obligations, and obviously a suite of demanding but also quite common rural growing up experiences. He attended our college part-time for nine years while also working full-time as a school custodian (a job that has since disappeared). As with many students, he came to the college with no particular goals or expectations. He enrolled in his first HDxHS course because it fit his schedule and looked like it might be interesting. As he was to earn a final grade of C in his first course, he elected not to take the final exam so that he would be able to earn a failing final course grade with the aim to take the course again, which he did. In all, he enrolled and successfully completed virtually all of the HDxHS course offerings (20+). Probably because college was a "retreat" from other parts of his complicated life, the critical campus mythology about HDxHS courses was an insignificant part of his experience: he often said that he loved "the [course] work," noting that he thought it was good for his mental health. As his family obligations shifted somewhat along the way, he applied for transfer and was accepted to a UC campus where he graduated with high honors in two majors. In time,

he completed a graduate degree in library science at one of the top university-based programs in the nation. As family demands eventually re-appeared he has since been geographically tied once again to the limits of a rural community. As with others similarly tied, this situation results in restricted opportunities, employment and otherwise.

Louise is a foreign student now in her mid-thirties. She came to the U.S. (East Coast) in her late teens from a small rural village in her home country. By U.S. standards neither of her parents completed high school, a common feature of the adults in her native community. When she arrived she spoke two languages but not English. In order to support herself she often held down two or more jobs, working where her language would not be a barrier (dishwashing, domestic work). Eventually meeting and marrying a partner from the local area, she enrolled in our CC. During her time as a student, she depended on public transportation (difficult in rural places) and simultaneously held down several part-time jobs. She dismissed campus rumors about HDxHS courses with incredulity, explaining that it was unheard of where she came from to get the assistance provided in the HDxHS setting (assistance which she routinely utilized and tried to encourage others to do the same). While she found the language related demands in HDxHS courses difficult at first, she also believed that they helped improve her language related skills. Successfully completing 15+ HDxHS courses, she became a tutor and something of an "ambassador" for HDxHS. After successfully navigating a host of institutional complexities to secure foreign transcripts for her transfer application, she was accepted to all the UCs to which she applied (3 that we know of). Impressively English language proficient by the time of transfer, she received departmental recognition (at the university) almost immediately; she also secured on-campus employment at the university so that she could address financial concerns without unduly compromising her studies. Besides her major field of study, she began taking

another language course while at the university, which means she is now proficient in at least four languages. Encouraged by her department to apply to virtually all the top Ivy League research universities for graduate school, she was accepted by all; at least two of the East Coast institutions offering to pay air fare for her to visit prior to her decision, and also extending considerable funding options to cover the cost of her studies. Her doctorate, along with her language competencies, provides her with global employment options.

Like many rural students we have met, Louise encountered difficulties with family members while enrolled at our college. While her partner (who had not attended college) and his family were initially supportive when Louise attended our CC, her developing interests in transfer and increased knowledge of previously unconsidered/unknown possibilities slowly eroded this support. This rift eventually resulted in a mutually agreed upon dissolution during her years at the university.

Beating Odds: Rural and Community College

Those familiar with CCs and conditions in many parts of rural America will recognize that these cases represent instances of beating well-known CC *and* rural odds. As noted earlier, CCs are often a barrier to college completion and other outcomes expected of college (Bailey & Morest, 2006). And, though rural places occupy a near sacred status in the American cultural imagination, many of these settings currently offer more opportunities for floundering than flourishing for those who do not leave immediately after completing high school (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). When these two conditions are added together, as they are in the rural CC, they essentially represent a setting where there is, to borrow from a 1960s folk song, “too much of nothing.” Rural towns are one of the hardest places

to live in America and degree attainment does not appear to have the expected effects in rural areas (Flippen, 2014).²⁸

Leadership Responses to HDxHS: Less and More Strategic Ignorance

It is well known that institutions often select strategic ignorance strategies to cope with perplexing challenges that create dissonance (McGoey, 2007). Such strategies include dismissing, marginalizing, distorting, and/or discrediting unwanted knowledge and those associated with it. Since 2007, when there was considerable administrative turnover at our college, this strategic ignorance pattern became particularly prominent. Coinciding with declining public funding and increased influence of reform policies, these changes *deemphasized* student education and social mobility while *emphasizing* productivity, efficiency, and cost effectiveness (Beach, 2011, pp. 107-108; Parry et al., 2013). In other words, in the decade between 1997 (when we came to the college) and 2007, leadership supported HDxHS efforts, reflecting a commitment to institutional knowledge rather than strategic ignorance. However, in the following decade (2007-2017), this leadership pattern reversed; strategic ignorance became more important than institutional knowledge.

This shift to the “accountability culture” increasingly marginalized HDxHS courses. Although previous leadership had encouraged and supported HDxHS efforts (e.g., developing/offering team-taught courses, extensive face to face contact [30-40 office hours/week], the development of faculty websites, after-transfer support and follow-up), this pattern reversed as the institution moved in “a new direction.” Eventually, most HDxHS courses were cancelled as the institution emphasized distance education, large enrollment courses, and limited course options.²⁹

The culture also directed its ignorance-producing efforts more broadly. This involved a conspicuous campus-wide silence around “undiscussable”

²⁸ According to the County Health Rankings website, which produces annual health rankings for counties throughout the U.S., rural counties are those that tend to occupy the lower health rankings.

topics³⁰ such as unique rural conditions, student malaise, and administrative pressure for classroom “fill and retention rates.” Further, even though HDxHS courses and office hours were open at *any* time to any member of the campus community, the number of individuals doing so could be counted on one hand. Further still, when we made presentations in the community (sometimes accompanied by current and/or former HDxHS students), some audience members invariably asked, “Why is it that we have never heard about these kind of opportunities at the college?”

Although ignorance can be a virtue and is not always something to be rectified, like knowledge, it occupies space (ideological, institutional), taking

²⁹ In two related instances, current and former HDxHS students wrote letters (Spring 2015) to college leadership and asked (Fall 2016) to be placed on a Board of Trustees meeting agenda. Providing readily verifiable details about the impact of HDxHS courses on their education, the students asked for the reinstatement of cancelled courses and critiqued the institutional emphasis on distance learning, high enrollment courses, and limited course options. While an analysis of these two related events would involve a separate lengthy paper, it is worth pointing out the following: First, the events represent a strategic ignorance strategy; no one from “leadership” contacted any student to inquire further about their experiences. In fact, one student reported being verbally admonished by a board member after the meeting for participating in the presentation. Second, the events demonstrate current concerns about public institutions and the professions “serving” in them (Nichols, 2017; Sullivan, 2005, pp. 1-33), namely the seeming inability/unwillingness of “leaders” to grapple with the way efficiency priorities *both* support and undermine democracy (c.f. Dahlgren, 2009, p. 20; Stark, 2009). Third, one board meeting exchange is especially noteworthy. In response to student concerns *about education as learning, not simply meeting technical requirements toward degree or program completion*, a board member’s response was much like early white responses to African American demands for full civic participation. Though not always stated directly, early white responses were along the lines of, “you should be happy to have access to the bus, you don’t need to sit down or be in the front.” Similarly, “leadership” responses to the students essentially imply, “you have access to earning a credential, you should not expect small classes, opportunities for extensive face-to-face contact beyond the classroom, chances to fail, make false starts and take wrong turns,” opportunities otherwise recognized as legitimate routes to success (c.f. Seybold, 2014; Yosemite Faculty Association, 2017).

³⁰ Zerubavel (2006) states, “Essentially revolving around common knowledge that is practically never discussed in public, undiscussables and unmentionables that are ‘generally known but cannot be spoken’” (p. 3).

³¹ On the will to ignorance, “whether there are circumstances that change the relationship between knowing and ignorance, perhaps to the point in which ignorance becomes the most important resource of action” (Luhmann, 1998, p. 94).

us down one path rather than another. “Decisions about what kind of knowledge we want to support are also decisions about what kinds of ignorance should remain in place” (Proctor, 2008, p. 26). As knowledge is rarely value-free (Kwa, 2011), decisions about what kind of knowledge we want to support are also decisions about the values we wish to ignore or assign less priority.³² For rural communities and CCs, both at a crossroads facing an uncertain future, these represent profoundly practical matters.

CC Leadership: Re-Scripting a More Democratic Model

If CCs are to avoid becoming zones of social abandonment, those places marked by low levels of public investment and populations increasingly marginal or entirely disposable in the new economic order (Biehl, 2013), they will almost certainly be required to rethink the “loser’s strategy” (Labaree, 1997, p. 220) assigned to them by the larger culture and consider an alternative strategy. Instead of serving contradictions that exhaust resources and compromise goals, they could self-consciously assume the role of an inclusive educational institution with a clear mandate to model democratic values and prepare students for participation in a democratic society (c.f. Harbour, 2015). As our experience suggests, in spite of ideas to the contrary, such a commitment does not conflict with the liberal arts canon or general education curriculum.

Such a strategy almost certainly requires a re-scripted more democratic model of CC leadership.³³ Instead of uncritically accepting common definitions and assumptions of the accountability culture this model would involve taking moral risks by questioning these.³⁴ Such leaders must ask “to whom the new audit culture makes professionals and institutions accountable, and for what it makes them accountable” (O’Neill, 2002, p. 52).

³² According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), “to overcome the anxieties and depressions of contemporary life, individuals must become independent of the social environment to the degree that they no longer respond exclusively in terms of its rewards and punishments” (p. 16).

One of the most significant moral risks is acknowledging that the CCs have never really taken charge of their own narrative (Seymour, 2016a, 2016b). As noted earlier, although democratizing in spirit, “those who have struggled to make its democratic promise a reality have faced formidable obstacles” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 232). And, as a result, the CCs lack a normative vision that organizes and validates commitments in that direction. However, in spite of the undeniable challenges involved, now may be an optimal time for such a venture as the questionable though popular cultural belief that closing the achievement gap among disadvantaged groups will solve social and economic inequities is increasingly hard to uphold (Garner, 2016; Silva, 2013; Standing, 2014; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Thus, the CC could address some, perhaps many, of its traditional maladies and initiate a flourishing institutional debut by beginning to chart a more coherent, less contradictory, narrative for the 21st century than the one with which it has historically struggled. The following ideas sketch some of the significant, often overlapping, aspects of this re-scripted model.

The first requirement involves acknowledging how moral revolutions happen. While a substantial body of respected inquiry acknowledges the considerable power of systems (broader and local culture) and situations (institutional incentives) to shape behavioral outcomes in many settings (Zimbardo, 2008, p. 445), *leadership* (regardless of formal status) is marked by the willingness/ability to consider fresh solutions to challenges, striking

the right balance between obedience to authority and independence of choice and decision-making (Appiah, 2010, pp. 196-204; Chaleff, 2015, p. xiii; Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010; Zimbardo, 2008, pp. 444-467). A new direction requires leaders who lead more than manage and in doing so encourage and support changes in systems and situations.

Organizationally, this form of leadership would move away from models of authoritarian hierarchy in favor of heterarchy (c.f. McCulloch, 1945; Stark, 2009), or “self-organization”:

[Unlike hierarchies], heterarchies are places where multiple orders of worth are discussed and debated, and where organizational goals are understood to be in flux in response to a rapidly changing organizational environment. This is the case because new ideas, new means for enacting those ideas and citizens competent for life in a democracy, emerge from discourse and deliberation. They emerge from reflection on taken-for-granted notions about the way things are. They emerge from the design, debate, and implementation of imagined futures. In point of fact ... many of the most dynamic companies have at least partially abandoned hierarchies in favor of heterarchies. (Busch, 2017, p. 117)

While the current managerial model is associated with a frenzy of mission statements sounding more like advertisements filled with “weasel words” than statements of educational vision, leadership should craft statements that create a “structural tension” (Seymour, 2016a) between an actual state (where we are) and a desired state (where we want to be).³⁵ These should lead to strategic action to resolve the discrepancy. This means the use of “forward-leaning language” (e.g., “aspires to become”). Like other official documents, mission statements should not reflect what might be described as a Potemkin village effect – a pretentiously showy façade intended to mask or divert attention from otherwise embarrassing conditions.³⁶

³³ The re-scripted leadership model likely has more in common with what Rosener (1990) describes as “transformational” rather than “transactional.” Transactional leaders view job performance “as a series of transactions with subordinates – exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance.” Transformational leaders are characterized by “getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal” (pp. 119-125).

³⁴ On moral risk, “There is no escape: we must decide as we decide; moral risk cannot, at times, be avoided. All we can ask for is that none of the relevant factors be ignored, that the purposes we seek to realize should be seen as elements in a total form of life, which can be enhanced or damaged by decisions” (Berlin, 1998, p. 15).

Leaders should refashion institutions as bridges and beacons more than as mirrors. As previously noted, historically the CC has reflected the communities they serve; while this makes sense when communities are functioning in the flourishing range, under conditions of strain (particularly in rural areas) the wisdom of exclusively reflecting community priorities is questionable. This change in functioning would enable the CC to link to points beyond and shed light where there is little or none. In times of rapid change, these institutional beacon and bridge functions take on critical significance, acting as midwives to the inevitable chasms growing between existing competencies *and* what will be required (of individuals, communities, institutions, the society) in the near and immediate future. Such a shift *acknowledges* rather than *marginalizes* new challenges in adult development (Côté, 2000), local, national and global citizenship (White, 2009), work (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011; Hatton, 2011), including what Rifkin (1996) believes to be “the most pressing issue in the decades to come,” namely “redefining the role of the individual in a near workerless society” (c.f. Kolowich, 2017).

Such a strategy would include redefining the meaning of “community.” This redefinition, of particular importance in rural and other isolated settings, would extend beyond the parochial, distancing the CC from its often “default/better than nothing” (Draut, 2005, p. 35) public reputation by becoming a *preferred destination* for those from *outside* and from *within* the community, offering *strong launch potential* for those wishing to leave, and *revitalizing potential* for those wishing to stay. This idea has already been suggested for CCs (Levin, 2001, p. 182).

The re-scripted leader should understand and influence research. This would involve recognizing the limitations in common social science research methods (epistemic science) and entertaining a wider range of approaches (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As is increasingly being acknowledged, following the natural science model (epistemic science), compromises social science in terms of its ability to capture what policy makers and administrators claim they want to know and endorse (Ekowo, 2016; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Horgan, 2011; Kolowich, 2016). Though numbers may be pure, counting is value laden and far from pure. Thus, numbers do not speak for themselves. As a result, numbers should *begin* rather than *end* inquiry and deliberation. For better and for worse, numbers that stand out (e.g. our HDxHS effort) usually do offer good clues, even if they do not provide definitive answers. (Blastland & Dilnot, 2009, pp. 78-95).³⁷ In the case of institutional reporting, for example, numbers that stand out might be understood in terms of the Astin and Antonio (2012) I-E-O (Input, Environments, and Output) assessment model or Crick’s (2007) learning how to learn model. As these have the capacity to point out the limitations in preferred metrics, they could be used for institutional troubleshooting.

Next, leaders should forge relationships with research institutions/venues concerned with the study of social problems and social change. This appears to be a neglected area of potentially valuable inquiry, especially now. For example, as far as we can determine no CC has been included in large-scale research assessing student gains (c.f. Arum & Roksa, 2011). Also, there are no studies following a CC cohort in the fashion of the Terman (Goleman, 1995) and Harvard Grant (Vaillant, 1995) studies; and no studies envelope CCs into a

³⁵ According to the *New York Times* archive, September 02, 1916 (“Origin of Weasel Words”), the use of the term appears to originate with Theodore Roosevelt; it implies the use of deception by claiming misleading authority.

³⁶ Potemkin Village, named after Prince Potëmkin, who allegedly had portable villages constructed for Catherine II’s visit to the Ukraine and the Crimea in 1787.

³⁷ An example of numbers beginning rather than ending inquiry: Business is one of the most numerically popular majors in higher education: enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are high. However, research has found majoring in business to be associated with attributes that run counter to the aims of undergraduate education and also contradict what companies claim they want in individuals they hire (Bok, 2006, p. 303).

public health framework,³⁸ like the Framingham Heart Study (2018) or Werner's (1989) study of risk and resilience. Given the CCs size and population characteristics under evolving conditions associated with economic neoliberalism, such an approach places the CC in the forefront of important questions facing the country and the world. Many countries have embraced the idea that credentialing is a panacea for social and economic challenges associated with changing economic conditions, and many are seemingly finding what the U.S. is also experiencing (c.f. Mangan, 2012).

Finally, re-scripting efforts are encouraged to form alliances with others taking on similar issues, across disciplines and *even* institutional types. Such alliances would include but should not be restricted to the P-12 system or CCs.³⁹ These alliances could mitigate against the inevitable forces of inertia particularly within highly authoritarian settings, and introduce new vitality into the fragile state of professionalism, particularly in public institutions (Nichols, 2017; Sullivan, 2005).^{40, 41}

Because normalizing the democratic promise depends upon a realistic awareness of status quo conditions, we encourage the development of a new field, Critical Community College Studies (CCCS).⁴² Following the lead of "critical university studies," CCCS would explore how CCs came to adopt corporate methods and goals, how these changes affect educational quality and the public good, while suggesting alternative futures (Williams, 2012; c.f. Newfield, 2016).⁴³ Such an effort is likely to be challenging, outside the routine reward system for researchers, involving a willingness/ability to suspend unwritten rules about what should be studied and how (Ziliak

& McCloskey, 2008), including the bias toward short-term productivity (Voosen, 2015), exclusive commitment to representative sampling (Flyvbjerg, 2001), and simplistic ideas about disadvantage (Bourgeois, 2003, pp. 14-18).

Conclusion

Using a long-running teaching/learning effort (HDxHS) in a rural community at a time of extreme strain, this paper has demonstrated the leadership (and followership) challenges associated with an attempt to move the democratic promise of the CC away from the margins into the normative vision of CC culture. As suggested in our title (*When Management Defines Leadership*), such ventures implicitly represent the power of competing views of moral authority, one view that marginalizes the democratic CC promise and is committed to cultural contradictions, and the other view that essentially reverses these. The outcome we describe would not surprise those familiar with research on change-related movements (Jasper, 1997); when the stakes are high, as is the case in education matters (c.f. Gutmann, 1987; Stewart, 2012) there are formidable

⁴⁰ Among the other highly relevant issues for a re-scripted leadership to address include, questioning the wisdom of capitulating to student desires, faculty recruitment and evaluation, relationship with Trustees, the costs of technology, the practices associated with efforts to compensate for the public support vacuum in the U.S., and "transparency" about what students can and cannot expect in terms of the outcomes of their CC experience.

⁴¹ It may be worthwhile to consider forging for post-secondary education matters an organization like The Hastings Center, an independent bioethics research institute based in Garrison, New York. Founded in 1969 as the first bioethics research organization, the center was important in establishing bioethics as a field of study. Such a setting would enable the ethical assumptions underpinning education matters to be scrutinized by a broad range of perspectives. Consider also the Hastings Center project, *How Should the Public Learn?*

⁴² While concerns about higher education in an era of corporate-philanthropic control have been articulated (Bok, 2013), involving accreditation (p. 404), trustees (p. 46), presidents (pp. 47, 50), other officials (p. 185), as well as faculty (p. 185), there is comparative silence about such matters in the nation's approximately 1200 CCs.

⁴³ In the Fourth Edition of *The American Community College*, Cohen & Brawer (2003) write, "Educators do not solve problems or cure ills. But neither do they deliberately sell false dreams or spread bad taste. It is only when they imitate the worst characteristics of business corporations and the mass media that they lose the status the public has granted them" (p. 434).

³⁸ Given the link between disadvantage and health, involving CCs in health research seems like a good idea. See Claire Conway, "Poor Health: When poverty becomes a disease" (2015).

³⁹ Alliances might include, higher education in general (Busch, 2017; Newfield, 2016), schools of management and business (Khurana, 2007), medical health (Wachter, 2015), and the preparation of physicians (Ludmerer, 2015), as well as efforts to provide prisoners with access to higher education (Karpowitz, 2017).

forces in the service of strategic ignorance. Thus, in spite of the American cultural belief that leadership is an individual character trait independent of the forces around it, leadership is in fact intimately caught up in the forces (past and present) around it. As suggested at the start, leadership is about “entertaining visions to see beyond the programming of the past to envision a future, a task that may involve entertaining ideas that “cut against the grain of the mainstream” (Berube, 2000, p. 27); it is about working at the edge of a society’s or group’s understanding of itself (Jasper, 1997, p. 375). For leaders in institutions like CCs, assigned to a disadvantaged position (the loser position described earlier) in the institutional hierarchy, the task really “does wind uphill all the way But that is no reason to lose heart. The way up can also be the way out, toward something better” (Hecló, 2008, p. 195). As such, it is worthwhile to briefly assess how John Dewey found his way into the CC and what purpose our HDxHS efforts might serve.

The first junior colleges (the original CC label) appeared in the early years of the last century, about the time that John Dewey’s book, *Democracy and Education* (1916) was published. Dewey was writing at a time of great change in America. Much like the present, the America of the early 1900s was experiencing a new economy, increased urbanization and immigration, the pulse of a powerful but unregulated economy, and growing inequality in terms of income and wealth. “Dewey’s purpose in writing the book was to explain the kind of education needed to advance American democracy” under these emerging novel demanding conditions (Harbour, 2015, p. 7). This context informed his dual commitment to expanding access to public education while also recognizing that in a “democracy educational institutions needed to do more than offer students access and award credentials” (Harbour, 2015, p. 7).

Though Dewey was an optimist, believing that individuals could improve their democracy, he was not a naive optimist. As time passed and the Great

Depression conditions became clearer, his interest in the linkage between education and democracy grew and his focus sharpened on the problems that undermined the development of democracy in America. The result was a substantial list of threats to democracy that accompanied commitments to it in American culture (Dewey, 2008/1939; Harbour, 2015, pp. 147-155).

He came to the view that the “nation’s schools and colleges reinforced the status quo and failed to teach students how to think critically” (Harbour, 2015, p. 151). He recognized that many institutions, including education, and cultural beliefs would need to be reformed in order to achieve a better democracy (c.f. Harbour, 2015, p. 151; Martin, 2002, pp. 376-398).

Dewey provided no specifics about CC education. However, his views have much to offer in the service of improving democracy, which every democracy implicitly is ethically committed to do. “What Dewey does offer, is a set of beliefs, a coherent philosophy, and a collection of priorities and values for a group of educators disappointed with a set of aspirations that goes no further than access and completion” (Harbour, 2015, p. 159).

As we move into highly uncertain times, perhaps Dewey’s concern with the relationship between effective democracy and education is his most important lesson. It has never been more important to help individuals effectively engage with uncertainty, to learn how to learn, and to understand that education is a moral enterprise concerned with developing informed citizens capable of making informed choices and decisions. As the late Martin Haberman observed, (we paraphrase) with or without basic work skills, those who are ill informed, unable to distinguish between reasoning and rationalization, and incapable of recognizing the moral dimensions of choices are downright dangerous. They are costly to themselves and to others (c.f. Haberman, 1991, pp. 290-294). Their needs already overwhelm institutions designed to serve them, including the CCs.

Although our HDxHS effort has been informed by many of Dewey's ideas, we cannot know how much of the effort approaches what Dewey (1859-1952) had in mind. And, likewise, we also cannot know how much what we have done fulfills what Nevitt Sanford (1909-1996) had in mind when he wrote about the maximum of demand and the maximum of support. All we can say is that the two lives overlapped and seem to have much in common. Both were concerned with educational opportunity and the forces that contribute to and threaten democracy.

Our HDxHS effort has been intentionally focused on the long-standing marginalization of the democratic CC promise. With a deliberate recognition of the challenges associated with the transition from learning in the novice range to learning beyond the novice range,⁴⁴ the approach attempts to function as a "holding environment" for transformation (Berger et al. 2007), *addressing more than accommodating* factors identified as promoting the attenuated educational attainment of CC students (Labaree, 1997, p. 216; McGrath & Spear, 1991). The goal aims to assist students in overcoming improbabilities, to beat the odds against them on many fronts, odds that include the effects of rural origins and a CC start-point as well as, more often than not, a host of other characteristics.

In spite of the limitations of a personally resourced cobbled together exploratory research venture on our own pedagogical efforts, there are strengths in our data. Our work has the benefit of a time-duration (1996-1997 to the present). Much of what we describe can be verified via public institutional records as well as a substantial body of supplemental evidence that we have maintained (and will pass on to former students involved with education). Also, as CC faculty we have not been

bound by the timing and other features associated with the cultural politics of research (c.f. Baez & Boyles, 2009).

As unusual instances invariably reveal more information (than typical or average instances) "because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 78), our HDxHS efforts potentially contributes to a broad spectrum of disciplinary inquiry and knowledge. In addition to the study of agnotology, or, ignorance (Proctor, 2008), the interdisciplinary critical case literature (Flyvbjerg, 2001), emerging concerns about the risks associated with the epistemic model informing social and behavioral science (Flyvbjerg, 2006), our work may also contribute in adult development, CCs, leadership, mental health/resilience, professionalism and institutions, rurality, and, teaching and learning. Examples of work with similarly broad relevance include recently published works like, *Hillbilly Elegy* (Vance, 2016), *Educated* (Westover, 2018), and *Heartland* (Smash, 2018), earlier works like *Children of the Great Depression* (Elder, 1984), and even films like *Stand and Deliver* (Musca & Menendez, 1988) based on high school educator Jaime Escalante.

As described earlier, our effort confirms the observation by Harbour (2015) that undertakings to move the democratic promise from the margins require leadership as well as faculty. In our experience, when previously supportive leadership disappeared, our HDxHS efforts became far more difficult to maintain (only hinted at these in this paper), even in the face of our willingness to continue (largely at our own expense, economically and otherwise) and requests from former as well as then-current students for us to do so.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Perry (1999) observes, "the most difficult instructional moment for the students, and perhaps therefore for the teacher as well, seems to occur at the transition from the conception of knowledge as quantitative accretion of discrete rightnesses (including the discrete rightnesses of Multiplicity, in which everyone has a right to their own opinion) to the conception of knowledge as the qualitative assessment of contextual observations and relationships" (p. 236).

⁴⁵ For example, when there was supportive leadership at our CC we were both compensated for team-taught HDxHS offerings. However, after leadership disappeared, only one of us received compensation. Though we continued the offering nonetheless, the example illustrates the significance of both leadership and faculty investment.

What we can confirm from our experience (and that of colleagues who made similar efforts) is that reinvigorating the long-standing marginalization of the CC democratic promise likely will not be easy, even in the presence of willing/able leadership (presidents, chancellors, trustees, etc.) and willing/able faculty. It involves constantly tackling deeply entrenched uncritically accepted cultural commitments (assumptions, definitions) on many fronts (both sides of the desk and beyond). As McClenney (2013) describes (we paraphrase), it is devilishly hard to do. It is intellectually challenging, complex, emotionally demanding, politically risky, and time consuming. It demands unprecedented leadership as well as collaboration at all levels. Overall, it amounts to “transformation more than innovation, and the former is far more difficult than the latter” (p. 28).

Though we all likely prefer a smooth ride, these institutional frictions are not something to be avoided at all costs (Stark, 2009, p. 7). As we all know when taking a sharp curve while driving, we count on friction to keep us on course. “When institutional environments are turbulent and there is uncertainty about what might constitute a resource under changed conditions, contending frameworks of value can themselves be a valuable organizational resource” (Stark, 2009, p. 7) rather than a threat or a weakness.

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About the Authors

Paula Clarke was the recipient of the American Anthropological Association/Oxford University Press Award for Excellence in the Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology in 2008.

Email: clarkep@yosemite.edu or hdxhs@icloud.com

W. "Ted" Hamilton was the recipient of the CASE-Carnegie California Professor of the Year award in 2004.

Email: hamiltont@yosemite.edu or hdxhs@icloud.com