

Pink Tea to Proactive
CCET's Transition Years, 1961-1982,
as I Remember Them

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Shortly after I moved in 1961 from being a teacher at Portola Junior High School in the Richmond (CA) Union School District to serve as a supervisor of social studies teacher candidates at the University of California, Berkeley, Enoch Dumas, U.C. Berkeley's legendary head of elementary education, said to me:

Al, you should go to the next Cal Council meeting. It's going to be at Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel in October.

I looked at him dumbly and responded:

What's a Cal Council, and why is it meeting in such an isolated area as Yosemite, which is probably under 10 feet of snow?

Enoch called in Jim Stone, the director of teacher education at U.C. Berkeley, and they explained the history and purpose of the California Council on the Education of Teachers (Cal Council or CCET) and how our Dean William Brownell, and Lucian B. Kenny, Stanford's Dean, were past presidents who currently were interested in making CCET a more noticeable professional force. I didn't appreciate the reasons for their concern about CCET's future until I attended my first meeting.

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Jim and Enoch reviewed CCET's function and purpose with me on the rather taxing drive to Yosemite. They noted that the organization consisted of deans, directors, and others who were heads of programs responsible for the preparation of teachers across the state of California. CCET was funded by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, who usually appeared personally at the meetings to help chart the organization's course and receive recommendations from the members. I thought to myself, "This was no insignificant group!" Also, it should be noted that private and sectarian school leaders comprised a considerable segment of the active membership.

The jovial and witty Father Darrel J. Finnegan from Loyola University was president of CCET at the time, and he kept the proceedings moving smoothly and happily. I attended as many sub-group meetings as I could. These consisted of the leaders meeting in tight circles earnestly discussing some important agenda item. Non-members like myself were permitted to observe, but not participate, from outside the circles.

After this initial experience with CCET, I reported back to my U.C. Berkeley group, the supervisors of secondary education. My comments were inaccurately summarized in our minutes as something like this: "Al Thompson reported on his attendance of a non-meeting called by the California Council on the Education of Teachers at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite." Seeing these minutes, Jim and Enoch called Karl Scheville, the head of our secondary supervisors, and said something to the effect, "Now do you see why we have to do something about this?!" It was clear that CCET was not being understood or portrayed in a manner that Jim felt was appropriate.

Setting the Stage

These concerns about the organization's image were important to Jim because he was setting the stage for a run for CCET president. He had been active with the organization since its inception two decades earlier, and now he was getting his ducks lined up. Consequently, we spent the next couple of CCET conferences really sizing up the organization. Jim finally succeeded to the presidency in 1965 and got everyone prepared for a bang-up first meeting, again at the Ahwahnee!

I was in the act now, having developed a program at U.C. Berkeley known as "The Urban Task Force: A Program to Prepare Community Oriented Teachers for the Inner City" (UTF). The purpose of the program was to recruit and prepare teachers specifically attuned to the challenges of urban schools, and this was a topic that Jim saw as highly appropriate for his first CCET conference as President. My UTF staff

consisted of three African-American males, two of whom had been my teaching colleagues at Richmond's Portola Junior High School:

Tom Walker—Former head of Detroit's Police Juvenile Division, now teaching Portola's Title 1 pupils (mentally challenged);

Walter Winston—One of Portola's main mathematics teachers, and previously a porter for one of our major railroads; and

Greene Farmer—Formerly a Harlem Globe Trotter, now a social worker. Recommended by Tom and Walt.

The three of them were now responsible for identifying and developing teachers for the urban schools we worked with. All of this was in the background for Jim's opener as CCET's president.

Jim assigned me to gather a group of high school students from the inner city schools that were part of our program. They were to attend his opening meeting as CCET's guests at the Ahwahnee. The students were to inform CCET's membership of their perceived educational needs at our general keynote meeting, as a way to set the tone for the conference's ongoing deliberations. The students involved were from Oakland Technical and McClymonds High School, two totally African-American populated schools located in Oakland's roughest inner city area.

The night before the official opening session all of us were in our rooms. My wife Jeannette and I were in a room that happened to be directly over the area occupied by the students and their counselor. It wasn't long before we were awakened by a roar of voices coming from just below us. I quickly determined that they had the mother of all crap games enthusiastically in progress. I called down to see if I could tactfully find a way to get them to calm down without destroying our rapport.

"How ya doin' down there?" I asked.

"We're having a recreational experience," the counselor quipped. "Do you want us to stop?" he asked.

"Oh heavens no!" I responded. "It's just that my wife and I need to rest before the big day tomorrow. Do you suppose you could keep it down a bit?"

The counselor, much relieved at the avoidance of a major misunderstanding, gladly complied.

Thus the big day arrived. The CCET membership from across the state gathered for the opening conference session. Among the audience were several nuns in habit from one of the Catholic institutions involved in teacher education. They filled the front row nearest to the podium. Jim and I waited backstage with the boys. Jim gave his pep talk:

“Guys, this is a big deal. I want you to go out there and really tell them how it is for you at school.”

“Yes, sir!” replied Anthony, the student body president from one of the schools, who the group had evidently selected as their nominal leader. “That’s me! I’m ready to do that.”

Even then, I had no conception of the extent to which Anthony was going to carry out Jim’s instructions!

With the presentation emphasis agreed upon, Jim and Anthony proceeded to the podium followed by the other boys and their counselors. Jeannette and I slipped into seats beside some of the beaming nuns, who also had no way of knowing what was about to happen. In fact, I cannot, in good taste, quote Anthony’s thorough effort to tell the assembled multitude just “how it was” for him in Oakland’s school system. He used every four-letter swear word and appropriately colorful supporting phrase in the book! When he had finally finished, the public and private leaders of California teacher education sat in stunned silence and then a ripple of polite applause trickled from the group.

Jim thanked Anthony. I thought I detected a slight smirk in Jim’s demeanor when he asked the audience if they had any questions. Experiencing not a peep, he dismissed the group to attend the next function.

Jeannette joined me as we stood up front watching the crowd quietly begin to filter out. Seemingly out of nowhere, there appeared a wide-eyed flaring-haired representative from one of the more conservative sectarian schools. He began shouting:

“He hadn’t otta have done that! He hadn’t otta have said those things!!! We have women here. He hadn’t otta have done that!”

In response my very natural blonde wife, Jeannette, with just a faint trace of twinkle in her eye, looked squarely at the border-line hysteric and inquired calmly:

“Oh, didn’t you like Anthony’s presentation? I found it quite informative. Perhaps you would better understand what he was trying to convey if you came down to work with kids just like him at North Richmond’s evening study hall at neighborhood house!”

Blink, blink, went her eyes innocently as the angry critic stormed away.

That, folks, was the beginning of CCET’s shift from a “Pink Tea” society to one of political action focused on the real needs of the schools for which we were all preparing teachers. These changes continued during our next several meetings, the first of which occurred in the spring at the Miramar Hotel in Santa Barbara.

Keeping the Pro-Action Bell Ringing!

The forces for change did meet resistance within our own ranks, as this shift in emphasis did not come automatically for all in CCET. Some, like Doug Minnis, a Colorado transplant to the University of California, Davis, much preferred the organization's traditionally non-political role. He had some well-founded fears of our exposure to political retaliation if CCET became a political advocate caught in the crosswinds (or was that "crosshairs") of partisan political debate. Doug certainly had a point there, as later disagreements demonstrated. For example, during this same period, in Rudolph Flesch's book *Why Johnny Can't Read*, statistics were manipulated in an attempt to show that no less than the extreme left wing (read this as Communist Plot by Educators Sought to Make us a Nation of Illiterates) sought to determine who would be defenseless in our increasingly complex socio-economic society.

Another critic of education who really got our attention was our new State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Max Rafferty, who hit the press with his book *Suffer, Little Children*, an attack on the very public schools he had been elected to lead. During this same time Admiral Hyman Rickover, working well beyond his knowledge base, and the John Birch Society both depicted a communist under every school desk. Then, of course, the Republican leadership was reveling in the antics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who appeared to be convinced that communists were hiding behind every stick and stone waiting to jump out and seize the country.

These political forces were quite representative of the anti-education context CCET faced while seeking to become more proactive. Coincidentally, this was a situation I had personally endured previously as a brand new social studies/English teacher starting my 10-year stint as a classroom teacher in the Richmond Union School District in the 1950s. One group that had succumbed to the right-wing anti-communist frenzy was the American Legion. Their leadership was condemning UNESCO, the Boy Scouts, and any other individual or group that the attacking of which would produce a headline attesting to the legion's 110% anti-communist patriotism. In retrospect, as I reacted to the American Legion's efforts, it seems that I was almost preparing myself to become president of a proactive CCET a decade or two later.

As a teacher in Richmond I became increasingly annoyed by these attacks by the American Legion, particularly by their slash and burn tactics. The old adage kept going through my mind: "Evil triumphs best when good men do nothing." Thus, without compromising my teaching, I assessed the areas in which I might have the most impact. I selected the

California Teachers Association/National Educational Association over the California Federation of Teachers/American Federation of Teachers because of the latter's constant negative projection of our school district to our electorate. My approach was "if you can't beat'em join'em and work for change." The local American Legion post looked like the best bet here. I joined, and my membership put me in touch with community leaders. Ultimately I selected the Legion, the Boys Club, and the Latin-American Social Club as the areas where I could be most effective.

I became immediately active and quickly learned that it took only three or four members to work to change the direction of any organization, at least on a local basis. I volunteered to produce the newsletter for each group so I could steer their memberships' actions in the desired direction. The Legion, under my direction, sponsored a Citizen of the Month effort. I assumed the chairmanship of both the Americanism and the Un-Americanism Activities Committees, to assure a balanced coverage in each area. For example, while the Legion nationally was attacking UNESCO as a communist front that spread its doctrine, our local Legion endorsed UNESCO's actions and its work to promote the health and education levels of children in the underdeveloped world. As I moved from public school teaching to teacher education at U.C. Berkeley, these experiences helped me steer my teacher credential candidates towards learning how to handle immediate controversial issues in a defensible and professional way.

Developing Sensitivity

Our UTF program was again a hit at the next regular spring CCET meeting held at the Santa Barbara Miramar. The hotel provided restful and comfortable surroundings to reflect about major issues in teacher education and perhaps even do something about them. Our Berkeley contingent was primed with new insights into the problems faced by inner city kids because we had spent real time in their schools.

Our goal was to wake up our CCET colleagues who were perched snugly somewhere in the high-class suburban high schools. In addition we wanted to show people from schools serving the unincorporated areas in North Richmond as well as those in West Oakland that help was becoming increasingly available from people in teacher education who really understood urban school problems. This would be a shift from traditional "Bleeding Hearts" who purport to bring joy and money from another "Great White Father."

We tapped into CBS's 20th Century series that included the film *Marked for Failure*. Among other things, this show depicted how completely

inappropriate “Dick and Jane” reading materials were in reaching kids in Harlem and other similar urban communities around the country.

Also making an impression at the CCET meetings were my seven years of home movies of our work with North Richmond’s Neighbor House (NRNH) mentioned earlier. Neighbor House was an evening study hall initiated by Quaker “Red” Stevenson to provide tutorial help for any children (7-12th grade) who needed a quiet and secure place to do their homework. This study hall responded to the needs of the typical North Richmond home, in which a mother would have a ping-pong paddle in one hand while carrying a “toddler” braced on the other while the younger children were free to bother the older kids who wished to do their homework, and where their “quit meddling me” was not enough to ensure a quiet place of study. Our tutorial support took care of this problem.

Then a giant Ford Foundation grant really put NRHS in the spotlight. The grant allowed a sociologically-oriented social worker to make sure good communication between the schools (Downer Junior High and Richmond High) was maintained. A psychologically-oriented social worker worked in a similar manner within the study hall itself. In addition, tutoring volunteers like myself, other community volunteers, and teachers from the schools all participated by supervising field trips to such destinations as U.C. Berkeley’s computer center and cyclotron where demonstrations were made by young African-American scientists. Another field trip involved Charter Day celebrations in Berkeley’s Greek Theatre where Governor Pat Brown, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and newly elected U.S. President John F. Kennedy were featured. We also took boat trips around the bay to see almost every form of transportation developed by mankind. Less esoteric, but equally important, were visits to sewage disposal and water purification facilities. Finally, we tracked down sources for the history of Native American lore like the Princess Tampla, whose prone silhouette graced the northwest skyline of the San Francisco Bay Area.

These experiences prepared me to undertake the urban-oriented teacher education mission at U.C. Berkeley and subsequently the leadership of CCET.

Follow Up at Santa Barbara

I recognized that Tom Walker was my kind of guy as we got the UTF at U.C. Berkeley moving. Our first seminar consisted of a walk-about in the McClymond High School area the day after the Oakland police shot and killed Black Panther Bobby Hutton, as he, surrounded, walked shirtless towards them with empty hands raised. The traditional Black

community had little love for the Black Panthers because they always seemed to cause trouble that upset the peaceful façade of the McClymonds High School community. The school was known as the “Home of Champions” before the Oakland district launched an open enrollment plan that dissolved previous individual school attendance areas. The retirement of McClymonds’ beloved principal “Doc Hess” resulted in an enrollment drop from 1600 to 600 pupils. Thus it was no surprise to hear occupants of cars driving by shouting “Whitey, go home!” This was the urban context that we wished to describe and share with our CCET colleagues from other parts of the state.

At the next Cal Council meeting in Santa Barbara Tom sealed my respect when he arrived at my Miramar door all spruced up in jacket and tie, and with an expensive looking briefcase. He opened the briefcase as he inquired, “What will you have: scotch, bourbon, or martini?” From there we proceeded to our session to offer two sections each of “Marked for Failure,” my 8mm movie coverage of NRNH activities, along with a description of the Urban Task Force and its goals and objectives! Our audience was buzzing with this new information.

Then, after the last session at that conference, Jim Stone came rushing over to me in a hard rainfall, with an attractive female in tow.

“Al, I want you to meet Claire Pelton, our first real-life classroom teacher involved in CCET.”

“My God.” I thought, “CCET is actually admitting a real-life classroom teacher! The Founders will turn over on their graves!”

Claire soon proved herself to be a brilliant mover and shaker. We hit it off immediately, especially after Jim offered me an umbrella to escort Claire back to her digs in the rain. Claire and I managed to get ourselves on several accreditation teams. Her principal served as the vice-chairman for our visit to the University of the Pacific, and we co-chaired visits to Westmont College and to Long Beach State, where we jokingly gave our good buddy Dean John Nelson a bad time before handing him what he needed to make some program enhancements in direct contrast with his campus president’s wishes.

As part of the Westmont visit, we were sitting in a restaurant bar on the pier in Santa Barbara trying to compose a helpful “Final Report” to prevent the small religion-based school from getting pilloried by our WASC counterparts. I remember drafting my opening statement:

When in the course of human events, the members of one professional group are called upon to assess the performance of their colleagues....

When we got right down to it, Westmont’s wonderful selection of students

won the day for the college, with an absolute endorsement of all its efforts, “from stem to stern.” That accreditation report was concluded and published on the day of the assassination of Martin Luther King, an event that made our efforts seem pretty mundane.

The combination of urban-focused presentations at CCET meetings and accreditation visits across the state all served as excellent preparation for my days as a leader of CCET.

Berkeley to Pomona: I Try For the Board

It took a lot of soul searching for me to move anywhere from the prestigious “Cal” (University of California, Berkeley). John Nelson and I had initially become personal friends and professional twins in our thinking while we were both in the Richmond schools and later at the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Education. He then tempted me to join him at U.C. Santa Barbara as well as when he moved to the Dean’s position at Long Beach State. Needless to say I was quite flattered by John’s interest because he had become a personal and professional role model from the day when I was his first student teacher at Richmond’s El Cerrito High School. John was also instrumental in promoting me for the honor of being appointed to Berkeley’s Demonstration Secondary Summer School faculty as a history and corrective reading teacher. Coupled with my Television Trailblazer award from television station KQED and my WHO award from the California College and University Faculty Association I was certainly well prepared for a move into a leadership position in teacher education.

Also, after being a losing candidate in the local school board election, it seemed that I had exhausted options in that area. I had been prepared to stay at Cal if I had won, but that was not to be. From Long Beach, John sent me the following confidential memorandum:

Al, the Directorship of the Teacher Preparation Center is open at Cal Poly Pomona. Believe me when I say, they need you and you need them. This would be a full professorship on a 12 month appointment.

I applied for the California State Polytechnic University at Pomona position after their search committee leadership interviewed me at a CCET meeting in San Jose, and when the position was offered I accepted the appointment.

An Emotionally Tinged Move

I then felt like public enemy number one to my three daughters when I announced our decision to move to Cal Poly. After the initial throes of

the actual move subsided, our situation seemed to improve. We missed our view of the Golden Gate, but we gained a generous-sized swimming pool on horse property. Daughters Pat and Peg got to exercise an overabundance of neighborhood nags, while daughter Tina was delighted to be on her own in Berkeley while attending Cal State Hayward. To make things even better, two daughters found jobs that fitted their high school schedules: Patty in tending the lawns at Citrus College with giant mowers; Peggy on her chosen vocation of restaurant management at nearby Sizzler. Jeannette continued building a promising career in ceramics as a teacher in adult education. On the other hand I had to come to grips with all of the divisiveness in the ranks of Cal Poly.

“Marked For Failure”

It did not take me long to discover that I had been set up to fail at my new campus. The person I normally would report to, Vice President for Academic Affairs Hugh La Bounty, was on special assignment in Greece. The outgoing director left one of her social friends in the role of my department secretary. She was a delightful person, but couldn't take shorthand, a basic requirement for the position.

It took me a while to realize that I was in a position like President Obama is now, fighting against the old guard GOP which automatically opposes whatever he is trying to do even if by doing so it destroys the organization! This attitude at Cal Poly even spilled over to block my attempts to serve on CCET's Board of Directors. The multiple subject credential coordinator at Cal Poly actively spoke out against my election the first time I ran on the basis that the Council “needed a woman.” She succeeded in getting a woman elected by six votes. The lady never attended one CCET meeting during her tenure. It took me two more times before I triumphed and won election to the CCTE Board of Directors.

Back to Basics

CCET's emergent financial independence from the State Department of Education and the State Superintendent involved some final streamlining. This finalization occurred again at the Ahwahnee. State Superintendent Rafferty sent a taped message rather than appearing in person, as had previously been the custom. Word filtered back through the “underground communication system” that Max was too shocked to respond immediately to our unexpected “rebellion in the ranks.” Apparently he had never anticipated that the California teacher education community would have the nerve to seek independence from his office.

Once he realized this, he began maneuvering to get rid of CCET's newly enlightened opposition.

However, with the appointment of George Gustafson from Occidental College (horrors, my alma mater) as the executive officer of the newly created Commission on Teacher Preparation and Licensing in 1970, it rapidly became crystal clear that "good old Gus" was out to get schools and departments of education. The Ryan Act which created the Commission was in large measure an attack on the teacher education community, and the members of that first Commission were appointed by Governor Ronald Reagan, who himself was no friend of higher education. The war was on in earnest.

However, Gus soon overstepped his antagonism toward the colleges and universities his agency was created to monitor, and thus became counter-productive to the Commission. They then appointed Peter LoPresti, a man who everyone liked and related to, as the new Executive Secretary of the agency. This signaled a shift to an "era of good feeling" and cooperation rather than one of hostility that had been initiated by Gustafson. Peter became a welcome participant in CCET meetings. What a relief! But this condition didn't last long enough.

Shifting Sands

My third attempt to be elected to the CCET Board was finally successful in the mid 1970s. Soon thereafter Mona Thompson, who had proved herself a first class faculty member and program developer at Cal Poly, and then CCET President Claire Pelton masterminded my successful campaign for the Presidency in 1980. Marilyn Nye of Cal State Hayward was the other candidate and probably should have won, but she was a most gracious loser! She should have been glad because this turned out to be a tumultuous two years both personally and professionally.

Personally, Jeannette and I lost our mothers, as well as our marriage. Also, my department secretary was murdered in her office by her live-in companion who had earlier killed her abusive husband when the latter was physically attacking her.

To round out my continual problems in the Cal Poly Center, my single subject coordinator whom I had rescued earlier from scrapes with two strong women faculty members decided to turn on non-tenured Mona in order to get at me and CCET for some reason. He looked for ways to embarrass us personally and professionally throughout my CCET Presidential term.

Being CCET President was just as traumatic. My first general meeting, held at a Holiday Inn in Monterey, set the tone. I managed to

develop an abscessed tooth which was very much with me throughout the entire session. Our hotel, located on the beach, received the full force of a gale that caused the drapes behind the podium platform to stand almost straight out from the windows. A faction in the group tried to ram-rod a non-agenized item to recommend the limitation of all teacher education programs to a fifth year effort. After some vitriolic exchanges, I allowed a vote which resulted in an absolute tie, fortunately permitting me to refer the matter to a blue-ribbon committee for further study. This move expanded later into CCTE's first Self-Study.

To round out this first session, the two adjoining rooms reserved for the President (me) were not vacated by the previous occupant, a happy camper who did not return from a side trip somewhere. We had to jam his stuff into one room and my excessive baggage, most of which consisted of booze accumulated in preparation for the large presidential receptions we had in those days, into another before I could retire for the evening.

I think all of this set the tone for the next two years.

As an aside, I could hardly wait for my next Fall Conference at the Ahwahnee, where I stood assured of the luxurious President's Suite. When we arrived it was completely prepared, offering me an opportunity to really look these quarters over without being distracted. To my surprise, in an obscure corner of the great room, I found an equally obscure door. Opening it revealed a stairway which led down to the lower level. Later, I was informed that this was an entry way that allowed distinguished guests like John F. Kennedy, brother Robert, and Marilyn Monroe a more private entrance and exit. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending upon one's frame of reference, I needed no such secrecy.

“Pro-Active” Finalized

In spite of all of the infighting that occurred during my “reign” as Cal Council President, we did accomplish some major changes. Our first issue involved selecting a new Executive Secretary as Jim Cusick wished a rest from the rather arduous responsibilities. Mona was a shoo-in for the position, but she and I decided that this might cause “too much talk in the community” to the detriment of the organization. Furthermore, we felt that she would be a natural to head the new Legislative Committee which I was about to appoint as the focal group for pro-active political concerns. This enabled us to appoint Jim Hoffner, a former school district superintendent, to be our new Executive Secretary. Jim proved to be a great organizer and asset for the organization.

Another major achievement came from our Self-Study Committee

mentioned earlier. Effectively populated by John Nelson and Alan Jones, their report facilitated the organization's endorsement of a proactive political orientation. In addition, Claire Pelton developed a program for CCET to recognize and award outstanding cooperating schools and/or districts. Also worthy of mention was the institution of our own accreditation program to give any member college or university a hard-nosed trial run before the "real thing" conducted by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges or the Commission on Teacher Preparation and Licensing visitation teams.

Finally, last, but assuredly not least, Mona organized our first Legislative Committee, working with her friend Assemblywoman Marion Bergeson. The CCET committee monitored and worked to develop proposed legislation aimed to enable the organization to move toward whatever action it deemed necessary. These efforts were not without initial set-backs, however, as the CCET General Assembly at that Monterey conference refused to endorse the work of the new Legislative Committee. Nevertheless, such efforts continued to evolve over time and eventually became the present CTE Policy Committee, which Mona now co-chairs (as of 2014).

In Retrospect

In retrospect, I can look back on my rather volatile term as CCET President with satisfaction. My *modus operandi* was to set objectives and goals, and/or to react to other's proposals, and then to appoint competent people to work on such tasks and get out of their way. This seemed to work reasonably well.