

THE EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE:
A Bit of a Memoir

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THE EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE:

A Bit of a Memoir

The Experimental College at San Francisco State had a short intense 3-year history. It began in the Fall of 1965 and the California State College administration closed it down during the big strike that began in the Fall of 1968. I was centrally involved in the beginning, but I had moved on by the end. This little memoir includes some of my recollections and reflections about the beginning—how we started it and what we created.

1. Getting Started

In the Spring of 1964, the progressives on campus at San Francisco State (SF State) formed a new campus political party, Alliance Toward an Active Campus (ATAC), and scored an overwhelming victory in the student elections—the third year in a row that progressive students had won, albeit with different campus political organizations.

After that victory, we continued the process of using our control of student government and our influence on campus to launch a whole series of student initiatives that became one of the first comprehensive programs for “Student Power” in the country. Our student programs were designed to give us the opportunity to take control of our own education and to have a strong, positive impact on the world.

In the election the subsequent year, in the Spring of 1965, we ran ATAC II (Advance Toward an Academic Community). Again, we elected virtually our entire slate and I moved from being a representative on the Student Legislature to being elected as Student Vice President.

The First Classes: As Student Vice President, I oversaw the student government’s efforts to impact our education and actually create an academic community on campus. Because of that, Cynthia Carlson, a young transfer student from the University of Nevada, sought me out in the summer of 1965 to talk to me about an idea she had for teaching a seminar for freshman to help them get the most out of their education.

At the same time, I invited Tom Ramsay—the former SF State Student President who had subsequently studied community organizing with Saul Alinsky and participated in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Mississippi Summer Project—to teach a class for student leaders in community organizing.

Both classes got launched very successfully. Cynthia’s seminar was so popular among freshmen that we had to add a second section. Tom’s class included all of us that formed the leadership of student government and of our student political party.

Power: Tom began his class by talking to us about power. He said that, in America, people have tended to approach power as something negative. In Lord Acton's phrase, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." From that perspective power often comes to mean the ability to hurt one's enemies. And power is seen as a limited quantity. The more you have, the less I have.

Tom suggested that, instead, we should think of power as the ability to accomplish our aims. If different people share the same aims, then the more power one has the more the others have. He maintained that power was neutral in itself, becoming good or bad depending on the aims toward which it was applied and on the strategies that were being used to accomplish those aims.

Tom also contended that, in relation to community organizing, power came from three main sources: people, money, and information. He set us to the task of choosing a community to work with and an aim to try to accomplish.

2. Our Theory

During that time, a group of us—led by Cynthia, Russell Bass, a freshman who had participated in one of Cynthia's seminars, Mike Vozick, an older peace activist who we had recruited to come back and work on campus, and me—had undertaken an extended conversation about what we were accomplishing on campus and where we wanted to go next. Out of the conversation, we evolved a theory.

Many of us had been engaged in the Civil Rights Movement, but that Movement had recently made the turn to Black Power. Essentially, the African American leadership of the Civil Rights Movement told us to go and work with our own people and we recognized that students were our own people. So, we decided that we wanted to work students at SF State as our community.

As to what we wanted to accomplish, we began with the premise that we wanted to make revolution at SF State. We viewed ourselves as revolutionaries who happened to be students. We believed that every institution of the society was a microcosm of the society as a whole and that if we could learn how to make a revolution in any one institution, then we would have learned a lot about how to make a revolution in the whole society. We were strongly influenced by the Cuban Revolution in which Fidel Castro and his little band landed in the Sierra Maestra Mountains in Cuba, built an example of the revolution they were trying to make throughout the country, and then went on to make that revolution throughout Cuba.

We decided that making a revolution at SF State meant that students should take over control of our own education and the best way to work for that revolution was to build an example of it, so we decided to start our own college. We figured that building the example would test

our theories and, if they worked, students would learn about themselves, about how to think and feel about their education, and about how to work for positive social and political transformation. In the course of building our example, we would have to develop a language, which we could use to capture the imagination of the whole institution and we would also coalesce a base of students with a direct, deep, personal self-interest in transforming SF State and the country.

Growing out of the Free Speech Movement (FSM), some students in Berkeley had split from the University, despairing of ever changing it, and had set up their own separate Free University. While they had had great difficulty, struggling to get space and enough resources to continue, the idea of a student initiated University/College was clearly in the air.

At SF State, we controlled the large Associated Students budgets (all told, more than \$1.5 million, which was real money back then) with access to offices and classroom space. We were participating in an institution with a relative weak administration committed to student participation in decision making and most of the faculty were either educationally or politically liberal or both. It seemed like a perfect environment to try to build our example.

Many of us had been participating in “The Group,” an informal association of faculty and students that come together every so often to talk about education in general and the education we were receiving at SF State in particular. We discovered that the faculty really didn’t have a coherent philosophy of education or a coherent pedagogy. And we found out that we were often more knowledgeable about these issues and better able to discuss them than the faculty members were.

3. The Experimental College

I don’t remember who suggested the name Experimental College. None of us could ever remember. However, in the Group, we had read about and discussed Alexander Meiklejohn’s Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in the 1920-30s, so the name was current with us. We just began using “Experimental College” to refer to what we wanted to do the next semester.

The nature of the experiment with the Experimental College was, however, quite clear. We hypothesized that students could run a better college than the faculty and administration could and we wanted to test that hypothesis. Nonetheless, we didn’t feel intent on fighting either the faculty or the administration. We wanted them to support us as much as possible. We needed resources that they controlled.

Philosophy of Education: We evolved our own philosophy of education. We wanted our classes to be based on cooperation among the students rather than competition and we wanted them to be relevant to something significant in the world and to accomplish something

useful. We decided that each class should be launched by a Class Organizer with the responsibility to:

- Organize the class around some project with clear goals and a program of action.
- Work out with each of the students how their individual learning goals and process of learning integrated with the class's project.
- Acquire the appropriate teaching resources for the class.
- Make the logistical arrangements for the class.

We believed that classes should follow what we came to refer to as the Action Cycle, by beginning with a formulation of values and goals for the class and then: 1) analyzing the situation relevant to the goals; 2) synthesizing that information into a coherent picture; 3) identifying natural tendencies in the situation that could be encouraged; 4) developing a strategy for accomplishing the goals that capitalized on the natural tendencies; 5) taking action to implement the strategy; 6) evaluating the results; and 7) beginning the Action Cycle again to make mid-course corrections.

Because of all this conceptual work, we entered the intellectual process of creating our own college with some confidence.

Community Organizing: Tom taught us the craft of Community Organizing to guide us through the political process. He had us undertake a formal and informal power structure analysis of the faculty, the administration, and the students to provide us with some of the key information we would need.

We scurried around the campus politely interviewing people and discovering how much people enjoy talking about themselves, their problems, and what they want to accomplish. We brought back our information and carefully arranged it on charts around the walls of my Student Vice President's office, using the formal structure of the institution as the skeleton upon which to fill in all our information about the informal power structure.

We already knew the student power structure well, because we had built a powerful set of student alliances on campus through our organizing for student elections. We rapidly found out how the political alliances among the faculty and administration worked, which groups were most powerful, and which ones were essential for getting a favorable decision. We also identified faculty who might be willing to assist the Experimental College by offering credit, and administrators who would likely be sympathetic to our project.

After we had developed most of the classes we wanted to offer, I carefully made the rounds of the key faculty and members of the Administration that we had identified in our power structure analysis to tell them what we were doing. I attempted to show them how their participation was in their own short- and long-range self-interests and then asked their advice

and sought their support. I went in as politely and carefully as I could and actually found that most of them took to the idea pretty easily.

The Administration realized that if SF State pioneered a new model of student participation in education, it would enhance their reputation. Also, there was always the implied threat that, if they didn't cooperate with us, we might resort to the more disruptive tactics used by the FSM at U.C. Berkeley. I think they enjoyed the idea that they might at last be able to get ahead of U.C. Berkeley for once.

The strongest leadership in the faculty came from the Schools of Humanities and Social Sciences. They tended to support us because their political liberalism dictated that they support oppressed peoples and students had recently succeeded in defining themselves as something of an oppressed group. The more politically moderate faculty were led by members of the School of Education whose liberal educational philosophy predisposed them to support our efforts to make the process of education more relevant to our lives and our needs as students. The very conservative faculty had no strong leadership then and pretty much went along with what the Administration wanted.

Most importantly though, we were the only group with a very accurate current picture of the whole formal and informal power structure of the institution. As we did our organizing, our better information and our clear program allowed us to become a political force among the faculty and administration with easily as much power and influence as any of the other major groupings.

Since I had become the first student member of the Academic Senate, I arranged for the Academic Senate to include a group of students in one of its meetings and to discuss educational philosophy in general and our proposal in particular. We had done our conceptual work and organizing work carefully so we had a great discussion and the Academic Senate unanimously endorsed what by then we were officially calling the "Experimental College". They gave us a special series of course numbers for "group special study" and said we could offer credit for our courses as long as we had a faculty sponsor.

SF State had been in a long process of trying to transform its general education program and had passed a moratorium on general education experimentation, but many of the students from Cynthia's seminars wanted to continue together and organize their own general education program, so we got the Academic Senate to lift its moratorium on general education experiments and to accept our General Education Experimental Program (GEEP).

Launch: I became the first Coordinator of the Experimental College and we used my offices as Student Vice President as its first headquarters. At the beginning of the Spring Semester in 1966, we put an article in the student newspaper and added ourselves on at the end of the

registration process and reached agreement with more than 320 students to participate in the 23 classes that were being organized.

Our classes took on many different projects. For example, one of our classes designed and launched a course and teacher evaluation program that students used to evaluate classes and teachers at San Francisco State, “MAX: Maximizing Your Educational Potential”. Another one focused on Black Power and designed what became the first Black Studies Program in the country. Another one designed and launched our own newspaper. Still another one, called *Astronauts of Inner Space*, looked at the history of Avant Garde art and assisted the students to create their own contemporary examples. One studied the Peace Movement in the Bay Area and collaborated in organizing a set of forums leading up to a larger scale demonstration.

The General Education Experimental Program (GEEP) undertook a whole new approach to general education—incorporating classes in movement, group psychology, literature, and politics that the participants all took together, applying the principles they had learned in Cynthia’s original seminar the semester before. They made the creation of GEEP as a highly effective learning community their overall class project.

We used one class to continue our discussions of educational philosophy and to apply them to the operations of the Experimental College. We also brought all the Class Organizers together every couple of weeks to check in on how things were going, work on resolving any problems, and explore how to take greater advantage of any significant opportunities that had emerged.

As we were organizing the Experimental College, we made the wise decision to use an unexpected surplus of Associated Students funds to hire Paul Goodman, the author of *Growing Up Absurd* and co-author of *Gestalt Therapy*, as our own visiting professor. As anyone who knew Paul remembers, if he liked or didn’t like something, everyone heard about it and why. He had the amazing facility to be just about totally direct. He would give a clear, emotionally honest response to whatever came his way. If you made him angry, you felt the quick blast of his anger, but you could come back at him a few minutes later and get a completely fresh interaction. If he liked something you said or did, he let you know that he liked it with similar emotional intensity. He definitely liked what we were trying to do and told us and others that he did.

Of everyone I have ever met, he most exemplified the Gestalt Therapy ideal of living in the present in constant contact with emotional reality. He hassled me some for not living close enough to my feelings. I often talked about the dialectic of thought and action, each following its own track according to its own logic, but each feeding and guiding and correcting the other. He always came back at me that I had left out feeling, which was the point at which thought and action merged. He was right.

The first semester of the Experimental College turned out to be remarkably successful and an amazing amount of outstanding work resulted. Course credit is obviously how students are

rewarded on campus, the coin of the realm so to speak. We created a system that connected the ability to earn course credit to the cooperative accomplishment of important, sometimes even transformative, projects that sought to make the campus, the community, and the world a better place. Thereby, we were able to generate a remarkable amount of very good collective work.

By our second semester we enrolled 1,000 students in close to 100 courses and became the largest department on campus. We divided into a set of areas of study. Some of the classes continued what had been begun the semester before. The first Black Studies program in the country was launched as one of the areas in the Experimental College. The course and teacher evaluation program, MAX, was expanded to cover all courses and teachers on campus. The General Education Experimental Program expanded.

At the same time, very many new classes were organized addressing Third World Studies, local politics, the Vietnam War Movement, the emergence of the counter-culture, new models of scientific endeavor, new theater and dance productions, and many many other focuses. We were so successful that professors began competing to see who would be invited to sponsor an Experimental College class.

Also, that next semester, we were incredibly lucky to be able to have Saul Alinsky as a visiting professor for all too short a time. I got to learn how he formulated the theory and practice of community organizing by taking the idea of union organizing and applying it to communities. It was a wonderful opportunity to add his teaching on to what we had already learned from Tom. He was a terrific story teller and it was great fun to listen and learn from his stories and the principles he derived from them.

4. What Ever It Was

It was my turn to run for Student President of SF State in the spring of 1966 not too long after we initiated the Experimental College. I won in a landslide, getting more votes than anyone ever had, which made me the President of the more than \$500,000 a year Associated Students corporation and also the one who appointed the majority of the Board of Directors of the million-dollar not-for-profit corporation that ran the cafeteria and the bookstore.

I kept my seat on the Academic Senate and took a seat on the President's Council, the small group of closest advisors to the SF State President, and became the President of the statewide organization of student presidents, so I didn't have much time to do much concretely anymore. I just picked other people and supported them. I had to step away from coordinating the Experimental College and Cynthia became its next Coordinator.

However, one day a couple of weeks before the start of the fall semester, Richard Rosenblatt, my Director of Activities, came in to see me and told me that he wanted me to meet with

Stewart Brand, the organizer of the *Trips Festival* at the beginning of 1966, which had been the event where the Hippy underground had finally gone public. I didn't know anything about Stewart before I met him, but I liked him right off.

The Idea: Stewart wanted to put on an event at SF State and call it: "*What Ever It Is.*" He proposed that we use the event to bring together the best musicians and artists who were creating the counter-culture in San Francisco at that time. He wanted to use the entire campus twenty-four hours a day for a whole week-end, with 7 or 8 rock bands—headlined by the Grateful Dead—4 or 5 light shows, Anna Halprin and the Dancers Workshop, the huge Ron Boise sound sculptures, a television crew to feed the event back to itself and on and on.

I loved the scope of his idea and the fact that it would merge the political and educational revolution we had been trying to make at SF State with the cultural revolution taking place then in San Francisco. I had moved into the upper Haight Ashbury almost a year before, just at the time that what came to be called Hippy had surfaced and taken cultural control of Haight Street.

During that year, I had spent a lot of time in the Haight. The street had, indeed, really changed. By then many stores and shops had emerged sporting brilliantly colored exteriors and lots of new kinds of clothes and food and other products. People did, indeed, look each other directly in the eye and smile and chat as they strolled down the street. One group or another was almost always playing some kind of music on the street.

I felt like a member of this new culture and I wanted to deepen my own participation. At the same time, the parallels between the Haight Ashbury as an example to San Francisco and the Experimental College as an example to San Francisco State had struck many of us and many of the same people were centrally involved in both undertakings.

We decided to have the Experimental College and the Associated Students co-sponsor *What Ever It Is* and make the event a benefit for the Experimental College. We set up Stewart and his wife Lois with an office in Hut T-2 in the complex of student offices and he put up two large sheets of paper. One, covered with names, was entitled Fantasy, the other, mostly empty, was called Manifesting. As we came closer and closer to the event, most of the names got crossed off Fantasy and emerged on Manifesting.

Stewart said that he wanted to use Jerry Mander to handle publicity for *What Ever It Is*. He brought Jerry in to see me and we had a long talk. Jerry had done the publicity for the *Trips Festival*. He agreed to be the publicist for the event and for the Experimental College. He even agreed to be the teaching resource for a publicity and media class in the Experimental College that semester. Jerry set up interviews for us with many different reporters from newspapers, television, and magazines and the word about the Experimental College did indeed begin to go out.

Stewart produced the poster for *What Ever It Is*, which superimposed part of Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights on a photograph of the Earth as seen from the horizon of the Moon—taken during one of the early Moon shots. The poster was the first indication of difficulty. It showed naked bodies. How could SF State put out such a poster? Anticipating that this might be a problem, Stewart had made sure that he had all 8,000 of them printed before he showed the poster to anyone. Eventually, I managed to get it accepted by expending a little of my political capital with the SF State Administration.

A week before *What Ever It Is* was to start, however, the Fillmore Riots exploded in response to the police killing of an unarmed 16-year-old African American man who was running away from them. It was very strange to drive home and go past check-points maintained by national guardsmen who all seemed very young, very scared, and very heavily armed. We watched many trucks full of troops pass on our way to the campus the next day. When I got onto campus, I discovered that the SF State Administration had decided to cancel *What Ever It Is*. I went into total mobilization with our supporters around campus and then participated in a meeting of the SF State President's Council.

It turned out that the Administration had visions of hordes of Black folks descending onto the campus to burn it down. They felt particularly dubious about our decision to keep hidden the professional security guards the law required us to hire and to maintain order with an all-woman security force. During that day, I used all the influence and political capital and persuasion and force I had carefully accumulated over the past few years and finally managed to get the Administration to let the event happen if the riots cooled off by Friday. They did and the event went on.

The Event: It was amazing. For that week-end we completely took over. It was our little Woodstock three years before Woodstock. We ran the whole thing from our offices in the Huts behind the Commons (the large cafeteria structure at the center of campus). We used much of the staff of the Experimental College and the Associated Students. Everyone had walkie talkies and we all wore little mylar mirror mandalas to identify ourselves. We placed people throughout the campus and checked in every couple of minutes. A small number of us rotated being at the central desk receiving all the calls and making whatever decisions needed to be made. We kept a dozen or so people in reserve to be used as needed.

Early on the day it started, Jerry Mander had the television stations out to a press event with a band and dancing and Stewart and I gave them interviews. Anna Halprin and the Dancers' Workshop had erected a huge scaffolding in front of the Commons, and they spent most of the event climb-dancing in and out and around the scaffolding. Stewart got the Merry Pranksters to help set up and to coordinate the performances and they drove *Further*, their bus that was wildly painted in psychedelic colors, up in front of Anna Halprin's scaffolding and left it parked there all week-end.

The bands began to arrive and the people started coming in long lines. The event acquired a life and a spirit all its own and essentially put itself on. Pretty soon the light show was going in the Commons and the Grateful Dead was jamming with the Jefferson Airplane and the television cameras were playing everyone's' images up huge on the walls. Wildflower was playing in the Gallery Lounge and two other groups had gone on in the Gym. Outside, people were climbing inside the Ron Boise sound sculptures and playing them and the Dancers' Workshop continued to climb-dance and people were looking over the bus.

I felt great, but I couldn't find Stewart or any of the Pranksters. Finally, I saw them emerge from somewhere around the bus looking very strange. I went up to Stewart to ask him about some problem, but he couldn't seem to talk very well and just giggled and indicated that it would take care of itself and he went off.

I had not taken LSD yet, so I didn't really understand that many of the folks I was partnered with to put on *What Ever It Is* were now very stoned. Remembering back to it, the memories of whole event do have a kind of Acid glow. The event must have been truly extraordinary stoned. As *What Ever It Is* went on, I couldn't figure out why Stewart and the Pranksters never seemed to get tired.

We had almost no trouble. The only bit of a problem we encountered was when some of the athletes from the football team took offense at the fact that Jefferson Poland, founder of the Sexual Freedom League, had come in a yellow plastic dress. They surrounded him and were moving in to rough him up, but we were right on top of it and sent five of our prettiest security force women to the scene. Each one walked up to one of the sources of the trouble and started flirting with him. While the athletes were all diverted, I slipped Jefferson Poland in a side door to the Commons and out of harm's way.

Our Special Guest: By Saturday, we had gone well beyond 10,000 tickets sold, essentially matching the 16,000-total enrollment of SF State. Everything was going fine and then something new began to happen. A strange voice went out over the whole campus, talking and playing a guitar, with a little singing and some other folks backing this voice up singing and playing. The whole campus, which was linked into one electric network, listened and danced and wondered.

In the broadcast room of the campus radio station, a few people knew what was really going on. Ken Kesey had secretly returned from his flight to Mexico to avoid arrest on drug charges and he was leading the Merry Pranksters and the Grateful Dead in their last Acid Test before the Acid Test Graduation event which happened a few weeks later. The word began to spread, referring to him as "our special guest."

By the time Sunday morning had arrived, Ken Kesey finally brought his long singing story discourse to a close, having delivered the message that he brought back from Mexico. "Better

watch out. Time to graduate off this LSD stuff. An Acid rape is on the way. But we can learn to do it without the Acid. It just helps us open the door, but we can't just keep on standing in the doorway opening it and closing it and opening it again. It's time to move on through the door into what comes next."

Sometime later, when I read Tom Wolfe's book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, I was charmed to discover that he began the book with Ken Kesey and some of the Merry Pranksters driving to SF State for *What Ever It Is*.

The last event in *What Ever It Is* was clean up. We got hundreds of "poke sticks" and lined up and marched from one side of the campus to the other spearing paper and trash, talking about how amazing it all had been and wondering what it all meant for us. We cleaned up so well that, by Monday afternoon when I finally got back to campus, I found calls from many of the faculty and most of the administration congratulating me. They didn't know quite what had happened, but the campus was cleaner than they had ever seen it, so whatever it was, it must have been alright.

Afterwards, we referred back to the event as *What Ever It Was*. *What Ever It Was* turned out to be the biggest event to date in that first flowering of the Acid/Hippy culture. Immediately after that Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters organized the Acid Test Graduation which split the movement. The bands and the dealers definitely did not want to graduate off of Acid.

For us at SF State and in the Experimental College, *What Ever It Was* was our biggest most successful mobilization during that era. The Experimental College joined with the emerging cultural revolution and, for one weekend, we totally took over. We were all there was.

Soon after *What Ever It Was*, the campus began the two-year slide that eventually led into the big strike with mobilizations that were comparable in size but under the aegis of a different spirit altogether.

5. Defeat and Victory

As my term of office as Student President came to an end, it became clear that most of the group of us who had been the core leadership of the Student Movement at SF State since the early 1960s either had graduated or were graduating. Those of us still left also were getting pretty tired and needed a bit of a rest. We had had a good run, winning 4 annual student elections in a row, controlling student government, creating a wide array of student programs, and going some real distance toward the transformation of education at SF State.

At the same time, the Black students on campus, through the Black Students Union and the Black Studies Program and also in association with the Black Panther Party, had become the cutting edge of student leadership at SF State. The team I was a part of had some pretty tough

negotiations with the Black student leadership over a variety of issues, but both groups had held strong and come to respect each other, working things out to mutual advantage.

Therefore, when it came time to choose a candidate for student President and a slate of candidates for the other executive offices and the student legislature, the larger coalition decided to run Peter Pursley, a Black student leader, for Student President and a very integrated slate of other candidates led by Black Student Union members.

However, the fraternities and sororities and athletes had been shut out for four years and had seen a substantial portion of student fees shifted to support our progressive Student Programs. Also, they had learned how to run elections effectively by watching us beat them over and over again. They allied themselves with the old student newspaper and ran a slate headed up by one of the paper's editors who used the paper to attack us and promote his candidacy.

Also, there was still more than a little racism alive and well at SF State and there were many students who weren't ready to vote for a Black Student President.

It was a very close election but, sadly, the progressives lost and so the Black Students Union the Black Studies Program had to take on a very difficult struggle to get the resources they deserved. Ultimately this led to the Third World Strike that the faculty eventually joined.

The strike lasted for 5 months, from November 1968 through March of 1969 and led to S.I. Hayakawa being appointed as President of the institution. Virtually all the students and most of the faculty honored the strike, but Hayakawa joined with the San Francisco city government to bring a special unit of the San Francisco police force, called the "Tac Squad," to march through the campus cracking heads and arresting protestors. Hayakawa waged a media campaign, funded by money from a Chicago industrialist, attacking the strikers and maintaining that the campus was open and functioning.

At the same time Hayakawa and the statewide administration put the Associated Students not-for-profit corporation in receivership and shut down the Experimental College and all the other Student Programs.

In addition to the creative leadership of the strikers, I've always felt that the strike went deeper and lasted longer than any other campus battle in the country in that era, in part because so many students had a direct personal self interest in defending the different Student Programs and the different kinds of education that we had created at SF State.

Eventually, after a very long and bitter struggle, the Black Students Union/Third World Liberation Front won a great victory by negotiating an agreement with the administration that

secured funding and support for a Black Studies Department and a School of Ethnic Studies at SF State among other provisions.

However, there was a profound defeat embedded in that victory. The team I had been a part of was no longer active and not part of the leadership of the strike and the agreement did not include a provision for allowing the Experimental College and most of the other Student Programs to re-start, and so the experiment in education that was the Experimental College came to an end at SF State.

6. The Conversation

Looking back now, one of the aspects of that whole period that I remember most fondly was the on-going conversation that we used to provide guidance for our work. Our conversation brought together our key leaders with others entering and leaving at various times. We believed that there should be a dialogue between thought and action, theory and practice, with each having its own legitimate territory and integrity.

Our conversation was the territory of theory. In the conversation, we attempted to understand the nature of our time and our role in it. We developed a theoretical formulation of the educational revolution that we were trying to accomplish at San Francisco State and in the broader society and we formulated plans for how to carry this out. As I have indicated, we believed that, by creating a revolution in one institution, we could learn how to accomplish a revolution in a way that we could ultimately apply more broadly.

The action/practice part of the dialogue took place through our organizing efforts, the coordination of the Experimental College, the development of the other Student Programs, our election campaigns, and the conduct of our classes.

But at least once a week we would go off to the Pall Mall Bar on Haight Street, or to someone's house, or to the Commons on campus, and take a couple of hours to continue the conversation. Before each of our major undertakings, we would discuss our theory and our analysis of the situation and come up with a plan. After carrying out the plan we would do an evaluation session.

If we ran into a problem while implementing the plan, we would convene the conversation, formulate the problem, and then give the discussion completely free reign—with the hope that, at the end of it, we would have come out with a solution. It virtually always worked, and frequently the solution we came up with was much more creative than any of us could have imagined at the beginning of the discussion.

Sometimes we were transported into a sort of altered state in which the conversation became the vehicle for the emergence of what felt like a kind of group mind—much smarter and

subtler than any one or any few of us. We never knew who would come forward to say something extra-ordinarily perceptive or beautiful or effective at addressing our current concerns.

For a while, our conversation joined with similar ones on other campuses, both large and small, weaving together a language and mode of discourse uniquely apt at guiding our national and worldwide political and educational Movement. Some of us traveled, helping to grow the Student Movement. That larger conversation was the vehicle for the creation of a great deal of what the Student Movement produced that was positive and creative.

Within three years after we launched the Experimental College at SF State, there were more than 300 student initiated colleges around the nation modeled at least in part on what we had built with the Experimental College as the first example of a student-initiated and student-run college in association with an established college or university.

Eventually the conversation unraveled as the whole time declined into the politics of violent confrontation and government suppression. But I went away knowing that, even though the Student Movement eventually disintegrated, we had done something amazing.

7. Lessons Learned

There are three lessons that I took away from my experiences with the Student Movement and the Experimental College. These lessons have guided my work ever since.

Make the Revolution by Example: Our branch of the Student Movement at SF State defined ourselves by what we were trying to build not just by what we opposed.

Opposition to the Vietnam War defined much of the Movement of the 1960s and we certainly opposed the Vietnam War, but we also believed that we were making a revolution to transform the way our institutions and our society functioned. We read Che Guevara's book, *Guerrilla Warfare*, were inspired by his description of how the Cuban revolutionaries built an example of their revolution in the Sierra Maestra Mountains in territory they had captured as a way of testing their ideas and showing the rest of Cuba what they were trying to accomplish. So, as students, we decided to build an example of the revolution in education that we were trying to accomplish.

Reflecting on the successes of the Experimental College led me to formulate this first lesson as Revolution by Example. If you want to make a significant change, start out by being the change. Mohandas Gandhi, the great prophet and leader of the Indian revolution, formulated this principle as "the means are the ends in process." If we create a really powerful example of what we want, it can sing to other people and can spread like the way crystallization happens

when a seed crystal is dropped into a super-saturated solution. I have been guided by the principle of Revolution by Example in most of what I have done since.

Push a Negative Hard Enough and You Can Turn It into a Positive: When Saul Alinsky, the prophet of community organizing, accepted our invitation to be a visiting professor for a short time with the Experimental College during its second semester, I was already quite familiar with his body of work.

So, when I started studying with Mr. Alinsky himself, I already knew about his approach to: power as the means to accomplish your ends; formal and informal power structure analysis; the role of the community organizer; beginning with people's self-interests and then weaving them together into a common interest; and always organizing before you mobilize.

However, as he told his stories and gave us a much deeper appreciation for the nuances of community organizing in different situations, I was most struck by one of his central premises that I hadn't encountered before. "If you push a negative hard enough, you can turn it into a positive." And the corollary, "If you push a positive too hard, it will turn it into a negative." It's hard to communicate how important this principal has been in my life since. Pretty much every time I've encountered a difficulty or a setback, I've tried to take a good, hard look at it, "push it," to see how I could make it turn into something good.

Later on, when I studied Aikido, I realized that this martial art was a physical and energetic expression of Alinsky's principle. In the practice of Aikido, over and over, an attacker comes at you with some kind of punch or grab. First, you blend with that attack and then redirect it into a pin or a throw. You turn the negative into a positive. Taoist Philosophy is based on the interplay of positive and negative and you can see the whole I-Ching oracle as a way to turn negatives into positives and avoid turning positives into negatives.

I deeply appreciate both Aikido and Taoist Philosophy, but when I face a difficult problem, I still hear Mr. Alinsky saying, "If you push a negative hard enough, you can turn it into a positive." And, when something very good happens to me I also hear him cautioning, "If you push that positive too hard, you will turn it into a negative."

Learn the Craft of Business to Put it in the Service of Economic, Social, and Ecological Justice: After some significant reflections, I came to recognize that most of the Student Movement, and the Movement of the 1960s in general, had made a serious mistake by defining business as the enemy. I realized that business is a powerful tool, not unlike a knife or a hammer or power itself, which can be put either to good or bad uses. It is certainly the case that some businesses have used the craft of business to produce some very bad results, making money by exploiting people and the environment most cruelly.

However, if we define business as the enemy, we have a very big enemy. At the same time, we make ourselves irrelevant or in opposition to much of the way people earn their livelihoods and

live their lives. And there are many examples of businesses that have produced and continue to produce some very good results for their customers, their workers, their management, their owners, and the communities where they are located.

Therefore, I decided to “Learn the craft of business to put it in the service of economic, social, and ecological justice.” That injunction has become a mantra for me for the rest of my life and a lesson that I have attempted to use to guide me in my work life ever since, as a leader in the worker cooperative, socially responsible investment, and sustainable economic development movements. Many of these efforts have had some of the same type of ramifying impacts that the Experimental College had, but that’s another story.

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