

PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL SECTION “MICHAEL A. PETERS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP”

MICHAEL A. PETERS

mpeters@waikato.ac.nz

University of Waikato;

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

I started writing a Preface that became a study in a genre that is defined as the novel of educational self-formation together with the various other kinds of literature that this genre – the *Bildungsroman* – generated that focused on the question of self-transformation. It was evident that the *Bildungsroman* developed as a genre in the air of German idealism and in relation to the same philosophical concerns that informed the Humboldtian university. The specific form of the novel of educational self-formation was primarily a story of ethical self-constitution. Both and genre and the institution seemed to belong to the same universe. Today in many parts of the neoliberal world this ideal and sentiment – this vision of education – seems hopelessly quaint and out of place. Philosophy is no longer the centre of the institution and the humanities are rapidly shrinking. Subjects like theology and philology have mostly disappeared; the study of literature holds its ground but often given way to media or creative studies focused on web design. The professional schools like engineering, law, medicine and teaching seem to be doing well but the big winners in the current environment are business, technology and science even after the global financial crash.

When one thinks of the crude comparison between the Humboldtian university and the neoliberal university in terms of the question of leadership and in relation to the question of educational self-transformation there is no question that only the first has a respectable or philosophically literate answer. The neoliberal university has a business plan and still operates on borrowed liberal rhetoric but really has nothing to offer than more efficient technology-enhanced learning that is in the service of national innovation and international competition. At a point where the university desperately needs a philosophical orientation to the education of global citizens and ethical leadership to match in order to tackle major world problems of climate change, sustainability, world poverty, discrimination and social justice in

relation to the rights of minorities, it is least able to provide or generate it. Generally all that it can manage is the sterile script of the strategic vision or plan. Leadership has been reduced to management and management has been reduced to managerialism – line management based on blind obedience with fewer forums for dissenting views.

My guess is that the neoliberal model will become less and less effective and desirable as the world edges towards its ecological threshold and the population at large realizes that universities have little to do with anything more than technical skills that provide some employability. There are as yet no clear alternatives as university administrations rush to emulate the top ranking universities. The visions of the postcolonial university, the indigenous university, the ecological university, and the humanities university cannot be defined in terms of rankings but only in terms of philosophy.

It goes without saying that these essays are offered in the spirit of the Humboldtian university and its successors that are able to imagine a world beyond the neoliberal consumer-driven university.

Copyright of Psychosociological Issues in Human Resource Management is the property of Addleton Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.