Editor's Page: Celebration – the 4th Stage in the Education Cycle?

Libby V. Morris¹

Published online: 24 May 2015

© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2015

Countless peer-reviewed articles focus on the importance and process of planning, implementation, and evaluation to create and revise educational programs. In addition, hundreds of books focus on goals, measurable objectives, learning activities, and assessment. The authors show how structured planning and evaluation practices can improve programs and thus teaching and learning. What struck me recently was how little we know about the relationship between celebrations and educational outcomes. What role does celebration play, if any, in motivating learning or in achieving goals? Does the idea of a future celebration affect planning or implementation of activities? This observation came about as the Institute of Higher Education (my academic home at the University of Georgia) prepared to celebrate 50 years of teaching, research, and public service.

First, a little background: the Institute of Higher Education was approved by the University System Board of Regents in 1964 following constant advocacy by UGA President O.C. Aderhold to establish an “Institute of Higher Education and Research” to serve the institution, the state, and the region by conducting institutional research, recruiting and training faculty, and working with other institutions to improve higher education overall. With this clear charge and direct support from the President’s office, we were off to fine start. Today, more than 200 Ph.D. and executive Ed.D. alumni serve as presidents, vice presidents, researchers, directors, and faculty members in colleges, foundations, and agencies nationwide. As we reviewed the past 50 years, dug through old files and photos, and reached out to close and distant colleagues, we created a shared story and a sense of ownership for “our accomplishments.” (See <http://ihe.uga.edu/anniversary>.)

Many alumni returned for the 50th anniversary to serve on panels and to network with students and colleagues. Current students looked up from their graduate research responsibilities on NSF and Foundation awards to learn about the Institute’s history and to meet those alumni who exist in the lore of graduate education. Adding to the historical review and illustrating the missions of public service and college teaching were participants in our

✉ Libby V. Morris
lvmorris@uga.edu

¹ Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, 102 Meigs Hall, Athens, GA 30602-6772, USA

longstanding programs of Faculty Development in Georgia and the Governor's Teaching Fellows Program. Full of youthful enthusiasm, the advisors staffing the recently launched Georgia College Advising Corps, a near-peer college access program, joined in the festivities and gave us a glimpse into the future. People and programs abounded.

How did we celebrate? In a nutshell, we started the year with a birthday party on the lawn of UGA's historic north campus. President Emeritus Charles Knapp read a proclamation from Georgia Governor Deal proclaiming our virtues and naming August 27, 2014, as Institute of Higher Education day in Georgia. This celebration built community (an important part of learning) and showcased our programs and accomplishments over the years. The kick-off was a fine 50-year assessment—it required cake and champagne.

More challenging was looking to the future. We now knew where we had been, but where should we go? In the fall, we convened a roundtable of scholars from leading higher education programs to discuss the status of postsecondary research, emerging issues, and priorities in educating the next generation of scholars and leaders. We celebrated with and learned from longtime friends and accomplished colleagues; this celebration deepened our ties.

A two-day anniversary conference in the spring brought our year of celebration to a close. Current and former Institute faculty and invited colleagues focused on issues of student access and success and on evolving U.S. and international higher-education institutions. Alongside our scholarly endeavors, we shared stories from the past, challenges in the present, and ideas for the future mixed with a hefty dose of laughter and camaraderie.

In retrospect, our 50th sounds fairly straightforward; however, the planning required months to weave together our longstanding scholarly interests with appropriate celebrations. The events were not just a party or routine roundtable or conference. It was the 4th stage in the educational process of Planning-Implementation-Evaluation: it was meaningful Celebration. To celebrate is to bring public awareness to one's activities, to announce that some standard has been met. Partying is easier than celebrating. A pizza, a libation, some friends and it's a party. Celebrations demand more. Celebrations require reflection and some degree of attainment.

Our yearlong celebration reaffirmed our mission and was met with great enthusiasm and kudos. We felt good! We might ask, however, what role do celebrations actually play in educational endeavors? I don't recall seeing any peer-reviewed articles in the educational literature on celebrations as part of planning, implementation, or evaluation. Celebrations could be more than an afterthought. Celebrations could become a structured part of the feedback loop in Planning-Implementation-Evaluation. I wonder what a student who finishes his Ph.D. degree and chooses "not to walk" is thinking? Have we failed to incorporate celebrating into our ideas about scholarly activities? Do we have any evidence to demonstrate the lasting value of educational celebrations?

You probably have many reasons to celebrate; but, like us you probably plan, implement, evaluate and then rush back into the next set of activities and programs just as we do. What role should we give to celebration? Where does it reside in our educational values? I will think more about this. I hope you will, too.