

NSEE HERITAGE TALKS

A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN S. DULEY

*Professor Emeritus at Michigan State University
NSEE Founder, Pioneer, Distinguished Scholar and Past President of NSEE*



John S. Duley
October 1, 2014

NSEE Pioneer and Distinguished Scholar John Duley took time out at the 2014 NSEE annual conference in Baltimore Maryland to talk with NSEE Board Members Jill Burya and Scott Blair about NSEE. In this latest installment of [NSEE HERITAGE TALKS](#), Professor Duley shares memories about the founding of NSIEE in the early 1970s, about the excitement and atmosphere of the early annual conferences that included Jimmy Carter and Ralph Nader, about the active research agenda the Society carried out over the years, and about the importance of the affective domain of personal growth and development in the coming era of experiential education. See "Photos from the Archives" below.

Thank you, Professor Duley, for joining us today here at the NSEE Annual Conference. Let's start at the beginning. What can you tell us about the people who launched NSIEE back in the 1970s?

We were all marginal in those days. There was no tenured faculty among us. We were Student Service personnel or running programs that had very little standing or visibility. There were a number of theological trained people and not many PhD's in the field at the time. Gary Hesser, Dwight Giles and I were Union Theological Seminary graduates and Bob Sigmon was at UTS for a year. It was an interesting group of people from very diverse educational backgrounds: a group of people that had compassion and an interest in social issues.

Jim Finney was teaching sociology at New College, Sarasota, Florida. He realized, in the course of his work, that there were a number of new developments in higher education that were partially a result of the dissatisfaction of undergraduates in the lock-step style of education. He got a grant from the Lingle Foundation and visited a number of these institutions, inviting the directors to come to Sarasota for a conference to discuss what could be done for this work. The conference was held in February 1972.

Were students involved in the establishment of NSEE?

We were trying to get students involved, but it didn't provide continuity since they only came one time. However, there was a student from Friends College, a Quaker school, who was at the initial conference and he provided a valuable historical perspective regarding the American Friends Service Committee's Work Camp experiences. The one exception to the lack of student participation was Pamela Tate who attended the second conference, later ran her own program, joined the staff of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL), and now directs its national program.

How did you manage the first few conferences, since it was entirely run by volunteers?

I am glad you asked that question because it is important for more than the conference planning. Our first President, Jim Finney, insisted that we not hire a staff person: that we assume full responsibility for the life and work of our organization. That stance was a major factor, from my point of view, that assured that NSEE would be a "movement" and not an institution. The four years we were without a staff person gave us all a sense of ownership such that even when we hired a staff person, we were still responsible for its life and work—and we fortunately hired Jane Kendall, who worked with us with that understanding.

Bill Ramsey, who was in charge of the Work Program at Berea College, a program built on experiential learning, served as the chairperson of the Planning Committee of the first Conference. Bob Sexton, Director of the Internship Program at the University of Kentucky, a person from Hofstra University where the conference was held and I made up the rest of the committee.

Did you present at the first conference? Tell us more about the first conference.

Yes, I gave a workshop, an experiential one which I had planned with the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont. We set up two rows of chairs up back-to-back and when some of the conferees saw the set-up, they decided they would probably get more out of the lecture which was scheduled for the same hour. Not all of us are risk takers!

It was a good conference, surprisingly well-attended considering the fact that we had just gotten organized in February and the conference was held in the fall. The fact that there were about 70 attendees shows that there was interest in innovation and doing things differently. We had a receptive audience who gave us positive evaluations.

Describe the NSEE members of those days.

What was so powerful about the Society in those days was that we were just a bunch of people that needed help and if we had any ideas we didn't protect them, we shared them because we needed all the help we could get. We were wandering around in the wilderness. It was a marvelous experience and a deep sense of camaraderie since we were a group of people working together on new directions for higher education.

Do you think that experiential education was born of its age since it was the 60's and early 70's?

Definitely... so maybe it was a time that it was bound to happen. It was a time when students were challenging the system and it just came at the right time. I think that the stage was set – the civil rights movement, the freedom summer etc.

What was the second conference like?

The second conference was the one I hosted at Michigan State University. I think one of the factors that helped NSEE gain some recognition was that I asked every presenter to write a paper describing his or her workshop and its relationship programmatically. Shortly after I had collected all of the papers, I was at a Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) conference. At that time Jossey-Bass was publishing a journal called "New Direction in Higher Education" and the Editor was at the conference. I learned that he had invited two highly respected academics to edit the next volume but they were unable to take on the responsibility at that time. I told him about the papers and he invited me to edit them for the sixth issue of the Journal. By this happenstance we got some visibility in a prestigious journal.

From your perspective, how did the Society gain strength at that time?

There were many aspects that gave the Society visibility and strength, which included various published papers and manuals. I can only speak directly from my own experience but know that many colleagues had similar professional experiences. Dwight Giles, Tim Stanton, Jane Permal,

Sharon Rubin, Mary King, Garry Hesser come to mind and there were many others who advanced the cause of NSEE through their professional careers. Two other key players were Jane Kendall who served as our staff beginning in 1975 and Tom Little. In 1974, at the annual conference in Atlanta, we completed a merger with the National Internship Institute (NII) based in Washington, DC. At that time, NII had a part-time staff person who worked for a government agency. We were required to make a decision regarding the employment of staff. I was serving as chairperson for the Steering Committee of the new agency. In a meeting in Washington, the Steering Committee, after much discussion, hired Jane Kendall and established an office in Raleigh, North Carolina. Jane saw her role as the fulfillment of the stated Mission of NSIEE and did a superb job. Tom Little who worked part time as a Field Representative for CAEL and was an active participant in the newly formed NSIEE. Tom had very good connections with the Fund For Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) and secured several grants from the Fund for NSIEE including the establishment of an extensive Resource Center and the writing and publishing of the landmark publication, *Strengthening Experiential Education in Your Institution*, and the funding of workshops and consultations using this book by trained members of the Society at numerous institutions. FIPSE also published a journal, *Synergist*, to which several members, including Bob Sigmon, made significant contributions. The frequent appearance of articles by members of NSIEE helped strengthen our work.

Because of my leadership in NSIEE I was asked by Morris Keeton, Director of CAEL, to represent "Sponsored Experiential Learning" on the CAEL Board. This provided me with the opportunity to write and edit some CAEL publications which also, I think, helped NSEE's growing strength. In addition, I received faculty status while at Justin Morrill College (JMC). In 1976-7 I chaired a committee in JMC to design and successfully implement a pilot competency based experiential learning degree program for 30 non-traditional students who graduated, were promoted or went on to do graduate study. The University decided not to continue the program because it involved "assessment" and not teaching. Shortly after the completion of this project I was granted tenure and transferred to the Office of Learning and Evaluation Services as an Instructional Development Consultant with special responsibility for working with faculty offering college credit for experiential learning. From 1978 - 1982 I also served as the director of Project Learn of Michigan, a state-wide CAEL project funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to assist Michigan colleges and university better serve non-traditional students. These professional experiences, mine and those of other members, are factors that gave NSEE credibility and visibility.

Tell us more about the third conference.

The third conference was in Atlanta. Jimmy Carter spoke at the conference in Atlanta and we had Ralph Nader at the conference as well. It was high profile and well done. At this conference, the agreement for the merger of the Society of Field Experiential Education and the National Institute on Internships was signed. I remember riding around Atlanta with Keith Lupton (Director of the EE program at the University of South Florida) looking for a notary to notarize the Agreement.

Those factors I think had an impact on the viability for what we were doing. Governor Carter was running for president so it was fortuitous that these things happened and we took advantage of them.

What was so different about experiential education research at that time?

I am not qualified to speak to this issue; Dwight Giles has more hands-on experience in this area. I think we were just scratching the surface in these early days.

Where would you like the society to go? What is the next new era for NSEE?

There are two areas I hope the society will continue to emphasize and explore: First, Experiential Learning has the ability to empower ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things—but only if the affective domain of personal growth and development is given full play. (See Lee Schulman's Tables of Learning). The work must be collaborative—one of equal learning relationship, not a situation where there are providers of services and needy recipients. There must be "engagement" on the students part—that means "ownership" of the project so "active learning" is involved. The student must seek to acquire "understanding" of the context of his or her work. - Not just facts about the

agency, but an empathetic understanding of the context, “walking a mile in the shoes” of your collaborators.” During and after the project there must be serious, in depth reflection on what impact the experience had on the student’s values and world view, his or her values and attitudinal dispositions that are and were operational during the project, how important are they to the student? Should they be continued and made a permanent part of his or her life, and should a commitment be made to continue living this way? (Please see the first issue of the Society’s journal, “Perspectives.”)

Second, there is a growing movement among some faculty who are involved in civic and community engagement research which is closely related to the Service Learning Movement. I would hope that we as a Society would find ways to relate creatively to these faculty members. We have much to learn from them.

Thank you, Professor Duley, for sharing your memories and insights with us today. Do you have any final words about the heritage of NSEE?

We need to reclaim our heritage. Our work can be life transformative, but it is only possible if we work in a way that the ownership of the service/learning process belongs to the students and it challenges them to re-evaluate their values. We have a great opportunity to empower ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Let’s maximize it.

From the Archives!



MS. Megan Boyne of Northwestern Mutual Financial Network, a long-standing supporter and sponsor of NSEE, presents the 2009 Experiential Education Pioneer Award to John S. Duley at NSEE’s 38th Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas. (Photo: © 2009 Scott Blair)