

Transformation and the Professional Military Education System

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“We should remember that one man is much the same as another, and that he is best who is trained in the severest school” Thucydides

The efforts toward transformation of the Professional Military Education (PME) system of the United States Army have made progress toward the desired goals, matching the positive results of transformation in other areas. Unlike some of the other facets of transformation, the majority of our PME systems did not begin its rebuilding until well after 9/11, almost three years into the Global War on Terrorism (Crawley, 2007, pg 2). Because of this, we have incorporated many of the lessons learned from our young leaders and their experiences in a hostile, asymmetric environment in the developing NCOES lesson plans. The basic restructuring of the Army’s PME began at the junior levels of development and is progressing upward to the more senior levels. This emphasis correlates to Leader Development and Education, one of 17 focus areas presented to Congress by Chief of Staff GEN. Schoomaker in July of 2004 (Miles, 2004). As GEN Schoomaker stated, this is a critical element of achieving a ready and relevant force to win the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

PME is a very important part of officer development. One of the earliest efforts towards transforming our education systems was the implementation of the Basic Officers Leaders Course, or BOLC. Rowan and Scherer (2001) stated that this training promotes a concept of the “Army officer”, not “an engineer (finance, artillery, and so forth) officer.” This reinforces the warrior ethos, that every Soldier is a warrior first, not just those in the combat arms branches.

It is important to realize that the basic courses that newly commissioned officers attend are not poor, nor inadequate. The whole concept behind BOLC is to add another layer of training, reinforcing the idea that better is just better. The layered structure of BOLC demonstrates a new precept of bottom up instead of top down development, a driving concept in our transformation of the PME. This attitude places leadership development at the formative stages of their careers, a decided change from pre-transformation doctrine.

In October of 2005, the Army took its first step in transforming the Non Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). The Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) became the Warrior Leader Course (WLC), a direct result of the recommendations of the Army Training and Leader Development Report or ATLDP (2002). According to the report, the basic Army top down training strategy had resulted in a gap between the accepted collective training concept for larger units and the individual training model that was vital to Soldiers and small units.

“The NCO’s role in the Army’s leadership, training, and operational doctrine is right. The Army must adapt its leader development programs to provide greater conceptual and interpersonal skills NCOs require in full spectrum operations in the contemporary operational environment.”(ATLDP, 2002). The Army felt that the best way to refocus the foundation for its junior enlisted leaders was to revamp their first formal leadership training experience. As outlined in the ATLDP, the Army’s goal was to move toward a modular force at all levels. This premise supports the role of the NCO as a small group leader first, training and leading Soldiers at the most basic level.

While the changes in PLDC/WLC seem to support the trend of transformation, this is by no means the end result of the effort. Recently, feedback from the field has prompted even more adjustments to the basic leadership course to support further transformation (CSM Lonny Wright, personal communication, October 1, 2007). One of the most striking changes implemented in 2005 was the focus on battle drills and the new Warrior Task list. Reports from the operational Army suggest that these changes may have been at the expense of more structured leadership training, primarily training management at the small unit level. As a result, there are changes in the works that will allow adjustments to correct this trend. This process displays one of the key precepts of transformation, flexibility.

PLDC/WLC was the first transformation process in the NCOES structure. Many other changes are in the works, revising the current Basic NCO Course, Advanced NCO Course, and the First Sergeant Course. The stepping-stones relevant to transforming the NCOES system focus on high payoff initiatives that enhance the training and more importantly, the leadership development of enlisted leaders (Schoomaker, 2004). Other tenants of development mentioned in GEN Schoomaker's report are leveraging technology such as distance learning and web based applications, and standards based assessments and feedback such as periodic tests that validate the self-development template of future NCOES functions.

Other NCOES changes that support transformation are revision of the Basic NCO Course as the Advanced Leaders Course (ALC), with a focus on MOS technical skills at the squad and platoon levels. The Advanced NCO Course will become the Senior Leaders Course (SLC), with an emphasis on technical skills at the platoon and company

levels, including critical skills that are required as a First Sergeant. A new tool, the Army Career Tracker or ACT, will manage all these changes. This career management tool uses a Soldier's training and assignment history, as well as formal and informal education events to give supervisors visibility and mentoring opportunities to better develop leaders at all skill levels (Crawley, 2007).

Transformation of the Army is a huge and many-faceted task, involving practically every one in both the uniformed and civilian force. An adequate judgment of success is not possible until some time in the future when there are solid, quantifiable results to analyze (Gutman, 2000, pg 116). The entire transformation process of the Professional Military Education system is an arduous, expensive task, maybe even questionable due to no apparent breakdown in the legacy system. No glaring failures caused the focus of transformation on the PME. In all likelihood, the Army could continue in the pre-transformation format and be completely competent. Nevertheless, in order to produce even better leaders at all levels, the application of transformation went forward in PME and is continuing to evolve.

The one paramount feature that transformation has brought to the forefront is flexibility. Regardless of what the content of transformation is, the underlying strength is flexibility. The basic argument facing transformation of the education system is not if it has or will produce the desired result, only that the goals and objectives identified as being critical are identified and addressed. The efforts toward transformation of the Professional Military Education system of the United States Army have made progress toward the desired goals, matching the positive results of transformation in other areas

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