Learner-directed choice is central to the process of educational achievement.

Quality and Access in Lifelong Learning

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The issues of programmatic quality and student access have always been of concern to higher education professionals. The quality of education is always under suspect when it is provided under any term not a part of the established and academic tradition. Rather than view change as an ongoing and integral part of our academic tradition change is generally viewed with suspicion and dread. Much can be said for the qualities of permanence and certainty that permeate higher education. Institutions' reputations and programs are based upon an ongoing assumption of credibility and predictability. Much of the credibility is based upon a common understanding and a common value set. Whenever terms such as "non-traditional," "lifelong learning," or "life span learning" emerge in our academic vocabulary they are immediately suspect due to the nature of that tradition. This suspicion is both natural and predictable.

As concepts and terms are developed they emerge in an undeveloped form, a concept waiting to be changed. As with all terms that emerge in higher education they demand an explanation and a precise definition. The physical world is easily divided, and to a large degree, explainable by defined terms: chemistry, physics, etc. Even subheadings of these fields of study are defined and understood: quantum physics or geophysics. They are part of an extension of defined disciplines long established in an academic tradition. Although disagreements might emerge within the field about minor details the definitions are easily agreed upon.

In the field of human endeavors this easy understanding is not achieved without strain or conflict. New terms that emerge are under immediate scrutiny and change based upon the background and expertise of the interpreter. They are made to fit a human interaction concept modified to accommodate the situation. In other words, they may be terms of convenience, descriptive to some extent, explainable, but certainly changeable. "Lifelong learning" may or may not be "life span learning" and either curriculum may or may not serve "traditional" or "non-traditional" students.

I am reminded of a dilemma that faced the field of home economics during the past decade. It seemed clear to some of those in the field of home economics that the very name of their field did not adequately define their scope or role. In their search for a new name "human development" and "human ecology" emerged. Terms of convenience, immediately under scrutiny and subject to local interpretation. The field has yet to emerge from the loss of identity, and the changing definitions have fostered questions of overlap and conflict among other traditional departments that may have an academic interest in the term development, ecology or even human.

This is not to argue for using only established terms. It is an acknowledgement that when alternative language is utilized we must understand its impact upon an established academic community and its view of quality. When we speak of access or quality in lifelong learning we are certain to create problems of interpretation and definition.

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Student Access and Quality

It was only a short 10 years ago that the shadow of the Bakke case began to be cast over the process of admissions to, and the manner in which, people are judged to be fit for higher education, the previous 30 years had produced a variety of programs, support mechanisms, and criteria by which admission of individuals to higher and continuing education programs could be judged. The Bakke case, although focused upon race as a criterion, provided the first brick in the new wall of admission restraint. Institutions began a search for more cognitive data to apply to admissions. This search produced an ever increasing reliance upon the established precollegiate testing programs, ACT, SAT, and the College Boards for undergraduate admission, and on the graduate level a reliance upon the GRE and Miller Analogy. Admission based upon data easily provided and, on one level, indisputable. A pattern well within the tradition of higher education and understandable to professionals in the field.

Winston Manning in his insightful Carnegie Report of 1977 stated:

> Bakke has cast a cold and relentless beam of light upon an area of institutional policy making—admissions—that has for far too long lingered in the shadows. It is not merely for the benefit of applicants that admissions policies and procedures need illumination. Rather, the gatekeeping function of higher education requires that connections between stated institutional missions and goals on the one hand, and admissions policies and procedures on the other, be understood by the various constituencies the institution serves. Some process akin to accreditation may be needed, in which an institution's admissions policies, procedures and practices are documented, carefully assessed, and publicly evaluated by independent authorities. If the pursuit of fairness in admission to higher education is to have lasting practical significance. . . . Admissions—no less than other areas of educational policy—should demonstratably express the values of the larger society, not at the level of broad generalizations, but at the level of specific working principles (Manning 1977, p. 41-42).

It should be evident that no one incident or ruling, no matter what its import, could possibly shape a national higher education policy. The implication that Bakke shaped the admission criteria for the last 10 years, is to ignore the second and probably most important factor, public policy and belief. If higher education is now in a new admission paradigm, that paradigm must meet current social policy and social commitment.

It is here that adult and continuing education professionals must acknowledge that the '80s has produced that new paradigm. This newer paradigm may be in direct opposition to the general consensus within their professional field. The established stated consensus, as reflected in the literature and practice, has been that access is the cornerstone to educational progress. A field as diverse as adult education produces few common generalizations, these generalizations once formed, however, become the basis upon which a common understanding of the field of practice is judged. The literature in adult education and continuing education clearly indicates a learner centered, learner directed education format. In this regard, learner directed choice is central to the process of educational achievement. The very choice of terms within the field leads to this conclusion. Terms such as self-directed learning and non-traditional learner are both commonly utilized and broadly interpreted. They indicate that "traditional" denotes a set of criterion that when applied to other than typical high school direct entrants, falls short of providing the necessary options. The choice of terms such as non-traditional free educators from interaction with "traditional" social norm influences. The definition of "non-traditional" however is left to the imagination of the educator providing the service. The older definitions that rely upon age as a definitive factor fall short in light of the demographics of the eighties. In 1980 over one third of all college students were over the age of 25 and by the year 2000 there will be an excess of 20 million adult students (Betters-Reed 1980).

The definitions such as non-traditional or lifelong learning seem to serve the purpose of escaping the traditional academic social norms. To be defined as non-traditional is to be allowed the opportunity for admission, assessment, and programmatic options not applied to traditional students. Boyer in the **International Journal of Institutional Management in Higher Education** makes this point quite clearly. He proposes that in times of social conservation, institutions move to non-traditional means to provide the options necessary for students rather than adapt traditional programs to satisfy the incoming learners (Boyer 1985).

Adult and higher education professionals continue to provide access for "non-traditional learners" with the understanding that "non-traditional" usually is a term of convenience. It allows for those options that can appear to provide access where traditional academic admissions and progress are impeded by standards of measurement that are meant to provide fairness, but lack flexibility for individual opportunity.

Issues of Programmatic Quality

Access to adult and continuing education continues to carry with it, however, a continuing responsibility to define quality. The traditional academic view that non-traditional equates to lower quality continues to effect the progress of learners who choose these modes of institutional progress. As educators risk providing services to whomever they define as non-traditional students, they are continually faced with the dilemma. The traditional approach to issues of quality are not applicable. If educators ignore established criteria for traditional programs they are forced to defend quality considerations without clearly defined criteria. They are left without the traditional safeguard of higher education, to blame the incoming student. Providing access however does not escape the measurement of quality. It may, in fact, enhance its importance.

It is clear that at some levels non-traditional is clearly defined as lacking in quality. In 1984 the **Journal of Human Resources** reported that economically disadvantaged women who received non-traditional training were much less likely to be employed in male-dominated occupations and received lower hourly wages (Streker-Seeborg, Irmtraub, and other 1984). If programmatic quality and student quality is judged by the work place and society to be in question, our very definitions and understanding must be examined. Our use of changeable and undefined terms must be held to a minimum. Issues of quality by wording must be avoided.

Not only are outcomes of quality at issue but the very consideration of usefulness of our past professional practice and belief is under scrutiny. In the Spring 1987 issue of the **Adult Education Quarterly** Catherine Cameron proposes that social equity and adult education are separate issues. She goes on in the article to propose that social equity should not be the goal of adult education (Cameron 1987). It would be difficult to disagree with her premise that the fundamental role of education is to develop " . . . knowledge, skills, and attributes that contribute to our continuing inability as a social and economic entity. . . . " The question for us is posed again, however, in her next sentence "Its mission is to educate, to provide effective accessible opportunities for children and adults to acquire knowledge and skills which lead to happier and more productive lives."

Providing access while maintaining progress. Producing programs without influencing social equity. It may seem that adult and continuing education has inescapable dilemmas. How might we provide the kinds of service that lead to both access and quality? Cameron poses an extreme conservative view, one clearly outside the consensus of our field of adult and continuing education, but one widely held and expressed in other academic circles.

It seems that access demands standards and that standards demand criteria. Winton provides an interesting set of what he called "soft criteria" for access:

1. Demonstrated achievement and accomplishment relevant to educational outcomes and sought by the institution (outcomes such as leadership, independent research and scholarship).
2. Characteristics especially relevant to the mission of the institution (such as artistic scientific and religious interests and accomplishments).
3. Characteristics that will contribute to the educational environment (cultural diversity, unique experiences).
4. Evidence of unusual strength of character, personal qualities, or sheer doggedness of persistence in the face of obstacles (including racial experience in overcoming obstacles of discrimination) (Manning 1977, p. 2).

These "soft criteria" may hold the potential of providing a foundation upon which to build criteria that are acceptable to both the established academic community and the field of adult and continuing education.

Faculty Quality

Along with the question of access and quality of students a companion issue is the quality and values of faculty. This issue of quality of faculty is based upon an ongoing assumption of obsolesence. This is a very difficult, if not impossible, assumption to test or even identify. It assumes a field definition, someone is losing touch with their field, the subject matter, new concepts, and new procedures are mov-

ing too fast for professionals to assimilate except in small subdivisions of established disciplines. The reliance upon research as a key to currency in the field is a manifestation of the dilemma. Research is measurable, it provides evidence for, and reason to, exempt someone from scrutiny. Research is an accepted and tested form of measuring currency in a field, but what if someone is losing touch with the learner. What if knowledge of the field is not in question, but knowledge of the learners and learner applications is at question.

The tendency is to point out that higher education professionals are basically unchangeable or if not unchangeable, difficult to motivate for change. Lynton and Elman propose three interactive concepts that might provide a format to provide an opportunity for change in faculty orientation.

> . . . broaden their system of values, priorities and rewards for faculty as to reflect the wider range of involvement with knowledge-based activities,
> . . . enlarge their instructional and dissemination activities beyond the graphic bounds of their campuses and beyond traditional time frames and formats;
> . . . adapt their tradition structures and procedures as to accommodate the interrelation of disciplines and the variety of knowledge transfer needs. (Lynton, Elmon 1987)

As faculty are expected to encounter and work with non-traditional students in programs called lifelong learning, their traditional academic roles and status may appear threatened. There may, in fact, be little personal reward for these ventures. Faculty are rarely rewarded for student service and even more rarely rewarded for admissions of deficit in their performance. It is far easier to ask for learner adaptation than to expect institutional and professional adaptation.

Faculty adaptation can only take place where adequate rewards are available for that adaptation and where institution change accompanies that alteration of practice. Francis Hart postulated a potentially useful set of keys to success in this kind of change process:

1. Use student service as an educatively natural and essential aspect of university operations, including teaching, advising, and administering.
2. Adopt a practical, constructive view of the inevitability of apprentice-teaching. . . .
3. Adopt whenever possible a consortial idea of institutional pluralism or federalism as the only viable counterforce to a growing statism in higher education.
4. Distinguish technologically between information and pedagogy, freeing pedagogy to function informally, interpersonally, while the informational part of instruction is done by technology.
5. Create counter forces to the inertia of departmentalism, not to delete disciplines but, rather, to revitalize them.
6. Work toward a simplication of curricula within a flexible plurality of institutional types.
7. Strive for a flexibility of educational timetables and, in conjunction, a long-range, modulated continuity of adult study.
8. Identify, train, and reward a generation of visionary administrators (Hart 1985).

Conclusions and Observations

It seems inappropriate in this article to try and define lifelong learning or any other non-traditional terminology. This is not an attempt to escape an inevitable controversy, but rather an acknowledgement that whatever definitions are utilized they are most likely of local or institutional deviation and with specific definitions and interpretations.

The issues of access to, and quality of, programs of study however remain consistently the same. Programs, students, graduates, and professionals within the field will be judged by these issues.

1. Does the terminology utilized by the program have curricular implications or is the terminology utilized to escape the established patterns of the institution.
2. Are students selected because of particular student strengths and student demands or are criteria set to escape issues of quality applied to other students.
3. Are faculty adaptive and productive within the new framework while still establishing themselves within traditional guidelines.
4. Is there an attempt to explain, train, and recruit educators and administrators to new programmatic emphases or are others kept from understanding and involvement for fear of interference.

The quality and freedom of choice are based upon commonly held understandings, generally acceptable terms, and adherence to values. None of these issues need to be question in programs of lifelong learning.

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