

THE CHANGING ROLE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION .

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If Sleeping Beauty had gone to sleep in her adult education class thirty years ago and were to awaken today, she would find herself in a strange and baffling world. In the first place, instead of being surrounded by admirers of her youthful beauty and unlined features, she might be asked to explain her lack of developmental progress, and there would be solicitous concern about whether missed stages in her development would precipitate predictable crises in her life. Second, she would no doubt be roundly criticized for waiting passively for Prince Charming to bring her to life, and perhaps workshops on assertiveness and career planning would be recommended. Third, Sleeping Beauty would awaken to find that new and different kinds of students had entered her classroom, and she would be surprised at their seriousness and competitiveness.

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But Sleeping Beauty would find some things quite unchanged. Upon waking from her thirty year nap, and assuming that she has not been swept into an electronic cottage by the Third Wave, Sleeping Beauty would find herself quite at home in her adult education classroom. There is a strong probability that the teacher would be standing in front of the room lecturing to an assorted group of students, as teachers have done quite faithfully for hundreds of years. Since Sleeping Beauty has been anything but a self-directed learner, has no experiential learning to her credit, and is only dimly aware of the knowledge explosion, she might find herself one of few students in the room willing to accept the authority of the teacher as expert.

While I do not assume that any of us has been asleep for the past thirty years, I do assume that most of us share Sleeping Beauty's sense of wonderment and occasional bewilderment at what is happening to continuing education under the press of the learning society. Thus I have entitled my remarks this morning "The Changing Role of Continuing Education." I should like to use this opportunity to look at both the internal and external pressures for change in adult education. I shall use the concept of internal pressure to refer to the sense of direction and priorities set by the profession of continuing education itself. External pressure refers to changing relationships between continuing education and its many publics.

Although internal and external pressures for change are certainly

related, I am going to discuss them in an order which may seem backward to those of you up on your reading about strategic planning. George Keller (1983), the guru of strategic planning in higher education, contends that "strategic planning's single most important contribution to organizational decision-making" is its focus on "keeping the institution in step with the changing environment." (p. 145).

That is important, but it is traditional education more than continuing education that has been out of touch with the changing external environment. Keller (1983, p. 145) claims that "for decades most colleges have been inner-directed, formulating their aims on . . . traditions, faculty desires, and ambitions for growth, largely ignoring the world outside." Recently, however, most change in traditional higher education has been triggered by outside factors such as the demographics of the birth rate, economic conditions, court decisions, and even the supply of gasoline. Thus, colleges are moving from a self-determining model to a biological model which requires continuous adaptation to a powerful and changing social environment (Keller, 1983).

Continuing education has rarely been accused of ignoring the external world. Indeed adult education has more often been taken to task for its knee-jerk responsiveness to the inevitable fads and fancies of the marketplace. The new pressures for continuing education are less likely to come from ~~new~~ external environmental factors and more likely to come from within the educational

community, that is, from state governing boards, or from university policies regarding off-campus programs, or from practices that result in less autonomy for continuing education programs.

These internal pressures arise in part from the new position of importance accorded lifelong learning -- and therefore divisions of continuing education. But they may also reflect changing values that need to be addressed by the profession. A high priority of the past for adult education has been growth and revenue, results obtained largely through marketing and operational efficiencies. The new priorities for adult education group themselves around questions that have to do with educational effectiveness.

Thus, I would like to commend the planners of this conference who hit the nail on the head when they selected "Improving the Effectiveness of Continuing Education" as the theme for your 1983 conference. I don't know, but I am going to assume, that the persons who thought that this was the year to concentrate on effectiveness chose the word carefully. The educational concept of effectiveness is frequently used in conjunction with the management concept of efficiency, and it is important to differentiate between the two. Efficiency refers specifically to the desire, especially in these times of scarce resources, to cut out waste, reduce organizational fat, and in general run a tight ship. Everyone is trying to "get more bang for the buck" by

being more efficient. Compared to educational effectiveness, efficiency is simple in concept and relatively easy to measure by computing a ratio of output to input.

Effectiveness, on the other hand, is not easily measured. It concerns how well the organization is accomplishing its purpose. Analysts have argued that educators tend to focus on efficiency at the expense of effectiveness when facing decline and that conservatism rather than innovation is the common ill-advised response (Cameron, 1983). The slick definition that has worked its way into the literature is that efficiency consists of "doing things right" whereas effectiveness consists of "doing the right things".

It is far easier to do things right than it is to do the right things. Most professionals can learn the management skills involved in efficiency rather easily. It is far more difficult to gain the understandings, the timing, and the sense of direction required for educational effectiveness. Effectiveness requires good leadership, whereas efficiency requires good administration. Clearly both are important in any organization, but since improving effectiveness is the theme of your conference, let us direct our attention to thinking about the "right things to do" in the 1980s. Lest anyone assume that I have the answers, let me hasten to disabuse you of that notion. The best I can hope to do is to raise the right questions.

I would like to set before you two questions that are internal to the profession and two that are external. The internal questions concern the integrity of continuing education and should be addressed by the profession regardless of changes in the external environment, whereas the external issues concern relationships with other people and organizations in the learning society. The internal questions I am going to address are issues of quality and mission. The external questions concern changing relationships with students and with the other providers of education in the learning society.

Everyone is raising questions about quality these days, be they manufacturers of cars or educators of citizens, young and old. To my mind, much of today's thinking about quality in education is regressive and unlikely to move us to new levels of educational effectiveness unless adult educators exert leadership and speak out for measures of quality that are appropriate for adult learners and adult education.

Quality in continuing education is generally judged by three criteria -- consumer demand and satisfaction, comparison to traditional on-campus measures, and special standards considered uniquely appropriate for adult education. In adult education, there is much to be said for satisfying the customer. The customers, after all, are adults who have every right to decide where and how to spend their time and their money. In an increasing number of cases, the customers are employers who

likewise have a right to decide whether the education that they purchase meets their needs for employees with the skills and knowledge to be productive on the job.

The obvious weakness in free market concepts of quality is that we all know of instances where entrepreneurial programs are hastily and shoddily launched to high demand and apparent customer satisfaction -- at least in the short run. And we all know of high quality programs that are losers financially because the market is neither large enough nor sophisticated enough to support them. It still seems appropriate to consider customer satisfaction an important measure of acceptability in non-credit programs, but questions are justifiably raised about whether it is an adequate measure of quality in credit-granting programs.

The criterion coming into more frequent use in the evaluation of degree programs is one that is potentially dangerous for the integrity of adult education. That is the too-easy acceptance of a naive definition of quality which assumes that quality has been attained when off-campus programs meet on-campus standards. It is not as embarrassing to traditional higher education as it should be, but most adult educators have had the experience of failing to satisfy adult customers with classes taught by fully-credentialled tenured professors from the campus. Yet one of the most frequent claims to quality by continuing educators is that their programs boast a high proportion of regular faculty members. This is commendable as far as it goes, but it doesn't

go nearly far enough. Until adult educators can show that their programs meet the special needs of adult learners, the profession will fail to meet the demands for integrity.

I spent some time this summer reviewing the responses of states to adult learning (Cross and McCartan, 1983). Not surprisingly, quality assurance is a major concern, and we found the issue of quality in off-campus degree programs handled well in some states and poorly in others. Program review seems sensible as long as it is conducted with sensitivity and understanding of quality conditions for adult learners. ^{We found} Attempting to formulate regulations to define quality ~~is~~ generally less satisfactory, ~~and~~

~~For example~~, New York state offers an enlightened goal for quality assurance in adult education. The New York Regents, in establishing goals for lifelong learning in the year 2000, recommend that informed choice by consumers, combined with responsible quality control shared by public educational agencies, voluntary accrediting associations, and private

providers of educational services for adults is the best route to obtaining quality education in the learning society (New York, 1981).

New York's emphasis on informed choice by adult learners is not as difficult as it seems. Indeed a good example of the combined power of informed consumers plus minimal regulation by governmental authority exists in the gourmet cooking and dining industry. Government agencies regulate basic requirements for cleanliness and health protection, but the informed consumer has done more to improve quality in the cooking and dining industry than any amount of regulation or inspection. Without question, knowledgeable cooks with developed tastes have stimulated the imagination and improved the quality of the cooking and dining industry. The more people know about foods, cooking, and nutrition, the more imaginative and responsive the industry must become. The gourmet cooking movement has demanded and received a tremendous response from restaurateurs, manufacturers of cooking equipment, cooking schools, and publishers of specialized cookbooks and magazines. A similar analogy can be made in certain sports. The more knowledgeable runners and joggers are regarding their needs, the more likely they are to demand 40 varieties of running shoes over the all-purpose sneaker of a decade ago. If we would have quality in continuing education, we should be about the business of developing gourmet learners who know quality education when they see it and who demand new developments, better services, and improved educational programs.

I suggest that a major role for adult education in improving effectiveness of continuing education is to educate the public -- which is, after all, our business -- to a more sophisticated understanding of quality education.

There are many ways to do that. One is to make known the learning options and to encourage comparison shopping. Knowledge about the options available, however, is only half the battle. The other half is to help adults choose the learning service that is most appropriate for them. That is done especially well when adults are encouraged to analyze what they wish to accomplish, how past learning applies to the goal, where gaps in skills and knowledge exist, and how they can evaluate their learning. It is also beneficial for lifelong learners to have some self-knowledge of their own learning styles so that they may choose courses or learning experiences offered in a mode that works for them. Courses in gourmet learning would not be at all amiss as we enter the learning society.

The second internal question facing continuing education in the 1980s is the definition of mission for continuing education. What should continuing educators expect of themselves?

Frankly, I think we should be annoyed when colleagues are willing to settle for providing little more than parity with on-campus programs for adult part-time learners. In the first place, the research as well as experiential evidence is piling up that, far

from being second-class students, adults are first-class students in terms of motivation and performance. Secondly, far from being a fringe activity, adult education is becoming the major route to upward mobility and personal satisfaction. Thirdly, far from being isolated in off-campus locations and evening hours, continuing education provides a window to the external world, and both students and teachers are rubbing elbows and trading ideas with the movers and shakers of business, government, and the professions.

The mission of continuing education as I see it is difficult but straightforward. It is to lead the way into the learning society, and that involves far more than achieving parity with on-campus programs.

That moves me, conveniently enough, to the changing role of continuing education in its external relationships with students and with other providers of educational services in the society. As lifelong learning becomes an accepted way of life in the 21st Century, adult learning is also becoming more traditional, more structured, and more credentialed. That concerns me because I wonder if we are moving, albeit with the best of intentions, toward extending the trappings of schooling into adult learning. Although researchers and idealists still talk about the self-directed learner, I wonder if that admirable character isn't an endangered species. As we move to make adult education accessible, affordable, and acceptable, and as we strive to make

it fit the needs of individual learners, are we removing all incentives for people to create their own learning models and to take pride in that resourceful act? Why should an adult reader roam around a library selecting different books, for example, when the telecourse has it all laid out with a syllabus, a reading list, and study questions? As we move to obtain credit recognition for adult learning, again with the best of intentions, are we subtly encouraging both adults and providers to enter into structured learning situations with certifiable teachers, curricula, and standards that meet rather traditional requirements? The ACE Office on Education Credit now lists more than 2,000 courses offered by more than 180 corporations and certified by teams of traditional university faculty members as being worthy of college credit. That procedure almost certainly assures that the course is a serious learning exercise and that it is not exploiting learners. But it probably also assures us that it has a certifiable instructor who is an authority on the subject, that it measures student achievement by acceptable tests, and that it covers the topic indicated by the syllabus. None of this is necessarily bad; in fact on the surface, it appears far more efficient than self-directed learning, which seems to result in a relatively low ratio of output to input.

But it is disturbing to observe that the cutting edge of practice in the external world of adult education does not seem to correspond to the cutting edge of theory in the profession. We say that we want to act as facilitators of adult learning and

that we want to help adults assume more responsibility for their own learning. Can we have it both ways? Can we structure the learning so that it is "efficient" without losing the incentives for self-determination and self-direction? We say that we want to help lifelong learners develop the skills of learning how to learn so that they may adapt to constantly changing knowledge, but in practice we are putting together courses and measuring achievement of content mastery. External forces from a variety of sources, including students and employers, will continue to press continuing education for credentials. What does this do to the relationship between students and adult educators and their students?

I have no answer. Perhaps self-directed learning is obsolete and too inefficient for these times of exploding knowledge and highly efficient delivery systems. But the profession needs to give some attention to the appropriate balance between self-directed learning and efficient mastery of essential knowledge and skills.

Finally, I want to turn briefly to changing relationships between continuing education and other providers of educational services for adult part-time learners. There was a time, not very long ago, when adults were limited in their learning options. Within the past decade, however, it seems that almost everyone has moved into the lifelong learning act, and today schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses, private entrepreneurs, and community agencies are falling all over one another competing for

essentially the same market. That market consists largely of upwardly mobile young adults with at least some college education who need advanced and specialized training to compete on the job. This group is easy to recruit and easy to teach, and the potential for payoff is high for employers, teachers, and students.

The result is that providers of adult education are in hot competition for this market, some eagerly and some reluctantly. Carnegie Surveys showed 73% of all colleges in the nation anticipating a rising emphasis on recruiting evening students, 78% planning more recruitment of adults over the age of 22, and 65% increasing their recruitment of students for off-campus programs (Stadtman, 1980, p. 130).

A certain portion of this activity will come into sharp conflict with the rising educational aspirations of professional associations. The competition will be especially keenly felt at major research universities. At Harvard, for example, 73% of the students in University Extension have bachelors' degrees, 22% have graduate degrees (Shinagel, 1983). At the University of California at Berkeley, 78% of the students in extension already have first degrees, and half of those have graduate or professional degrees (Stern, 1983). Milton Stern (1979), Dean of Extension at Berkeley, views with some alarm the huge budgets and ambitious educational programs of professional associations, some with convenient connections with licensing boards. Competition

seems especially torrid in business education. The American Management Association is the giant in this realm, conducting some 3200 programs annually and enrolling 100,000 learners. Even the AMA, however, has no corner on the market for business courses. It is estimated that 3,000 different providers, many of them private entrepreneurs, conduct some 40,000 public business seminars each year.

The hunger for business skills seems especially insatiable, and employers have become major providers. Business and industry offer a wide variety of programs, ranging through special university-like institutes with degree-granting authority, to residential campuses boasting residence halls and wired classrooms rivaling anything offered in our most exclusive and expensive colleges, to basic and remedial education for clerical workers, to the more traditional types of on-the-job training. As you are no doubt aware, industry has been developing a new profession of corporate trainers, and the American Society for Training and Development has more than doubled its membership within the past decade (Craig and Evers, 1981). At professional schools of education, there is rising demand for courses in corporate education, and many graduate students plan to work, not in academe, but on the development of "human capital" in business and industry.

Business, more than any of the other competitors in the learning society, is a reluctant and therefore friendly provider of adult

learning services. It is increasingly popular now for employers to contract with colleges for the provision of educational services and the practice is especially common in community colleges. A study completed in 1981 found that 40% of the community colleges in the nation had formal cooperative agreements with employers (Young, 1981), and that was just the start of the movement. I suspect that today a substantial majority of community colleges have training and education contracts with local business firms.

In Ohio, the Board of Regents has taken the position that their appropriate role in planning for lifelong learning is to serve as catalyst in linking together the resources of higher education and the needs of learners, employers, and government. To this end, they have conducted needs assessments, sponsored conferences of employers and educators, distributed brochures promoting the resources available in the public colleges of Ohio, and, in general, attempted to revitalize the economy of Ohio through cooperative ventures in lifelong education. While emphasizing cooperation, the unmistakable interest of the Ohio Board of Regents, is to promote continuing education capacities of colleges and universities.

Other examples of cooperation between industry and colleges are calling more for working partnerships than for contracts. Last year the faculty of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at M.I.T. issued a report called "Lifelong

Cooperative Education" in which they maintained that the future of engineering education lies in creating working partnerships between engineering schools and industry. Neither the university nor industry working alone, they said, could possibly provide adequate lifelong education for engineers. To the M.I.T. Centennial Study Committee, lifelong cooperative education is essential for three reasons:

1. Universities acting alone have neither the human nor the financial resources to carry out a lifelong educational program on the scale required....
2. Engineering faculties cannot by themselves keep up with the knowledge explosion. Close collaboration between engineering faculties and their industrial colleagues is essential if new knowledge is to be distilled from the literature and widely disseminated at the rate at which it is being generated.
3. Engineers in industry and their university colleagues need a supportive environment in which they can teach and learn from one another. A concerted effort will be required to bridge the many gaps -- organizational, social, and temporal -- that now separate 'work' and 'study' (M.I.T., 1982, p. 6-7).

Examples of the changing relationships among the multiple providers of the learning society could be extended, but my point is that there are many new and old providers of adult learning

services on the frontier of the learning society and appropriate relationships remain to be worked out.

There are basically three possible relationships between continuing educators and other providers -- competition, cooperation, or the establishment of autonomous markets. Probably all three positions will co-exist depending on the program, its market, and the competition. Autonomy can be worked out by the parties concerned, but so far that option has been somewhat more likely to be mandated by some external authority. State boards have forced autonomy, for example, by establishing geographical or program boundaries. Regulations prohibiting off-campus centers more than 30 miles from the campus establish geographical autonomy, while funding of only one program in a given discipline or profession establishes program autonomy.

Cooperation may range all the way from genuine partnerships to contractual agreements about who will do what. Constructive cooperation is not easily achieved, but as adult educators become more aware of other providers and more secure in their own missions, cooperative relationships seem a priority route to improvement of the effectiveness of continuing education.

Competition is likely to get worse before it gets better, but there are constructive and destructive forms of competition. In many cases, strong programs will drive out weak, but in some cases hastily-contrived programs will capture a significant share

of the market while programs with higher quality are in the making.

The problems confronting the learning society will not be solved quickly or easily, but there is a leadership role to be played in creating effective learning options for adults, and conferences such as this one where professionals are encouraged to think about what constitutes effective education are steps in the right direction.

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