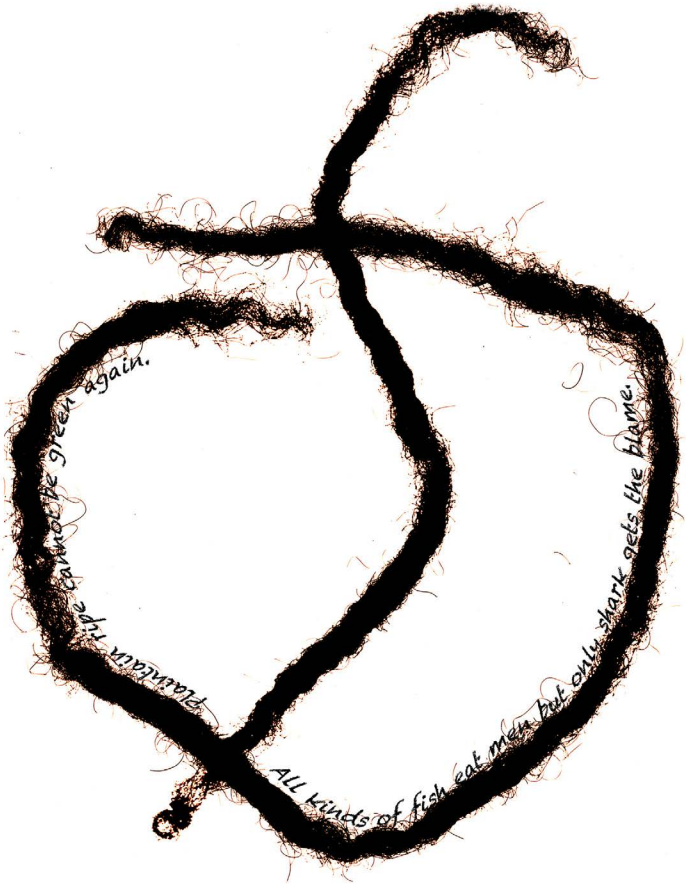
Explorations in Adult Higher Education

An Occasional Paper Series

Making Room for Adults



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Terry Boddie's work as a photographer and multidisciplinary artist explores the historical and contemporary aspects of memory, migration and globalization. The images often blur the distinctions between photography, drawing and painting. Boddie received his BFA from The New York University Tisch School of the Arts in 1989, and an MFA from Hunter College (CUNY) in 1997. His work has been exhibited in "Kréyol Factory" at the Parc La Villette in Paris, France, and in the show "Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art" at the Brooklyn Museum. His work has also been exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution, The Studio Museum in Harlem, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Art Museum of the Americas, among other venues. Awards and honors include The Studio Museum in Harlem Artist-in-Residence, Center for Photography at Woodstock Photographer's Fellowship, the New York Foundation for the Arts Artist Fellowship, The Center for Book Arts Artist-in-Residence Workspace Grant, and the Marie Sharpe Walsh Artist-in-Residence. Terry Boddie received a 2009 New Jersey Print Fellowship from the Brodsky Center at Rutgers, a 2009 Artists' Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and a 2011/2012 photography grant from The George and Helen Segal Foundation. His work is in several private and public collections including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Cover: *Untitled 1,* 2013, Digital pigment print, 17" x 22"

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SUNY Empire State College's occasional paper series brings together the ideas, voices and multiple perspectives of those engaged in thinking about adult higher education today. Our goal is to critically examine our theories and practices, to provoke dialogue, and to imagine new possibilities of teaching and learning.

Special thanks to our SUNY Empire State College colleagues whose ideas, work and ongoing commitment to this project have made this publication possible: Meg Benke, Terry Boddie, Shantih Clemans, Kathy Cole, Lael Dickinson, David Henahan, Terri Hilton, John Hughes, Janay Jackson, Janet Jones, Casey Lumbra, Paul Miller, Sabrina Nastasi, Bernard Smith, Peggy Tally, the Print Shop, and the Office of Academic Affairs. With much appreciation.

The recordings of the webinars in this series, upon which this publication is based, are available upon request by emailing Karen.LaBarge@esc.edu.

The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of SUNY Empire State College.

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Untitled 10, 2013, Digital pigment print, 17″ x 22″

Photo credit: Courtesy of the artist

Making Room Redux

Alan Mandell, Editor

College Professor of Adult Learning and Mentoring
SUNY Empire State College

For one thing that's certain
You will surely be a-hurtin'
If you throw it all away

– Bob Dylan, "I Threw it All Away" (1969)

In 1992, my dear colleague and longtime collaborator, Lee Herman, edited a volume of the SUNY Empire State College faculty publication, *Golden Hill* (Volume 6). The theme of that issue (which also celebrated the college's 20th anniversary) was "Making Room." "How … might schools and colleges be malleable enough to make room?" Lee asked in his wonderful introduction to that publication. And his questions kept coming: "To what extent might the practice of teaching depend on the needs and purposes of the learners?" "Can a responsibly academic institution be that flexible and innovative, that deliberately unfinished?" Those foundational questions about teaching and learning, about flexibility and experimentation, about authority and access, and about who these adult learners are and how we acknowledge what they know and what they want to learn, remain with us right now, more than 25 years later. We're grappling and questioning and, sometimes frustratingly, trying to make our way to make room for adult learners – still wondering who just might fit in and how to make that possible and consequential.

The socioeconomic, cultural and educational terrain of 2018 is surely not the same as the one we tried to understand and respond to in 1992 (nor, of course, in the early 1970s when ESC and many other experimenting institutions were founded). Adult learners are not as "neglected" as they were then; indeed, they are energetically sought after as higher education (more competitive than ever) desperately looks for new populations and new sources of income, particularly in a society suspicious of the value of institutions (particularly public ones) and even of knowledge itself. When students become consumers; when the melding of the "liberal" and the "professional" fades away as a significant academic hope; when educational stratification at every level becomes endemic; when

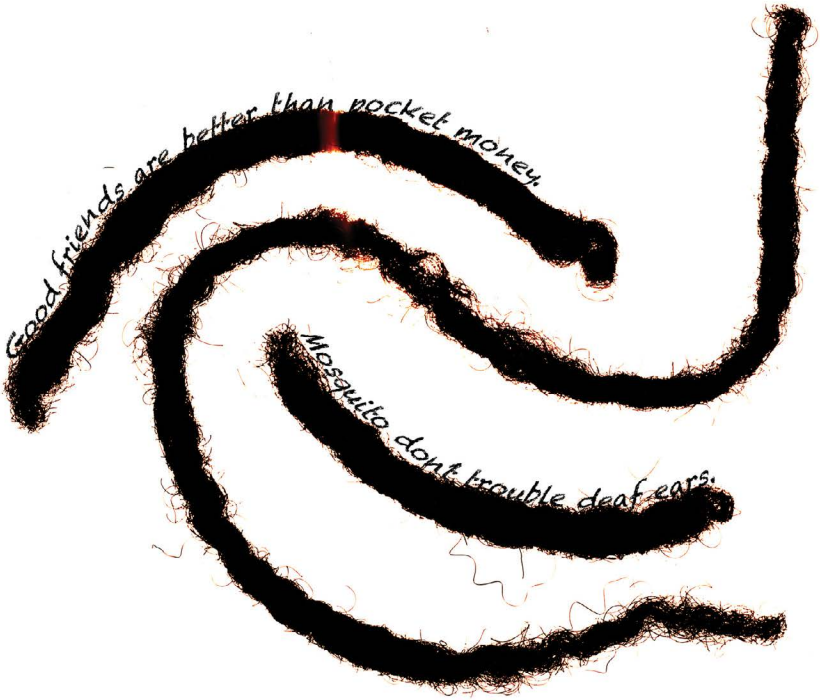
credentials take over as the big payoff; when U.S. student debt is reported to be almost $1.5 trillion; and when the tide of standardization has become the answer to academic quality control, talk of reaching and teaching and wondering about new academic ways, new chances to define and genuinely understand the "nontraditional," and to listen with care, imagination and openness to our students' voices seem way out of tune with the spirit of our times. Is there enough energy, is there genuine desire, to stay with it? Is it possible to think and act by critically understanding, but not succumbing to the heavy pressures of the day that shape policies and processes, and that so often undercut our efforts to (as Lee asked) "expand our skills to respond helpfully to the people we see?"

The essays and responses included in this, our fifth "occasional paper" in the *Explorations in Adult Higher Education* series, encourage us to recognize that while at many points we are all, indeed, "a-hurtin'" at the micro-level of daily roller coaster institutional life and at the macro-level of stunning social inequality and suffering, there is hope, there is vibrancy and there are openings that we, as educators, need to recognize, work with and critically engage. The three guests whose webinars served as the basis for this publication push us to consider new questions, new angles, new examples and, certainly, new challenges that adult higher education – indeed, that societies across the globe – must confront right now.

Amy D. Rose offers us the American historical context we so often lack and that we desperately need to more accurately understand the relevance of the fact that "adults have *always* been present on campus" and that, quite fascinatingly, "programs for adults have often served as incubators for reform," even though, as she persuasively argues, "a true transformation [in higher education] has not occurred." Patrick Werquin provides insights into one powerful reform particularly apparent in Europe: the creation and use of "qualifications" that, in the spirit of access and fairness, can be "a useful tool for learners who need transparency, who need to know where they are, where they will go, and where they will be allowed to go if they … achieve a qualification," even though as he maintains, our challenge is that it is actually more "highly qualified people" and not "low-qualified adults" who take advantage of the range of learning activities offered today. And Liz Marr reminds us that, "ironically," even at a time when many government policies such as in the U.K. identify "social mobility as a key aim," it is not easier but actually "more difficult for adult learners to take up higher education opportunities than it has ever been before." As Marr stimulates

us to ask: What are the "green shoots" and what are the "threats" to meaningful lifelong learning and significant change that so many adult educators have championed, in theory and practice, for so long?

We are honored to have the contributions of Amy D. Rose, Patrick Werquin and Liz Marr. We are also so pleased to include the insightful reflections of colleagues from both within and outside of Empire State College, including those by Paul Miller, Cathy Leaker, Bernard Smith, Marc Singer, Lael Dickinson and Donna M. San Antonio. Their spirit of probing and provoking can help us become more aware of the assumptions to which we are so often wedded, and of the possibilities that offer hope so that we feel – that we know – that amidst difficult odds, trends and circumstances, even as more than 20 years have passed since that *Golden Hill* edition, we don't have to "throw it all away."



Untitled 2, 2013, Digital pigment print, 17″ x 22″

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Who Cares About Adult Students Today? The Antecedents and Implications of Recent Reform Efforts in American Higher Education

Amy D. Rose

American Higher Education as a Mess

A number of authors have put forward the idea that American higher education is a *mess*. They use this term in slightly differing ways. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Witte (2011) took the title of "nice mess" from the comedians Laurel and Hardy. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Witte described this "nice mess" as a confluence of diverse approaches to all aspects of higher education, with conflicting institutional approaches and understandings (p. 13). Their *mess* meant that institutions could never ascertain what the best way forward might be.

David Labaree (2017) continued this idea of higher education as a mess. In fact, he titled his book, *A Perfect Mess.* Labaree's vision of a *mess* echoes that of Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Witte. For Labaree, the American higher education system is barely a system. It is disorganized and nonstandardized, with no system of accountability, and with contradictory purposes built into its very structure. Additionally, Labaree stated that, historically, higher education has been viewed as a social privilege, not a right, and that this has had enormous consequences for the ways that higher education has been offered within the U.S. This complexity of purpose has stymied the myriad reform efforts that have been offered over the years. Labaree saw this complexity as a strength *and* a weakness that defied easy solution. He maintained that this contradictory system did not make sense, and, at the same time, that these contradictions needed to be accepted.

For Labaree (2017), the source of this contradictory system lay in the unplanned nature of American higher education. The system developed in response to varying needs. These needs were not necessarily educational or student-focused. Labaree argued that the resulting competing aims led colleges and universities to adopt diverse and often divergent missions that make reform and change inherently difficult. In this paper, I attempt to lay out some of the contradictions, along with their historical development. Additionally, I would like to make the point that these organizational contradictions remain especially problematic for adults, even as many other curricular and organization reforms began with the adult population.

Recent Trends

The literature on higher education is replete with references to a pervasive crisis. The source of the crisis is often ascribed to a set of challenges that have had an impact on the financing and administering of institutions of higher education. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Witte (2011) identified some of these challenges as: long-lasting effects of the 2008 recession; rising costs; credentialing pressures; and pressing concerns about accountability, both externally from accrediting agencies and governmental bodies, and internally from university and college governing bodies.

Kuh et al. (2011) added that these challenges are placing an even greater burden on institutions: "All this means that higher education must do something at a scale never before realized: deliver a high-quality postsecondary education – and at less cost – to more than three-quarters of an increasingly diverse and often academically underprepared undergraduate population" (p. 13). The kinds of reforms that are usually put forward aim to increase retention, persistence and ultimately, graduation. Recently, writers and policymakers have emphasized these goals while simultaneously calling for greater accountability on the part of colleges and universities. Many writers dealing with this issue (including Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Witte) write from a student affairs/higher education outlook rather than an academic content one. Interestingly, however, these writers and researchers are not primarily concerned with student development from either a psychosocial or skills development perspective. Rather, the primary focus is on persistence as it relates to graduation. Learning is mentioned, but by itself is not the chief goal. One of my main points here is that, while previously, postsecondary reform and innovation were often discussed in terms

of curriculum and ways of thinking about knowledge, innovation today is now very clearly tied to delivery systems and technological innovation with a focus on ways that they add to persistence and retention.

Adults on Campus – A Brief Historical Overview

We tend to think of adults on campus as a new phenomenon, developing primarily in the 1970s, after the brief experience of veterans flocking to higher education after World War II. However, this is a misconception. In truth, the U.S. has a long experience with adult students on college campuses. Beginning with antebellum colleges, adults (or those older than 22) were a familiar phenomenon on campus. In fact, during the early years of the republic and during the colonial period, the concept of a "traditional-age" student did not exist. Students were often either very young (much younger than 18) or significantly older than 22. In both cases, students were often underprepared and in need of remedial work. The younger students were also in need of supervision. Often, students would attend a local college as preparation for transferring to a more prestigious college, often receiving a second bachelor's degree. Frequently, the older students had been schoolteachers because a college degree was not required to teach school. These men (and they *were* men) merged into the general student population. Adult students were not differentiated in any way. There was no concept that adults had particular needs. In fact, there was little consideration given to the needs of college students in general. By the time of the Civil War, only some ideas about the development of children were beginning to appear. The psychosocial development of adolescents and of adults was completely unconsidered. During the antebellum period, only one aspect of developmental psychology was beginning to emerge: the idea that children had special needs, and even that was not completely translated into a school curriculum (Allmendinger, 1975; Ogren, 2003).

After the Civil War, adults began to be more segregated, although as Ogren (2003) pointed out, they were still plentiful in institutions such as normal schools (which were institutions for teacher training). The major innovations that moved adults to the periphery were extension programs and later, evening colleges. The post-Civil War period was a time of university development. This meant that the three prongs of what Veysey (1965; 1981) saw as the basis of the modern university (research, utility and culture) were being developed and expanded. There was growing acknowledgement that the age

of higher education attendance was between 18 and 22. Adults were relegated to extension classes and later to evening colleges. Initially, extension classes focused on engineering and agriculture, but they soon expanded to other areas. In fact, institutions discovered the adult population in the late 19th century and early 20th century, treating adults as one among many populations that sought access to higher education. In the late 19th century/early 20th century, as transportation within cities grew, it became possible to offer evening classes at urban institutions. Also during this period, specialized colleges within larger universities focused on the working adult. The colleges of general studies developed a model, still found today, that segregated adults into their own special programs, separated from the mainstream college population, while maintaining the same basic requirements as the more traditional bachelor's programs. Columbia University was one of the pioneers in this regard, as was Washington University in St. Louis. Both of these programs are still in existence.

But, the time that people really point to when thinking about adults on campus is the post-World War II period, where the veterans streamed into higher education thanks to the GI Bill or the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. This period immediately after the war saw an unprecedented expansion of higher education. The changes in the American university were solidified after the launching of the Soviet satellite, Sputnik, in 1957, and the concomitant increased emphasis on science and graduate education.

In the 1960s, adults were still segregated in specialized programs. This segregation did not extend to graduate programs, where older and younger adults freely mixed. However, toward the end of that decade and the beginning of the 1970s, a new trend was becoming visible: Adults were being welcomed into four-year colleges, liberal arts colleges and community colleges. Of particular interest are the smaller liberal arts colleges that turned to the recruitment of adult students. Some leaders in this area included the College of New Rochelle's School of New Resources founded in 1972, and SUNY Empire State College, which was founded in 1971 as a branch of the State University of New York (SUNY). Other colleges followed suit.

During this period, innovation was presented through changes to curriculum, greater access and expanded diversity. If we examine just one funding stream, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), we can see that initial grants were made to institutions proposing program changes. Later

grants, particularly those offered through the Learning Anywhere Anytime Partnerships (LAAP), focused on distance education. Distance education, unlike the earlier 1970s program, was not aimed at changing the curriculum and developing innovative approaches to curriculum; it was concerned fundamentally with issues of delivery (Rose & Stuckey, 2012). Community colleges have long been sources of innovation within higher education and have embraced adults at all levels of participation. They have also been among the leaders in distance education and in expanding access, in general.

In summary, adults have *always* been present on campus. They have gone from being little noticed, to participating in specialized programs, to emerging as the primary population of students in higher education. In general, programs for adults have served as sources of innovation (in terms of new approaches that have often been inadvertently piloted on them) and as models for experimentation in postsecondary education. There is a pattern to the development and then dissolution of programs specifically for adults. The direction of change has been movement from complete integration to segregation in evening colleges and extensions, to specialized programs, and most recently a return to integration. Adult students themselves have served several purposes within higher education. From the administrative perspective, they are sometimes viewed as emblems of diversity and as alternate sources of income.

From the educator's perspective, however, adults present both a challenge and an opportunity to experiment with traditional curricula and delivery systems. For example, when looking at examples of innovation, it is also clear that funding for innovation has shifted. While adults are still often a primary target audience, they are narrowly viewed as users of distance education rather than as seekers of knowledge. Starting in the 20th century at least, innovations concerned several aspects: curriculum, delivery and access. Access for the nontraditional student began with a focus on the adult population, but ultimately shifted to a concern with issues of access for minorities. The only delivery system that seems to be innovating at present is distance education.

More importantly, some of the issues that pervade higher education today are rooted in some of the historical concerns of adults, while also simultaneously undermining adult participation in higher education. Specifically, I will briefly

discuss concerns about accountability and the ways that this accountability movement has affected both administrative expansion and approaches to change within academe.

Present-Day Concerns

The issue of accountability pervades higher education today. Its reach is much broader than it might first appear. Broadly speaking, a focus on accountability means asking: What are college students supposed to learn, how are they learning it, and what are areas for improvement? None of this is completely new, and in fact, these questions have haunted higher education for decades, if not centuries. What is somewhat new is the view that the ultimate criterion used to define accountability is graduation and not the measurement of learning. This new emphasis has had and will continue to have profound repercussions.

The focus on accountability and graduation rates has led to a plethora of approaches to assessment, evaluation and the establishment of benchmarks. One such approach has focused on identifying the characteristics of institutions with *best* or *good practices.* Recent writings in higher education have attempted to isolate the variables that extend the probability that students will complete their educations and receive degrees. Kuh et al. (2011) identified what they termed the characteristics of institutions with *good practices.* In studying a variety of institutions that were deemed effective, the researchers found that these colleges and universities shared the following characteristics: an ethic of positive restlessness; data-informed decision-making; academic and student affairs staff collaboration; and the entire institution working for student success. Kuh et al. (2011) defined *student success* in terms of retention, persistence, graduation and ultimately work placement. Defining student success in these terms has perhaps inadvertently led to a focus on student support as the source of good practice. Thus, for example, the expansion of higher education administrative structures can be rationalized if these added positions can be seen as major sources of success. I am not arguing that this should not be the case, only that this focus on best practices may have had some unintended consequences. Examining some examples of what works in higher education shows that the kinds of supports identified are, indeed, important, but focused on the nonacademic side of the college experience. Looking more closely at some of the innovations and reforms that have advanced can provide a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Reforms That Work and Those That Do Not Work

Calls for reform have shaped much of the contemporary discussion on higher education. Reforms are invariably linked to the need for increased persistence and retention among all groups. Interestingly, Reed (2011) extended this discussion to low-income males. His discussion illustrated some of the principal problems that these reforms are trying to remedy. It is clear that many groups are represented in the pool of students who are not graduating from institutions of higher education. Reed identified several reforms that positively affect persistence for low-income white males. The first few of these reforms focused on increased areas for spending that result in greater persistence. These included: more public support for public colleges and universities; more spending on instruction and student services that are related to student success; more full-time, tenure-track faculty; and increased financial aid. Reed also noted that intervention programs were especially effective for white, low-socioeconomic status (SES) students. Other interventions included specific measures to increase math skills and encouraging exposure to "high-SES peer habitus" (p. 6). Although Reed was focused on white male students, his list is actually more broadly applicable. It is particularly interesting that he identified an area that was previously an explicit aspect of all higher education, that is, exposing individuals to a more middle-class way of life with the hopes of having them adopt those values and ways of behaving, or what has been called *habitus*.

It is also important to note that some reforms have notably not worked well in terms of increasing persistence. These include performance-based funding and articulation agreements. The research has consistently shown that performance-based funding does not increase graduation or completion rates (Hillman, Tandberg, & Gross, 2014). It is unclear why articulation agreements do not contribute to increased graduation rates. This needs to be studied in greater depth since it was a rather counterintuitive finding. In this context, performance-based funding means tying grants to performance under the assumption that this will spur motivation to perform. However, this does not work because higher education institutions are already motivated to retain students through tuition payments, if nothing else (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015).

The Conundrum of Assessment and Accountability

Assessment and accountability are two interrelated, but different entities. Both have emerged as new imperatives or even slogans within higher education. As already noted, both have had an enormous impact on higher education today and on the potential enrollments of adult students, in particular. Accountability refers to the ways that institutions are accountable to the government (at all levels including the state and federal levels) and to the general public. Most of the push for accountability has been tied to the granting of federal monies, although the movement itself is broader. In its broadest sense, accountability means that institutions need to justify that they are doing what they promise. Of course, public institutions have greater accountability than private institutions. Specifically, the central questions are: Are students learning? Are they able to work after graduation? Are they lacking in skills? Are institutions graduating students or are students failing to persist? Assessment involves measuring all of these points.

Assessment is used to measure all values within a higher education institution. Schuh (2013) reminded us that assessment itself is a value. Thus, calls to integrate assessment into every aspect of decision-making and to develop a *culture of assessment* so that there is a continuous cycle of assessment, improvement, and assessment reflect particular values and views about innovation and improvement. Inherent in this culture of assessment is a focus on outcomes and on continuous change or improvement. From this point of view, results need to be communicated and acted upon immediately. There is a deep internal logic to this approach. However, it is important to bear in mind that assessment, in and of itself, is not value-free. Secondly, it is important to remember that continuous assessment is not without risk for those being assessed.

Schuh (2013) elaborated on this idea of culture by encasing it in a sense of shared purpose; in effect, it is the way a particular institution does things. Additionally, this culture of assessment includes particular elements as found in institutions that were identified as having such a culture. Within these institutions, all staff collect evidence to demonstrate the following: accountability to stakeholders; commitment to student involvement; and what Schuh described as "positive restlessness" and "continuous innovation" (p. 91). Other aspects of a culture of assessment include institutional self-criticism, or the ability to question basic institutional premises and assumptions; data-driven

decision-making; identification and measurement of learning outcomes; and the appointment of an identified leader in assessment, that is, someone in charge. These attributes need to be part of an institutional commitment and part of the institutional culture.

The principal value connected to this culture of assessment relates to concern over dropout and persistence in general, and in particular, as it relates to minorities. This core value is then implemented through a variety of measures that focus on supporting at-risk students. Additionally, this calls for efforts to identify who is most at risk before a problem develops. For example, recent research on student engagement encapsulates this discussion. Student engagement is a complex measure that includes ways that students interact with each other, faculty and staff, and with the institution itself. Studies have shown that the greater the engagement, the greater the likelihood of persistence (Kuh, 2003). The problem lies in how this seemingly important, but ambiguous terminology, is translated into practice. Too often, it means that support and engagement are prioritized in terms of involvement in activities with the concomitant expansion of administrators to facilitate this process. As mentioned earlier, this administrative expansion can have unintended consequences. An interesting dissertation study by El Fattal (2014) found that community colleges in low-socioeconomic status communities tended to spend more on administrative functions than high-SES colleges, where there was a greater expenditure on instruction. Ultimately, we must ask what an institution's academic and funding priorities are and how they decide to allocate funding based on these priorities. However, more recently, this question of priorities has been reformulated to focus on the ways that assessment can serve as a panacea for all the problems plaguing higher education. The implications of this view are that the collection of data becomes an overriding concern of the educational enterprise, as if the data alone can solve some of the problems inherent to this somewhat contradictory system. A brief look at the historical issues connected to assessment belies this belief.

Assessment of Learning in Historical Context

Assessment and evaluation of learning are often used interchangeably. The educational psychologist Ralph W. Tyler is often credited with founding the field of educational evaluation. Tyler (1935), who often used the term "educational appraisal," was concerned with developing a more holistic approach

to the evaluation of learning. Tyler distinguished assessment from testing; testing looked at discrete knowledge, whereas assessment was broader and integrated into the individual context. Additionally, Tyler was concerned with how learning was to be studied, both on the individual and on the societal level. Assessment looked at this societal level. What, he asked, does the general population know (Tyler, 1967)? For Tyler (1942), evaluation and assessment were important tools for understanding the effectiveness of educational institutions, rather than individual achievement.

Tyler (1942) posited that assessment needed to be viewed against a backdrop of a real increase in standardized testing – such as the SAT (previously known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test), the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), IQ tests, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Tyler admonished educators to think about education more broadly. He later added that knowledge is a construction, not an entity to be delivered (Tyler, 1967). Tyler was one of many individuals who advocated for a change in the way education was delivered. In particular, he wanted educational institutions to move away from required *seat time* to an emphasis on the outcomes or learnings that had taken place. According to Tyler, seat time was a narrow and constricting means of measuring learning, especially since the construct was not concerned with learning, but merely the amount of time spent in class. Tyler's view was that learning needed to be broadly understood and that all living experiences could be incorporated into it. This meant that learning both inside and outside of the classroom was important. For Tyler, educational assessment needed to devise a way to measure all of life's learning, and then recognize this learning within educational structures.

Although Tyler is often characterized as an adherent of behaviorist psychology, in fact, he perceived himself to be a humanist, with a firm commitment to liberal education and to the multiple ways of learning that define our thinking today. Embodied in his views was a critique of the current educational system, and a real hope that a shift in focus could bring about a complete change in how we think about higher education and bachelor's degrees. This philosophical premise can be clearly seen in the tests of General Educational Development (GED) developed during World War II.

Tests of General Educational Development (GED)

Today, the term GED is widely recognized, although it is not as ubiquitous as it once was. While it is most well known as a test of high school equivalency, it was actually instituted for broader purposes. In fact, many people think that GED stands for General Equivalency Degree. This is a mistaken belief. The GED test does not stand for equivalency, and in its initial iteration, did not apply only to high school. Individuals who take this test are awarded a high school equivalency degree by the state in which they reside. The test itself does not award a degree. When the GED test was first developed, there were two levels to it: there was a college level, and a high school level. The GED test was developed in preparation for demobilization after World War II. Planning for demobilization began before the U.S. entered the war, in 1940. The reason it began that early is that the planners were very concerned about preventing another Depression. A massive Depression had followed demobilization after World War I when veterans came home and flooded the schools; they also flooded the job market, causing massive unemployment. Part of the planning effort was to keep veterans out of the job market as long as possible, and there were two pieces to that: 1) a slower demobilization, so that veterans returned home at varying times, thereby preventing the flooding of schools and the workplace that had occurred earlier; and 2) the GI Bill, to encourage people to go back to school (Rose, 1991).

A large part of the planning for the GI Bill and its aftermath focused on how higher education institutions would provide for these demobilized veterans. Several ideas were initially recognized. In the first place, there was a widespread view that these students would want to accelerate their studies. This was based on the previous experience following World War I. There were differing views about how this acceleration should proceed. One solution discussed was to offer the veterans credit for their wartime experience. The premise of the GED tests was that the veterans were mature adults who had experienced a war, and thus had had many educative experiences. The idea of general educational development focused on the broad (not skills-based) knowledge that adults acquire through experience.

The key players here were the American Council on Education, Ralph Tyler, and E.F. Lindquist, who formulated the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the ACT (American College Testing) program. Tyler and Lindquist saw the tests as measuring the learning gained through experience. Lindquist (1944)

summarized their views when he wrote: "Through their travels, both here and abroad, and through their contacts with people and institutions, the servicemen may learn much that they would not otherwise have learned had they remained in school" (p. 359). These tests were not designed to measure specific areas of knowledge, nor were they matched to specific curricula. Lindquist also noted that the GED test, similar to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, measured general development. Earl McGrath (1944), who at that time was in the Navy, but who in 1949 became the U.S. commissioner of education, provided his own broad understanding of the concept:

> General education should give the individual an understanding of the physical, social, and political world in which he lives, acquaint him with the cultural heritage and traditions of his age, and cultivate in him those habits of reflection, morality, and aesthetic appreciation required to meet effectively the problems of everyday life, while achieving a satisfying personal life. (p. 74)

This question of how we measure learning was very much connected to the question of the meaning of a college degree. At the present time, this issue is again resurfacing, sometimes in surprising ways.

The first question to be asked is: How do we know if something has been learned? However, a second question is: What is the degree for and how do we know if the aim is being accomplished? This focus on accountability has had some unfortunate consequences. In the first place, there is now a great emphasis on completing degrees quickly. Experimental programs look at degree completion in four years. There are more recent calls to mandate full-time attendance or (as in the case of the state of New York) to tie student funding to full-time attendance. This is based on research showing that full-time students are more engaged and more likely to graduate. This is, of course, true, but it neglects the plight of adults who may be equally engaged, but who may also need to attend part time. In fact, the push toward full-time enrollment is problematic for many groups among the traditional-age students who may need to attend college on a part-time basis.

Education for Work

The movement calling for greater accountability is closely tied to calls for more job training within higher education. These calls come from a variety of perspectives. Workforce analyses claim that there is a shortage of technical workers, and that it is the role of higher education to supply these workers. Additionally, traditional employment training programs have been cut back or eliminated entirely, with the result that employers expect new employees to enter the workplace with all of the necessary skills. There have been calls for reform of higher education, focusing on the need to prepare prospective employees for the workforce. These calls fit into the broader pattern of reform and assessment that has recently pervaded higher education.

As with the issue of accountability and assessment, the role of higher education in preparing the workforce has been long debated. Despite the writings of numerous historians of higher education studying the dynamic nature of the higher education curriculum in the antebellum period, this myth still persists (Rudolph, 1977; Herbst, 2004; Labaree, 2017). The classical curriculum of the antebellum college was based on an educational psychology that favored repetition and eschewed the specificity of particular content areas. This educational psychology was laid out early by Yale College in its defense of the classical curriculum in 1828. This report dichotomized learning as the "discipline" and the "furniture" of the mind. The classical education took the untrained mind, and through individualized instruction and repetition, trained it to become disciplined. Later studies could focus on the furniture or the specialized knowledge needed for a profession (Herbst, 2004).

Additionally, the segmented psychologies of learning that include child psychology, adolescent psychology and adult psychology did not exist until the late 19th century. In fact, as noted earlier, schools were only beginning to talk about age-appropriate learning for young children in the early 19th century. The basis for a discussion of the place of learning for work lies in the changing nature of educational psychology. This psychology of learning through repetition was supplemented by the idea that learning involved disciplining the mind, or in more modern words, learning to learn.

The tension between this idea of discipline and the rise of disciplinary knowledge created deep divisions within higher education. For example, science and engineering in the 1820s were not part of the classical education. These

topics were indeed offered, but they were considered "extras" outside of the curriculum. The big debate before the Civil War revolved around the roles of science and engineering in higher education. This was also tied to the fact that, by the 1850s, many colleges that had opened were closing. Higher education was deemed to be in a crisis. In fact, it could be argued that the history of higher education is one of continual crisis. In 1850, Francis Wayland, who was the president of Brown University at the time (Brown was very experimental), felt that there was an important place for science and engineering in the curriculum. He was a major critic of the traditional curriculum. He said:

> We have produced an article for which the demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away, and still the demand diminishes. Is it not time to inquire whether we cannot furnish an article for which the demand will be, at least, somewhat more remunerative? (as cited in Labaree, 2017, p. 51)

Wayland was arguing that colleges were failing and individuals were not enrolling because colleges did not offer a product that was valued. He saw the addition of science and engineering as a way to overcome these lagging enrollments. Wayland indicated the precedent of West Point (the U.S. Military Academy). He noted that "the single academy at West Point has done more toward the construction of railroads than all of our … colleges united" (as cited in Labaree, 2017, p. 51). For Wayland, the value of education needed to be measured in terms of outcomes, and the desired outcome was employment. In other words, education needed to be useful.

David Labaree (2017) pointed out that the dichotomy of "learning to learn" and "learning skills" was never dealt with fully, which is why it keeps returning. For Labaree, the reason for this is that the modern university kept expanding to encompass a multitude of purposes. Engineering was grafted onto the structure of the classical liberal arts college. Other professional schools followed, with little change to the underlying structure of the institution.

With this extremely brief overview, I hope it is clear that many of the current debates in higher education have a long and somewhat recurrent history. The problem of accountability, in particular, has reoccurred at frequent intervals and has consistently been tied to enrollment and outcomes.

Final Thoughts

In my view, college programs for adults have often served as incubators for reform. Some of these innovations include changes in the curriculum, acceleration, alternative assessment and portfolio development, and the general movement away from seat time. Yet despite these important and far-reaching developments, a true transformation has not occurred. This is partly because higher education institutions are able to transform just enough to absorb change without any deep restructuring.

Today, many of the reforms advanced cater to the traditional-age student. Adult students and those who do not fit the mold of the traditional, full-time student are an issue, a problem to be solved, not a population to be sought. This attention to the traditional student focuses on persistence, retention, graduation and job placement, without any concomitant changes to the curriculum. To be sure, research indicates that full-time students are more likely to complete their degrees. However, this research also discounts the adult students who very rarely study as full-time students and possibly stop out for significant periods of time. Some programs – there is one at Smith College, for example – do require that their adult students attend full time. Smith also expects its adult students to move into the residence halls with their children. However, while an interesting model, Smith is very much an outlier here (Cohen, 1998).

The push for full-time students is occurring at the same time that the number of full-time students is declining. In times of scarce resources, funding for programs that help adults has been cut back, while support services within student affairs units has increased. It is interesting that this is occurring at the same historical moment when community colleges, for example, no longer talk about nontraditional students because their enrollments are made up of adults and other nontraditional students. They have become the new tradition. In fact, over the past 20 years, many writers have noticed that the former nontraditional students are, in fact, the norm (Choy, 2002; Ross-Gordon, 2011). This is particularly true at community colleges where the average age is 28 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017).

Programs for adults have rarely been central to an institution's mission; SUNY Empire State College is an exception here. As *nontraditional* is becoming unnecessary as a term, these adult students are growing in their presence. Similarly, the term "commuter" student has become quaint, although

surprisingly it is still in use. In fact, within the past 10 years, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), which is the major student affairs association, inaugurated its Commission for Commuter Students and Adult Learners. The ACPA did this in response to new demands to provide discussion of this group at their annual conference.

As we look to the future, we must ask how adult students can be better served. Many of the reforms currently under discussion are focused on the retention of students. Certainly, adult students need to persist and graduate. However, they also have life events that might preclude their accomplishment of this goal within a prescribed timeframe. This is not necessarily problematic, and policymakers need to be aware of the ways that adult students may differ from so-called traditional-age students. Evidence also seems to point to the fact that adult students are engaged within their institutions in ways similar to those of younger students. They may be less involved in clubs, but they are very much engaged in the classroom (Rose, Smith, Ross-Gordon, Schwartz, & Hitchcock, 2013).

In closing, I would like to ask for caution in the embrace of reform for the sake of change without fully understanding the consequences of some of these changes. The first caution is that the sense of crisis may be overblown. As I have already mentioned, higher education institutions have been perceived as being in crisis for the past 150 years. This *mess* has actually allowed change while maintaining institutional structures. Secondly, the focus on jobs as the major outcome of higher education is not a new issue. In fact, it is the *original* higher education debate. Questions about the usefulness of a college degree are long-standing and complex.

One of the things I'm thinking about is this: Are we moving to a two-tiered system, where we have an elite system for traditional-age students, and then a secondary, lower-tiered system for everyone else who is part time, and possibly for the for-profit institutions that are siphoning off many of the adults? What does that mean for adults in public universities, in particular? It is important to understand that the programs that are funded are those that are prioritized as important. This prioritization comes from a variety of forces including internal management and external calls for accountability. However, innovations that are not tied to a broader inclusivity do not always last (Grant & Riesman, 1978).

Finally, as I have pointed out, the tension between vocationally-driven and liberal arts programs has never been resolved. This tension raises perplexing problems for everyone, but for adults, in particular. Adults attend college for a variety of reasons; many are job related, some are not. The plethora of motivations is not acknowledged within the current reform efforts. Additionally, the idea of reform is being very narrowly construed. In fact, much of the reforms focus on providing support (not a bad thing) without thinking about the deeper learning needs of students (adults or otherwise). The idea of a "mess" that has permeated American higher education lends credence to the idea that adults have a place within the structure. Yet, much of the rhetoric ignores both the historical forces that shaped our present concerns and the ways that these institutions could be welcoming to adults.

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Completion Rates or Learning?

Paul Miller

In her talk, "Who Cares About Adult Students Today? The Antecedents and Implications of Recent Reform Efforts in American Higher Education," Amy D. Rose underscores themes of continuity and change in her overview of higher education and the experiences of nontraditional students. As Rose explains, adults have been on college campuses since the era of the American Revolution when they were part of an undifferentiated mass of scholars. They remained part of the student body until after the Civil War when colleges separated them through extension classes and evening courses. In contrast to this aspect of her presentation that recognizes the uninterrupted presence of adults on campus, Rose identifies a new focus within higher education on raising graduation rates with consequences to learning standards. Building on this insight, the comments that follow amplify Rose's assertion by examining research on learning outcomes and employment preparedness to show that adult students have been impacted negatively by shifting institutional priorities. The overriding theme here is that institutions of higher education owe their students an education and not a degree of declining value.

In the section of her thoughts that she calls "Present-Day Concerns," Rose reports that institutions of higher education have increasingly measured accountability by retention and graduation rates to the point that these have become the *sine qua non* of colleges and universities. Institutional processes for evaluating outcomes are not new. Faculty and professionals have been engaged in self-examination "for decades, if not centuries," as Rose says. The difference between past and present is that the academy used to investigate questions about the quality and relevance of learning: What did students learn? Was this knowledge adequate preparation for their lives after college? Presently, innovation within the academy has been riveted on academic retention and completion. It is symptomatic of this state that colleges and universities have made investments in student delivery systems to increase completion rates. According to Rose, the significance of this movement in higher education is that improved graduation rates have become the singular measure of good practice and institutional efficacy. While developing support services to help students finish their degrees is ostensibly a worthy goal, Rose identifies unanticipated consequences in these changing institutional measures:

"What is somewhat new is the view that the ultimate criterion used to define accountability is graduation," she avers, "and not the measurement of learning. This new emphasis has had and will continue to have profound repercussions."

How did we get here? No doubt, the emergence of graduation rates as the yardstick by which officials measure effectiveness derives from several sources. One impulse, clearly, is to raise human capital for the purpose of boosting economic growth, lowering unemployment and distributing income. The assumption is that more people with degrees makes it more likely for an individual state or the entire country to achieve these economic ends. College officials acknowledge, in this regard, the role of their campus in building their state's workforce. Speaking at SUNY Empire State College in 2016, Dr. Michael K. Moore of eVersity, which is part of the University of Arkansas system, noted the relationship between employment in his state and the number of college degrees: "We've got this vicious cycle right now. We have a lowly educated population which means we don't attract employers who want to bring high-paying jobs to the workforce …" (para. 19).

Another imperative comes from the federal government. President Barack Obama's U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) created a college scorecard based on cost, graduation rate and post-graduation salaries as metrics of institutional performance. This effort served the larger goal of the president to raise the production totals of colleges and universities in order to deliver at the least an associate degree to every American. On its face, such an effort is not misdirected. Raising education levels in rust bowl communities, for example, so that these localities become destinations for advanced manufacturing or health services, indicates a concern for blue-collar neighbors. There is nothing inherently wrong with these efforts except for the possible ramifications to curriculum and learning that are hidden behind the graduation numbers.

The problem lurking underneath increased graduation numbers is that while the number of graduates has risen in the last 20 years (McFarland et al., 2018, p. 190), it is not clear that these students are as prepared as their peers from 20 years ago. A number of recent jeremiads have warned about the state of learning on college campuses and the value of a degree. One of the first studies to raise alarm about declining standards of learning was by the U.S. Department of Education (2006), "A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education." The authors of this report observed declining literacy rates of college graduates and the increasing failure of higher education to educate

Americans to compete in the global marketplace. Five years later, a study by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa (2011), *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses,* ignited a national conversation. Using assessment data on 2,300 students at 24 colleges and universities, Arum and Roksa demonstrated that the impact on critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing after three semesters of college was "barely noticeable" (p. 35). Further, the authors found no statistically significant gains for nearly half of their cohort. Hundreds of newspapers and magazines cited their research. As recently as last year, Jeffrey J. Selingo (2017) echoed the findings of Arum and Roksa when he warned about the new emphasis on completion rates and job placement as opposed to learning in *The Washington Post:* "… [P]arents and students have focused more than ever on employment preparation and graduating on time. Intellectual discovery and exploration are no longer a priority, unfortunately" (Design New Pathways section, para. 1).

If studies confirm that nontraditional students have the same negligible learning outcomes that are described by Arum and Roska – and there is no reason to doubt this – the situation represents a bait and switch for adults who sacrifice considerable amounts of their time away from families and investment from savings for a credential of declining value. We know from surveys of adult students that they want an education, not merely a diploma. Amy Strage (2008) found that older students and community college transfers expected professors and courses to be "more rigorous, more serious, and more readily applicable to the real world" than their younger counterparts (p. 225). Relatedly, as one of my students remarked about the difference between older and younger students regarding lifelong learning, younger peers, he thought, "… simply lack the life experience to see its true value."

The expectations of adult students cited in Strage's research hew to the requirements of today's job market. According to a study by Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose (2015), workers of today and tomorrow "require higher levels of cognitive and non-cognitive competencies" (p. 10). Yet a poll by the Association of American Colleges and Universities discovered that employers gave college graduates low scores on oral communication, written communication and critical thinking, whereas students themselves believed that they had been better prepared in these areas (Jaschik, 2015). Leaving students debt-ridden but unable to compete in the knowledge economy can rightly be perceived as educational malpractice.

Rose's ideas are prophetic for the manner in which she raises awareness about new standards of accountability and their effects on learning. The discussion seems counterfactual: What could be wrong with initiatives to help more students graduate? It's a fair question that raises additional questions: How have the new criteria of accountability served adult learning? Does this learning adequately prepare students beyond college? Will testing undergraduates be necessary to justify the enormous personal and public costs of higher education? It is difficult to draw firm conclusions because of the paucity of data specific to nontraditional students, but Rose's analysis of recent trends should give faculty and administers pause.

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Who Sees Adult Learners Today?

Cathy Leaker

I wanted to respond to Amy Rose's comprehensive and layered presentation by answering the question in her provocative title, "Who Cares About Adult Students Today?" However, mindful of both word limits and my pernicious tendency to violate those limits, I decided to respond to the slightly less ambitious question, "Who Sees Adult Learners Today?" While Rose uses David Labaree's (2017) *A Perfect Mess* as a backdrop for her analysis, I set mine against the background of Charles Clotfelter's (2017) *Unequal Colleges in the Age of Disparity* and Tressie McMillan Cottom's (2017) *Lower Ed,* two texts that both raise profound questions about the choices that structure our higher education system, and suggest that those choices are more deliberate than Labaree implied. Finally, while I conclude that adult students are (or rather *an* adult student is) considerably more visible within higher education than Rose suggests, the terms of that visibility (exactly who is visible to whom and what that means) illustrate precisely the cautionary tensions that Rose so effectively outlines: between degree completion and learning/development; and, most troubling, between a plural system designed to support multiple needs, constituencies and purposes and a hierarchically-tiered system that pays lip service to pluralism, even as it delivers increasingly deep and personalized learning experiences to the few, and increasingly superficial, mass-produced programming to the many.

The prospect, indeed the likelihood, of the latter outcome is becoming harder and harder to ignore despite – or perhaps as a corollary to – the student success discourse that currently dominates the higher education landscape. The Pell Institute report, *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States* (Cahalan, Perna, Yamashita, Ruiz, & Franklin, 2017) painted a disturbing picture of wide and increasing postsecondary equity gaps linked to race and socioeconomic status. Specifically, the report cited multiple data sets to illustrate "high inequality," "widening gaps" and "reduced opportunity" in such areas as affordability and net cost, type of institution attended, delayed enrollment to college and degree attainment. For example, in 2015, students in the highest income quartile were five times more likely to complete a bachelor's degree by age 24 than those in the lowest quartile (58 percent and 12 percent respectively; p. 74). One explanation for this gap is the college cost burden for families. In 2012, the average net price of a college education (after all financial aid is

subtracted) for families in the lowest quartile was 84 percent of family income, as compared with 15 percent of family income for those families in the highest quartile (p. 69). According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy's *Limited Means, Limited Options,* this means that only 2 percent of colleges would meet the affordability threshold for adult students with incomes under $30,000 (Poutré, Rorison, & Voight, 2017, p. 7).

The inequities outlined in the Pell report both produce and are produced by the economic forces that underlie institutional decisions across higher education. In his *Unequal Colleges in the Age of Disparity,* Charles Clotfelter (2017) described in excruciating detail how the economics of higher education mirror trends in a larger American economy marked by growing income inequality; for Clotfelter, "the inequality among colleges … is stunning in its extent and breathtaking in the variety of its manifestations" (p. 337). Among those manifestations, claimed Clotfelter, are self-perpetuating "scholastic segregation and … academic hierarchy," effects "so well known that their existence is entirely unremarkable" (p. 207). Clotfelter borrowed sociologist Robert Merton's biblical metaphor, the "Matthew Effect" (p. 113), to denote the tendency, especially pronounced since the recession of 2008, for the handful of America's wealthiest and most selective institutions to accumulate more wealth, and in the process become more selective, while the majority of colleges, faced suddenly with the "bleak prospects of a buyers' market" (p. 164), scramble to find tuition-paying students in order to break even. Clotfelter suggested that this latter group of what he termed "colleges of quiet desperation" can't afford the putative high admissions standards of wealthier schools, and instead must "[embrace] all those for whom financial viability is a recurring, year-to-year concern" (p. 119).

Those financially vulnerable students overlap significantly with the new market of adult learners that, until recently, has been courted by for-profit colleges, a sector not included in Clotfelter's analysis.

Among the many disturbing pieces of data in The Pell Institute report was the fact that students from the lowest income quartile are "substantially more likely" than students in the other quartiles to enroll in private for-profit institutions (Cahalan, Perna, Yamashita, Ruiz, & Franklin, 2017, p. 42). While it is all too easy to demonize the diverse for-profit sector, Cottom's (2017) *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy* offered a compelling argument that this sector, taken as a whole, has had far more success commodifying and financializing social inequality than in remediating it.

Cottom's argument was comprehensive and nuanced, but most germane for my purposes was how she framed her analysis in the context of the "Education Gospel," a construct first articulated by economists W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson. Grubb and Lazerson (2005) defined the Education Gospel as "the idea that formal schooling preparing individuals for employment can resolve all public and private dilemmas" (p. 297). Cottom (2017) suggested that after the 2008 recession, this gospel morphed into the message, all social and individual problems are a *result* of the lack of formal schooling that ensures employment.

For Cottom (2017), this retooled Education Gospel has two distinct effects, both of which fall disproportionately on poor people of color. The first is that education has gone from being a public good to a private investment, with the consequent shifting of not only the cost burden but also the moral injunction (often framed as "entrepreneurial chutzpa") from states to individuals. The second is that for the most vulnerable students, education has become less about opportunity, much less about learning, and much more about insurance against continued vulnerability. Ellen Ruppel Shell's (2018) op-ed in *The New York Times* framed the new education bargain as follows: "It's not necessarily college that gives people the leverage to build a better working life, it's that not having a degree decreases whatever leverage they might otherwise have" (para. 18).

It is against this backdrop (a highly stratified higher education system, stark inequity in higher education attainment, and an increasingly privatized, economically-driven Education Gospel) that adult students have emerged from the penumbra of higher education discourse in the early 21st century into a kind of hypervisibility in 2018. But this characterization itself is misleading since arguably the adult student who is suddenly hypervisible may well be an entirely different figure than the adult student whose historical relationship to higher education Amy Rose so carefully traces. What is most visible about the adult student of 2018 is the economic urgency that interpellates her or him. Driven in part by the educational agenda of the Obama administration, national organizations with relatively deep pockets, like the Lumina Foundation and Complete College America, have targeted adult college completion – or rather, and the distinction is telling, *credential completion* – as a core strategy for meeting America's "urgent and growing need for talent" (Lumina Foundation, 2018, para. 1). In this articulation of what is quite literally a story of nation

building, adult students are heroic (and sometimes tragic) figures in a national drama in which America's shrinking competitiveness in a global marketplace is the mise-en-scène.

Having said that, neither individuals nor institutions are wrong in perceiving an employment-driven imperative for further education. But recognizing the primacy of the economic drivers, and even acknowledging the desperation that may fuel those drivers, does not and should not presume that current or prospective adult students are galvanized by exclusively educational entrepreneurialism at the expense of other motivating forces. On the contrary, even national studies that purport to demonstrate the supremacy of economic motivators cannot entirely eradicate alternative ways of thinking about education. Public Agenda's 2013 report, *Is College Worth it for Me? How Adults Think About Going Back to School,* is a case in point. The report described a nationally-representative survey of 803 adults ages 18 to 55, in which seven in 10 cited career mobility as their main reason for going back to school, while "just 1 in 4 [said] they [were] looking primarily 'to learn about the world'" (Hagelskamp, Schleifer, & DiStasi, 2013, p. 13). While it is all too easy to focus on the 70 percent of career-focused adults, the 25 percent of adults who *primarily* want to learn something about the world deserve attention as well, in part because that number seems both unusually high for *any* college student demographic, and because the particular framing of the motivation runs counter not only to educational entrepreneurialism but to our current political climate, as well. Indeed, a reasonable rhetorical alternative to the almost dismissive language of the report's authors might read as follows: "While seven in 10 survey respondents cited career concerns as the primary reason for returning to college, fully 25 percent reported as their primary motivator a desire to learn something about the world." I am not suggesting that the 1 in 4 statistic, however articulated, discounts the economy as the dominant force pushing adults to enroll or to re-enroll in higher education because it obviously doesn't; rather, I am calling attention to what can only be described as the astonishing resilience of other less tangible factors shaping adult students' decisions about education.

In the face of such resilience, framing adult learners as solely economic actors is reductive at best and discriminatory at worst. Throughout his text, Clotfelter (2017) rightly bemoaned the *de facto* return of academic segregation in an age of educational stratification, providing repeated and compelling evidence that "the byproduct of more homogeneous colleges is, obviously, more separation between

students who are different from each other" (p. 229). This separation of students – by race, socioeconomic status, academic pathway or academic background – is alarming enough on its face, but equally alarming is the concomitant byproduct. Clotfelter's analysis revealed that those largely tuition-driven colleges most pressured by market forces, notably the same colleges most likely to "see" adult students, were also those most likely to adapt or grow occupational majors while reducing or dropping liberal arts majors (p. 177-180). Clotfelter made it very clear that if current trends continue, the liberal arts and the kinds of critical questions and intellectual inquires they sustain might become a marker of educational privilege, suitable only for those overwhelmingly traditional students with the time, capacity and resources to indulge them. But, like earlier forms of educational segregation, what is *also* being separated and segregated is a way of thinking about, and being within, higher education. Arguably, depending on how one interprets the role of the liberal arts, what is being separated and segregated is the very notion of difference itself or at least the privilege of thinking about it. Put bluntly, a small number of by and large wealthy, by and large privileged, by and large white, and by and large *young* students are provided opportunities to think deeply and carefully about, among other things, the role of difference in shaping individual and collective histories, socioeconomic and political frameworks, and educational narratives. Those students, including adult students, who most deeply live the effects of difference, however, might well be prevented from exploring their particular differences academically. It is, of course, more than a little arrogant to suggest that disadvantaged adult students *need* academic language to understand their own disadvantage and the role difference plays in structuring it, but it is equally arrogant to assume that those same adult students have no desire to engage in and *contribute to* conversations about history, identity and difference.

The point here is not to decry institutions or students for an increasingly occupational approach to education. Rather, my goal is to reflect for a moment on what gets lost when our vision for education narrows, particularly when the narrowing is so much more intense for certain populations of students, including adults. A brief account of a distinctively academic celebration might help to illustrate – or at last hint at – those losses. The celebration occurred at my current institution in April of this year and honored students who had made the dean's list the previous fall. During the ceremony, I found myself particularly drawn to the invited speaker's comments, in part because she herself was an alumna of the college and spoke very powerfully about her experiences

as a student consistently functioning in what she described as "survival mode." And yet, while she certainly acknowledged both the economic vulnerability that drove her to college and the economic opportunities she'd been given as a result of earning her associate degree, she focused more intently on what her studies had helped her to understand about her own history and about her identity "as a woman and as a Latina." She concluded with an exhortation to the primarily traditional-age students to "aim high and aim wide." Perhaps on a different occasion at a different time, I might have found these words a bit clichéd, but because at the time I heard them I was immersed in the issues this essay raises, her language struck me as particularly poignant. The invocation of such familiar academic values as "depth" and "breadth" seems sadly quaint in the context of current discourses, all the more so because the speaker was referring not to *curriculum* but to student *aspirations.*

It is a commonplace understanding of andragogy that adult students are goal-driven. Arguably, that commonplace was, at some point, one of several tools that helped adult educators more effectively and accurately see the students they serve. But perhaps it's time to revisit the usefulness of the "goal-driven" lens. This is not to suggest that adult educators should return to the good old days of imposing our own goals on adult students, though we may do well to wonder if we ever really stopped doing so. Rather, we must first ask ourselves how and to what effect the concept of "goal-driven," like so many other core andragogic values, has been so co-opted by larger sociopolitical forces that produce, sustain, and (as Cottom would have it) profit from inequality. Secondly, we must interrogate the degree to which the language of goals has not only dominated but actually replaced the language of aspirations. While no language choice can claim ideological purity, words do matter even in the Trump era. They matter even more when they are not simply connected with, but are quite literally and quite differentially *allocated to,* groups of students based on characteristics that have little to do with the desire to learn. As we ourselves aspire toward an equitable system of higher education, a core element of that imagined system should be first a commitment that all students are entitled to "aim high and aim wide," and second the recognition that so many of them already do.

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Untitled 5, 2013, Digital pigment print, 17″ x 22″

Photo credit: Courtesy of the artist

Motivating Adults to Learn: The Role of Qualifications

Patrick Werquin

Introduction

My focus here is on participation in adult learning activities and, in particular, the participation of so-called "low-qualified" adults. I want to focus on some pieces of evidence, some hypotheses and some possible options for improving participation. I also want to say that most of the findings, ideas and hypotheses reported here are based on the research I did when I was working with the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), or as a consultant over the last seven years.

Conceptual Clarifications

There are a few words I would like to clarify. First of all, "lifelong learning" is *not* "adult learning." By all definitions, what we term "lifelong learning" is from cradle to grave, so it begins from the very moment you are born, and only ends at the moment you die. "Adult learning" is a component of lifelong learning; it's for the adult population, and the issues are entirely different and specific to adults. So I'm really focusing here on adult learning.

One of the other keywords I am using here is "qualification." A qualification is basically a document; some people may call it a degree, a diploma, an award or an outcome – it depends upon the country. Whether you're traveling in English-speaking Africa, the U.K., the U.S. or even in Canada, the term is defined slightly differently but the meaning is the same. For me, a qualification is an official document – the result of an assessment. It is awarded when a person has been recognized for learning outcomes achieved. So basically a qualification is describing a competency. And the competency is social; the competency has to be assessed in the context in which a person is using that competency, and with whom this person is using that competency (i.e., teamwork). Otherwise, it doesn't make too much sense. For me, that's the difference between, for instance,

knowledge and competence, or skills and competence, or learning outcomes and competence. All in all, a qualification is a piece of currency, and it has to have currency in the society, or it is useless.

Regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs) are very trendy at the moment in Europe, southern Africa and Australia, for example. The so-called "European Qualifications Framework" (EQF; see European Commission, 2017) has great appeal in Europe because we have many national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) that are not compatible, and mobility of students and workers is complicated, if not impossible. A qualifications framework is a classification instrument – a method for classifying qualifications and providing transparency to end users, especially learners and employers. The concept of qualifications frameworks is perhaps less common in the U.S. or, when it is known, is often perceived as involving too much regulation, and is therefore ruled out. I believe this kind of qualifications framework is actually a useful tool for learners who need transparency, who need to know where they are, where they will go, and where they will be allowed to go if they ever undertake learning activities and achieve a qualification. In effect, the European Qualifications Framework is providing a description of the entire system and organizing qualifications in relationship to one another. If implemented in a way that all stakeholders can use it and have a sense of ownership, a qualifications framework – whether sectoral, national or regional – is really useful. It makes the establishment of a prior learning assessment (PLA) system a lot easier, because qualifications awarded to successful applicants are systematically anchored in the qualifications framework; applicants know what they get (or do not get) and why.

To go back to definitional issues, and to be very clear, competencies are made visible through qualifications. In my country, France, for instance, a diploma or a degree is very often used to position someone in relationship to their social status on the social scale. I see qualifications as a bit more neutral, more clinical: they serve as a description of competencies for employers, for instance, and other recruiters, in the tertiary education system typically, who want to know exactly who they are hiring/recruiting, or potentially hiring/recruiting. Also, to be even more specific – and this is sometimes misunderstood by many people – you may be competent but *un*qualified. This is very clear in Africa, where many people have acquired competencies nonformally and informally, and still never have gone to school, or never have gone to school long enough. So they are "unqualified" in the sense that I'm using the term, meaning that even though they are competent – for example, they master their trade job – nobody has ever

given them any documents to substantiate their competencies. Obviously, in this situation, PLA, or what many people across the world call recognition of prior learning (RPL), or what is called recognition of nonformal and informal learning outcomes, is very useful because many people are competent – they are self-learners – but they don't have any documents to prove these competencies.

Formal Adult Learning: Evidence and Hypotheses

Most of the formal learning in which people have participated has taken place by the age of 20-something – about 25 at most – and then it disappears completely. That is, most adults are not engaged in formal adult learning. This is a well-known fact that cuts across all time and space (see Desjardins, 2015, for example).

There are many reasons for this situation. For one, I believe there is a supply and demand issue. There are insufficient resources; there is just not enough money. Also, adults are not interested in engaging in full-time learning activities because they are busy: they are busy with their lives; they are busy with their families; they have many other constraints. That is the main difference between children and adults when it comes to education and training. The former have no other things to do than go to school and engage in school-related activities; they are captive, at least until the end of the compulsory school age, and they have no choice. Conversely, adults have many, many things to do, including, of course, making money for a living. I saw a case in Mexico where everybody was excluded from learning activities because when they were learning in formal learning contexts, they weren't making money enough to feed their families.

There is also the fact that the return on investment in adult learning is unclear. This is a major issue for me. Most of the research work – especially in economics – has been more than disappointing about proving that the return on investment in adult learning is useful, especially whether there is benefit in the long term. Most of the studies I know are looking at whether trained people have a better wage or better benefits just after a training period in which the learning has taken place, for example. Obviously, this is too short a time scale for proper measurement. We need long-term research; we need longitudinal data. And we need to look more thoroughly: We surely need more variables than wages. For instance, a reasonable hypothesis is that learning – and achieving a qualification, even more – provides learners and recently qualified

adults with better self-esteem, which is an excellent predictor of better earnings in the future, provided, again, that the time window is long enough. Economists – and data collection processes – are shortsighted.

The real issue as to why most adults aren't engaged in formal learning situations can be described in relation to the "Matthew Effect." This well-known phenomenon comes from the Bible, and basically says that the ones who have a lot will be given even more. In the context of adult learning, it means that while you would expect that adult learning systems are bridging the gap that the school created between the least qualified people and the most qualified people, in fact, it is the other way around. Low-qualified people do *not* engage easily in formal learning activities, and highly qualified people benefit more – and more often – from adult learning opportunities. And we know the reasons. For low-qualified people, there is the issue of shame, especially regarding literacy, because perhaps they did not go to school or did not go long enough (depending on the country), and they may be ashamed that they cannot read and write well. Also, as earlier mentioned, there is the lack of visibility of the return on investment in adult learning. On the contrary, more highly qualified people have a richer track record of learning and success – they are not afraid of being assessed, they are not afraid of being confronted with what they do not know. Given this context, we need to create and support appealing steppingstones for low-qualified adults to feel legitimate about engaging in adult learning activities.

There is additional evidence about the realities of the Matthew Effect, for instance, from the OECD Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey program for international competencies (OECD, n.d.; 2000). Evidence from all of these countries, including the U.S., indicates that highly qualified people (ISCED 5-7 [International Standard Classification of Education]) with higher levels of education engage more often in formal adult learning. And, if you look at participation levels in relationship to "prose literacy," which is how well adults master the language of the region, we see the same story: Highly qualified people engage more often in adult learning activities. So the Matthew Effect is highly substantiated.

This is the real issue for policymaking and a major challenge for research: the low participation of low-qualified adults in adult learning activities. As noted before, this does not mean that these adults are not competent – they may have been self-learners for many years after dropping out of formal schooling. Rather, they are low qualified, and that is the beauty of PLA. Indeed, the

mere fact that they may be competent is the rationale for implementing prior learning assessment systems. Thanks to the assessment involved in PLA, the competent, unqualified people will be awarded a qualification that matches their competencies, and their requests will gain more weight and legitimacy when they ask for a pay raise, a promotion or a better job.

Disappointing (Statistical) Research

As I said before, the research based on econometrics and statistics has been disappointing because it is almost uniquely focused on wages; that is, the research asks: How much better is the wage after the completion of the learning activities? However, most of the time, the increasing wage doesn't show up immediately after learning; if there is a wage increase, it happens a long time after. But, above all, what is missing for me are all the other possible covariates. What is missing for me is the measuring of self-esteem, happiness – all of those predictors of future enrollment in learning activities, of job promotion and of occupational mobility. Better self-esteem after adult learning activities may not have a direct impact on wages in the short term, but it is clearly a potential predictor of a better job, or of a job promotion in the medium or long run, and therefore of a better wage eventually.

A real focus on the long-term impact of learning is missing. We're always looking at short-term effects of adult learning activities, but most of the time after such learning, adult workers go back to the same job, with the same boss, with the same money and the same occupation, and this is not really helping. Data collection is just too limited; we are not following people long enough.

I have a hypothesis that low-qualified adults are *not* interested in learning, but they *are* interested in a qualification. They have realized that people with qualifications – the lawyer, the medical doctor, the teacher – are the ones who are active in the community, have the responsibility in the community, and have the say and the influence. They are also the ones with the better jobs and the better wages.

If fact, it is a bit more than a hypothesis. There is strong evidence to support this claim, and I've seen it in many countries. People are moving away from learning activities, but are being really responsive to opportunities to get a qualification, even sometimes a very small certificate of labor market competencies – not a "real" qualification, but a small piece of paper. I remember being in Mexico once with an OECD delegation, and we were invited to

give certificates to people who had six months of literacy training in Spanish. These people were 60 years of age and above, mostly women (another issue, since there is no such thing as gender balance in adult learning), and they were extremely proud of receiving this document that was official and was probably the first document of this kind they had received in their lives. As a result of this and other similar experiences, I got the feeling that we should work more on promoting the use of documents to make people prouder of what they have achieved in terms of learning. These are among the steppingstones we could use: building an achievement track with certificates, and then awarding qualifications as milestones; and building this throughout life, not just for a short period of time.

And there is other evidence to support this insight. When you look at OECD data, such as the International Adult Literacy Survey data (OECD, 2000), you see the countries – for example, Chile, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy – in which you have a significant number of people with low qualifications. These are also the countries where people report that they learn for the sake of achieving a qualification over the pleasure of learning, for example, which was among the other proposed items in the International Adult Literacy Survey questionnaire (Coles & Werquin, 2007).

I did some statistical work myself regarding the relationship between learning and qualifications and found a different pattern. If you create two models – one in which you explain the learning activity only, as opposed to one in which the result is the gaining of a qualification – what you see immediately is that people who are interested in learning are more frequently people with a high level of qualification, and those people with a low level of qualification are less interested in learning. On the contrary, where you have people interested in seeking a qualification, you see that people are at the lowest level of qualification, as opposed to the highest level of qualification. And this does make sense because when you are already at a high level on the qualification scale, it is unlikely that you want an additional qualification. I don't think it is especially useful for people with a Ph.D. to seek a second Ph.D., but for people who dropped out early from school, a "simple" certificate that would have currency in the labor market may make a difference in their lives. This is measured thanks to the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey, with a sample of 21,000 to 43,000 people, so this is rather consistent evidence and the model estimates are very significant (Werquin, 2006).

Nonformal and Informal Adult Learning

The other piece of evidence that I would like to put forward is that nonformal and informal learning are the dominant forms of adult learning. We have some further evidence that those who engage in RPL or PLA are more likely to resume studies in the formal adult learning system. So we can think about "double currency" here. We have witnessed this in France where we have a very old RPL (or PLA) system that we call VAE (as in, Validation of Acquired Experience). Very often, we've heard a successful applicant in the VAE system say, "Well, finally, in the end, I liked it and I will now resume formal study. What I did in terms of being assessed on my nonformal and informal learning outcomes put me on the right track, and I want to study more." So, in effect, an award that you receive in the nonformal and informal learning system through assessment and recognition of prior learning outcomes has value, has currency in the formal education and training system, as well as in the labor market. That is, what I am calling this double currency idea is a very useful way of attracting people to resume formal learning.

Food for Thought

Finally, as a conclusion, I want to propose some possible solutions that might encourage the enrolling of people in formal adult learning, especially low-qualified people. First of all, there is the importance of awarding qualifications, or credits toward a qualification. It's not always possible to assess people in a way that you can make sure they have all of the competencies, so they are awarded the full qualification. But isn't it possible to provide them with credits or with exemptions if they resume study and do not want to follow the whole program? Why can't these adult learners be awarded all or part of the curriculum based on the assessment of the competencies they have already gained?

We need to carry out more comprehensive and relevant research by looking into all of the possible benefits of PLA/RPL. I remember doing a survey myself in Portugal several years ago about people engaging in PLA. We asked about economic benefits, and about other benefits, too. The results showed that most people did not have any significant economic improvement after doing PLA. But when we turned to other kinds of benefits that resulted from engagement in this process, people noted that they were all happier, they all had improved self-esteem, they all became self-directed learners, and, very importantly, they

all became interested in potentially beginning or resuming formal study. The sad news is that the Portuguese government stopped the program after our results because, as pointed to earlier, we could not show any economic evidence, no immediate return on investment in PLA. Still, as I have tried to argue, I strongly believe that self-esteem and all of those related covariates are good predictors of future economic return and future involvement in adult learning.

We should also combine PLA and adult learning more effectively. Wherever I travel throughout the world to talk about PLA, people all see PLA as a competitor to adult learning: I think it's a mistake. It is the other way around – they are not competitors, they are friends. They should be used in combination. I was in Germany recently talking about PLA. Germany has a very strong vocational system for young people (they call it the "dual system"), and they were very reluctant about implementing PLA – despite a strong push from the European Commission (the administrative body of the European Union) – because they were worried that their vocational system would collapse when the benefits of PLA were known throughout Germany. But this is wrong! PLA can be used to position people *before* they enter a training program, including in the dual system, to know exactly what potential learners need. There is no point in training people forever when they already have competencies. It is much better, much more effective, to assess them and see where they need improvement, and then to train them for the little bit they sometimes need, whether they are adults, obviously, or young people.

What is also clear to me is that the lifelong learning approach is absolutely not effective in any country I know, except, perhaps, in Norway. What I mean is that all countries are putting significant pressure on young people to achieve their highest qualification in their youth. France has a very strong attachment to qualification, and that's OK, that's good even (because all approaches using qualifications are inclusive); but what is problematic in France is that we assume that we have to do everything by the age of 20, 22 or 26 if you want a Ph.D. That is wrong. I think we should organize the acquisition of competencies, and therefore the achievement of qualifications, over a longer period of time – throughout life, as it says in lifelong learning – probably not until retirement age (because the time horizon would be too short to reap the benefits of investing in learning), but until at least 30, 35 or 40. All European countries are postponing retirement age, so we all work until 65 or 67, so I think it's time we have a meaningful lifelong learning approach that will necessarily and importantly involve adult learning.

As I said in my introduction, this might not be a good argument in the U.S., but a qualifications framework, I think, is an important tool for providing transparency, and therefore motivating people to engage in something having to do with learning because they know where they will go and what they will get. Again, a qualifications framework is nothing more than a classification instrument, but it takes away the opacity of the education and training system. And again, in this context, PLA/RPL is a very useful approach. If PLA/RPL is used in combination with the qualifications framework, we can reach a stage where learning is highly motivating, because first of all, what you know is assessed, and you are not taught something that you already know, and then you are given the qualification you need for the life project you wish to pursue.

Obviously, all of these solutions can be used at the same time and they are not divorced from one another; I would even stress that it is only in combination that these options are useful/relevant. For instance, you involve universities in the lifelong learning approach, so students can learn, accumulate and transfer credits over a *long* period of time, rather than over a few years. I believe that every single higher education or tertiary education should be considered *vocational.* I accept that we draw a distinction between an academic track and vocational track for young people, for secondary education; but after tertiary education, there is only the labor market, so everything is vocational in tertiary education: the ultimate objective is to get a job. Also, if you talk to a medical doctor and you ask whether what he or she is good at is purely academic or purely practical/hands-on, that person will say "both." By definition, it is almost impossible for most professionals graduating in the tertiary system to say whether they have practical skills or academic knowledge.

I would also more fully involve universities in the PLA/RPL system. I've seen the benefits of this involvement in Saskatchewan, Canada, and it was almost funny, because every year, the number of traditional students coming from a postsecondary education would go down because of poor demographic trends. The universities would therefore call the local PLA center and ask, "What is this PLA again, you're doing?" because they just wanted to increase the size of the pool of their potential customers. It is very much a win-win situation. Adults are invited to learn and study in the university, and part of the curriculum is not given to them because they already have it, because they are assessed before they start. And for the university, obviously, that increases their pool of students, and students are given access to the qualification and to the kind of employment they desire and need. Indeed, as I have argued throughout,

there is double currency for PLA/RPL: It can be used for the formal education system and it is most relevant to the labor market. And it responds to those who most need it – the students.

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PLA: Is There a Hidden Bias Against Those With Fewer Qualifications?

Bernard Smith

What do we think we know about individualized prior learning assessment (iPLA) and retention and completion? Data from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (Klein-Collins, 2010), and from our own findings (Ellis, Smith, Travers, & Treadwell, 2017; Travers et al., 2008) points to a strong correlation between those students requesting that their experiential knowledge be assessed for college credit and successful completion of their degrees. Indeed, data from 62,475 students attending 48 institutions across the U.S. (including SUNY [State University of New York] Empire State College) concludes that twice as many adult students who completed PLA were likely to graduate in seven years compared to those who never included PLA; and, perhaps surprising to many, those who included PLA as part of their degree were more likely to take additional classes and earn more credits than those who eschewed PLA (Klein-Collins, 2010).

It must be noted, however, that the results of this important CAEL study do *not* suggest that there is any causal relationship between the successful completion of prior learning assessment and retention or the completion of a degree. In fact, the CAEL report makes it clear that PLA is not even a "predictor" of college success:

> Too many other factors upon which degree completion depends cannot be measured or are difficult to collect across multiple institutions. Studies have shown, for example, that the following individual factors have an impact on student success: personal characteristics, academic background, integration of the adult learner into the academic and social life of the campus, social influences (especially those of parents, peers, and teachers), GPA, institutional commitment, encouragement from friends and family, goal commitment, attitudes, financial status and assistance, and off-campus employment. (Klein-Collins, 2010, p. 9)

As part of the mythos surrounding iPLA, our thinking at SUNY Empire State College has been that we should emphasize to adults, who are now attending college after a hiatus of 10 or 20 years, that despite their previous poor

experiences with college classes and without formal teachers and classes, they *can* successfully master college-level knowledge, and thus college-level work should not seem so alien and daunting. They can do it, we implore, because they *had* done it and they had done it by themselves.

But Patrick Werquin's talk does not so much question this story as upends it. That is, for Werquin, those mentees who are willing to put themselves on the spot and have their knowledge and skills assessed by faculty are the very mentees who are most likely to succeed in college. However, there are those mentees whose experience of any kind of assessment makes them far less comfortable with this process and who, in fact, are the very people who find all forms of academic assessment a real obstacle and challenge. As Werquin puts it, echoing the biblical Matthew, to those who have, more will be given, while from those with little, even what little they have will be taken from them.

Is there something then, that caring and attentive faculty (mentors) can do to help their students (mentees) become more comfortable with the assessment process? Provisionally, I think, those of us who support PLA believe they can. I think we believe that mentors can support students as they progress through college by helping them develop better skills in expressing their ideas; providing guidance on the definition of college-equivalent learning; offering useful feedback as students make explicit what was hitherto tacit knowledge; and guiding them as they reshape accounts of their experience into versions of what they have learned from such activities. In other words, we take for granted that we can assist mentees to treat assessment of their experiential learning as simply a hurdle to be overcome.

In contrast, Werquin seems to offer a very different perspective. For Werquin, there appears to be two quite distinct classes of students. One class is not particularly challenged by any assessment process because their routine experience has been that, when faced with the assessment of and judgment by others, they have no difficulty in successfully demonstrating their knowledge, their skills and their abilities. Members of this class are then comfortable and eager to learn and to have their learning judged. They know how to do it.

The second class has a very different experience with assessment. When evaluated, their knowledge, their skills and their abilities are routinely found wanting. Members of this class are then quite resistant to having their learning assessed. Indeed, Werquin suggests that learning is not something for which

members of this set of students have returned to college. They are here, Werquin claims, really only to acquire qualifications because a qualification is simply one other thing that a college offers apart from learning, and it is these qualifications that these "low-qualified" adults are seeking, and not the "pleasure of learning."

Werquin argues (I think accurately) that people with higher qualifications, that is, socially recognized credentials, are far more likely to be interested in learning – and at the same time are less likely to be interested in acquiring more formal qualifications. To cite the example that Werquin offers, those with one doctoral degree are not likely to seek a second Ph.D., while those with few qualifications are far less interested in engaging in learning but are far more interested in obtaining more or better qualifications, which will enable them to have more access to "success" in life – most notably, better jobs and more money.

However, Werquin's claim that those with few (or fewer) socially recognized credentials are less interested in learning, is, despite Werquin's examples to the contrary, inconsistent with our own experience at SUNY Empire State College. Werquin offers that the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey program for international competencies indicates that "[h]ighly qualified people engage more often in adult learning activities" such as "prose literacy," and that those with lower qualifications fail to master the language of their region (prose literacy). But two points need to be made here. The first is that mastery of language skills is not a neutral metric, but is one that is, in fact, bound up with who has authority to control, monitor and police the social recognition of mastery, and how those who have authority to define mastery, in fact, define it. Recognition of the power of authority and the desire by those with such authority to work to provide safe spaces for those with lower or few qualifications to exercise their curiosity with more support and less judgment appears to enable many of these students to embrace learning when learning is meaningful to them (see, for example, Herman & Mandell, 2004).

The second point is that those who will routinely be judged as failures will not then seek out situations where they will be judged, even if they are just as curious and fascinated to learn as others who are qualified. Rather than view the world as divided into those seeking knowledge and those seeking credentials, it may be more useful to think about students as those engaged in studies in which they see a connection with their own lives, and those who are taking

studies in which they are offered no way to see such a connection. In other words, it is not self-evident that when provided with tools and materials to make better sense of their own lives that those with fewer qualifications will reject such opportunities.

Importantly, this connectivity is not about a view of education as instrumental in any simple literal way. By "connectivity," I mean a connection to any aspect of students' lives – their work lives, certainly, but also their interpersonal relationships, their understanding of poverty and wealth, of power and privilege, of their own everyday experiences, of the experiences of others with whom they share this planet, of birth, of health, of grief and loss. Education to provide those students not simply with credentials but with a better understanding of how to achieve what they really want is not perhaps as alien and unwanted as Werquin claims.

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Motivating Institutions to Learn

Marc Singer

Patrick Werquin's "Motivating Adults to Learn: The Role of Qualifications" addresses a crucial issue about how welcoming institutions are to adult learners – or rather, how welcoming those institutions are to adult learners' learning. Those of us who work in the field of adult learning have come to understand that adult learners (and indeed, all learners) are more than blank slates, and do not need, nor desire, to be remade by institutions of higher learning in their own image. Instead, the best thing a university can do with adult learners is to help them determine where they currently stand in regard to the distance between the learning they already have and the goals they hope to achieve through education, and then help them to create a roadmap to get them there as efficiently and as meaningfully as possible.

In his consideration of adult learners and their navigation of our advanced education systems, Werquin makes several excellent observations that change my way of thinking about adult learners. I was especially struck by his comment at the outset that "'lifelong learning' is not 'adult learning.'" Adult learning is just one subset of lifelong learning. Werquin's observation serves to make clear that learning evolves over time – not just in terms of content, but in method and in value, as well. I would only add to this my sense that it doesn't evolve the same way for all learners, so perhaps adult learning is not the same for each adult either, except that it is not typically the same as learning at earlier stages of life.

Werquin's focus here is on how to motivate adults to learn: that perhaps by doing a better job of aligning qualifications frameworks with adult learners' needs (especially, in this formulation, the opportunity to improve their economic situation), we can draw those he refers to as "low-qualified" adults into the formal learning ecosystem. This conceptualization of these learners is a marked departure from our traditional conception of adults as self-directed learners. Instead, Werquin suggests that a better alignment of qualifications (we might refer to these as "credentials" in the U.S., or in some cases, "certificates" or "degrees") would be an effective tool in convincing these low-qualified adults that there is value in pursuing a qualification – assuming that they actually need convincing. In other words, perhaps not surprisingly to anyone, it is not solely within the discretion of the individual to decide to go back to school or earn

a credential. There are structural factors, such as the existence of qualifications frameworks (not widely known in the U.S., though there are movements to establish such frameworks, such as the Global Learning Qualifications Framework developed at SUNY Empire State College (n.d.), or the Connecting Credentials (n.d.) project, afoot); the relevance of qualifications (which address the question, "Can I get a job with this?"); and perhaps most crucially, the accessibility of such opportunities – as Werquin notes, in Mexico, when people were spending time learning, they weren't making money to feed their families.

While, of course, there are still self-directed adult learners, they tend to be those who are already well situated in the economic or social structure, following a pattern Werquin quite accurately labels the "Matthew Effect," following the biblical idea that those who already have a lot will be given even more. It makes sense: You need to already have learned if you are to understand that learning is important, especially lifelong learning. Likewise, regarding qualifications or certifications: Those who already have credentials are more likely to pursue additional ones than those without credentials. One can observe this effect in patterns of MOOC-taking: a majority of those who enroll in these free, Massive Open Online Courses already have earned at least a bachelor's degree, and sometimes graduate degrees, as well.

While I would agree with Werquin that qualifications should have relevance and currency in society, both for learners and employers, I am not sure that the lack of interest in pursuing education among those who don't already have a high level of education – in other words, those we might assume would be most in need of education – can be attributed to a low interest in learning for its own sake, as Werquin suggests. Instead, I think there is a more fundamental question, one that Werquin does hint at: People need to see a path to their goals through the education system. If they cannot see clearly how a credential or a degree gets them where they want to be, why should they pursue it? This is much more of a structural issue that varies from system to system and country to country. It may be that those who have low qualifications (by which I assume Werquin means lower-level qualifications) have stopped where they are because they don't see what benefits an additional credential would bring them. This could be the result of a number of structural issues: a poorly developed, or less knowledge-based economy; institutional racism or sexism; high costs, or opportunity costs (as Werquin notes regarding Mexico); a widespread sense

that advanced education is associated with elitism or exclusivity, and thus is not socially inclusive; or, conceivably, an economic system in which there are suitable occupations and jobs for those without an advanced level of education.

There was a time not long ago when I believed that everyone was capable of learning anything, if only they had the time and would put their mind to it. I have come to realize, reluctantly, that this is not the case, and could not be the case. People have different levels of aptitude for learning, they harbor biases against or negative associations with education (as we are seeing in the U.S., in the results of a 2017 poll by the Pew Research Center [2017; see also Fingerhut, 2017]), and they may have greater or lesser amounts of self-directedness. Any of these obstacles could also mitigate against the pursuit of higher education. It is our job, among others, to expand access to those who might consider themselves imposters in a classroom or training program, and to welcome those who might have been excluded.

But not all will take advantage of such opportunities. Some of the responsibility for this lies with higher education institutions, my own included. To make sure that such learners see the advantage of pursuing lifelong learning, and also are motivated to acquire credentials that can help them, we need to make sure that our qualifications have currency, and that, indeed, they reflect a set of competencies that holders of these credentials can achieve and demonstrate. Unfortunately, at many institutions of higher education, degrees reflect an older way of doing things, one in which the teacher and the institution are at the center, rather than the student. In such a system, some venerable credentials – traditional either because of the approach taken to their subject or the method by which one earns them – may no longer be as useful as they once were. In such cases, prior learning is usually considered irrelevant because that learning wasn't acquired through the authority of the institution.

I do endorse Werquin's idea of issuing smaller, incremental credentials – but not primarily as a means of luring people into acquiring more education. Instead, such credentials should be "real," meaningful, and complete in and of themselves – but they should also be building blocks toward the construction of other credentials. Such a program of microcredentials could allow individuals to take more control over their education; that is, by cobbling together credentials that cover skills and topics in which they are interested, learners could tailor their own progress to address their own interests and goals. Such a system could encourage people to become lifelong learners in a rapidly changing economy

in which qualifications can become outdated, even those from prestigious institutions (except as a means of signaling status). They could leverage the learning they have acquired through nonacademic experiences.

Postsecondary institutions would do well to accommodate such an approach. Doing so would allow institutions to play a crucial role, both as intermediary and collaborator in the creation of meaningful connections between learners' needs and societal needs. These needs go beyond wages for all parties, as Werquin notes, extending to societal well-being and nonmarket benefits such as greater life expectancy, lower rates of social welfare programs, reduced alcoholism and more (Fujiwara, 2012; Kil, Motschilnig, & Thöne-Geyer, 2013; Goldin & Katz, 2008; McMahon, 2015). Besides Werquin's work, such analyses of these benefits are few in number. More needs to be done to make clear the value of linking the education of adult learners to the greater good.

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Untitled 7, 2013, Digital pigment print, 17″ x 22″

Photo credit: Courtesy of the artist

Adult Learning, Social Mobility and Social Justice: A View from the U.K.

Liz Marr

Thank you for inviting me to talk about a topic that is very dear to my heart. I am a lifelong learner, as I expect we all are. As one who was a mature student and took my first degree at the age of 30 as the mother of a small child, I am very acutely aware of the life-changing opportunities that higher education offers, but also the challenges that adult learners face. I was reminiscing recently about doing exams in my final year, when I actually had to leave the afternoon exams early in order to get to nursery in time to pick up my daughter. Those kinds of challenges are faced on a daily basis by adults who are trying to develop their career aspirations through higher education.

Alongside a sense of maybe not belonging, I can also recall how ridiculously pleased I was when the younger students started treating me like one of them, and started to engage me in conversations about the course. So the experience of an adult learner is one that I have; I can speak about it with confidence. It is also one that I have committed to exploring and examining over the years. That experience was at a time when it was, believe it or not, much *easier* for the mature student than it is now. There were no tuition fees in the U.K., and grants were available for living expenses – the grant actually just about covered my child care expenses, so I had to work part time, as well. But nowadays, it is pretty impossible to study full time or part time in the U.K. without accumulating huge debt, even if you're undertaking part-time work at the same time. It has become a very expensive thing for people to want to do.

What I want to talk about here is how we have come to this situation – where it is more difficult for adult learners to take up higher education opportunities than it has ever been before, ironically, in a period when government policy is ostensibly targeting social mobility as a key aim, and in theory should be prioritizing the needs of adult learners in addressing skills and productivity gaps. Data shows us that there is a huge demographic downturn – the number of

young people is declining over the next five to 10 years (Universities UK, 2017). If we are really going to develop the workforce that we need for the next decade, then we have to focus on adult learners. I am not arguing here that higher education is only about training people for developing skills in the workplace, but it is a very important element about which I think we need to be aware.

Background and Context

At the time of writing, the U.K. was going through a period of transition, with policy in limbo due to an unexpected election outcome, casting doubt on the ability of the incumbent prime minister to pull together a government. As a result, many of the proposed changes in the manifesto – such as the reintroduction of school selection at age 11 – were abandoned. But, I would argue, this serves to underline just how important education has become, and not just for economic reasons. Twenty years ago, Dame Helena Kennedy (1997), in her introduction to a review of U.K. further education (post-compulsory, non-university provision), wrote:

> Education strengthens the ties which bind people, takes the fear out of difference and encourages tolerance. It helps people to see what makes the world tick and the ways in which they, individually and together can make a difference. (pp. 6-7)

In today's context, that is a really critical purpose for higher education. The recent terrorist attacks in Manchester and London, of which I'm sure you've all been aware, have brought out the best of most British people. But there are still many who see the solution to the problems they are facing as lying in greater divisions between people. The outcome of the "Brexit" vote reinforces this view. Alarmingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, those results correlated really closely with data on low educational outcomes and higher education participation (Rosenbaum, 2017). In other words, people who lived in areas with low educational participation were more likely to vote to leave the European Union. One of the possible explanations mooted for this is that the "expert" is no longer seen as having meaning for some parts of the population. But one might equally argue that lack of access to learning opportunities limits aspiration and attainment; it locks people into a world of low or no employment options, poor health, high crime rates, high mortality rates and high rates of disability (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

The experiences people are having around employment and unemployment are also critical. Peter Scott (2017), the fair access commissioner in Scotland, spoke recently of what he called the "precariat in the so-called gig economy," acknowledging we will all work for much longer and have multiple career changes over that period, should one be lucky enough to find work at all. So we're in a very changing, fluctuating context in which I want to argue education is so important if we're going to really resolve some of the problems we're facing.

It is against this background that the promise of successive U.K. governments to address social mobility and social justice through education is encouraging. But I want to argue here that the neoliberal ideology that sits behind policy development has a skewing effect that diverts both funding and intent toward a very narrow interpretation of social mobility, and has a limiting impact, in particular, on adults and part-time learners. To do this, I will take a historical look at higher education policy over the last 50 or 60 years, and highlight some of the key points in the journey that have brought us to where we are now. I am going to be looking at the contribution of two key figures – Lionel Robbins and Ronald Dearing – and the role that The Open University played. But before I do that, I want to give you a picture of the current state of inclusion in U.K. higher education. I then want to spend a little time thinking about what higher education is and what it is for; introduce some of the more recent policy developments emerging from the newly passed Higher Education and Research Act (UK Parliament, 2017); and then I am going to posit some ideas for what we might do to push the lifelong learning agenda forward.

The Challenge for Inclusion

The challenge for inclusion is both an external and internal one. The extract below, from an anonymous academic and published in *Times Higher Education* (2010), the U.K. higher education trade press, illustrates how difficult we find it even to agree among ourselves. Signed "a lecturer," the letter argued that:

> It is obvious that the current policy to increase participation in higher education has led to too many students attending who are not suited to studying at university level. And, as a consequence, standards fall.

> The crisis in university funding could be solved overnight by reducing participation to 20 percent (from the current level of 43 percent). Standards would rise, staff morale would rocket, and engaged students would get the education they deserve. (paras. 15-16)

What this highlights is that the pervasive argument that circulates, not just in university circles but in the wider community and in government, is that more means worse. And if you let more people in, then standards will fall. But as Tim Blackman, vice chancellor of Middlesex University, a workplace learning/competency-based learning institution in London, recently argued, "We measure the excellence of a university on how difficult it is to get into it, rather than how good it is at teaching" (Blackman, 2017a). I would like to argue that there was already a market in higher education before the introduction of fees, where individuals traded their educational and cultural capital for a place in a particular institution, and that the entry fee for an Ivy League university, or a Russell Group university as we call them in the U.K., is much, much higher than it might be for a community college, for example. The market already exists, and the challenge that we address in trying to ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes for individuals is wrapped up in our conceptions, our perceptions and misperceptions about the impact that market has on the higher education institution.

Diversity and Inclusion in U.K. Higher Education

Despite some negative views, there is a very solid commitment in the U.K. to widening access to higher education, which is shared by all of the devolved governments of the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). Primarily, they focus on socioeconomic background, albeit using some variation in terminology, identifying deprived areas using what is called an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). IMD measures things like infant mortality, unemployment and a whole range of other related characteristics. What we can see from data collated by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (2015) is that for 18-year-olds – I'm just talking about young people here for the moment – from the most deprived areas (referred to as quintile 1), only 18.5 percent will apply to and go on to study in higher education, whereas of those in the least deprived quintile (quintile 5), 44.9 percent will go on to study. Those in quintile 5 are 2.4 times more likely to enter higher education than people in quintile 1. All of the governments of the U.K. are really focusing on how they can make a difference there.

Unfortunately, what we see happening is that their focus is almost entirely on young people, on 18-year-olds, and all of the projects and programs they fund are about working with people who are under 18 in schools and colleges, to help them prepare for progression to higher education. In actual fact, most of the universities working in this field will take a much wider range of characteristics into their internal interpretations of widening access. However, we know that there aren't distinct sets of people who demonstrate each specific characteristic, but that they combine in various ways. So those living in areas of multiple deprivation are more likely to suffer from a disability, to have low education achievements, or to come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. That applies as much to adults as it does to young people. So there is aspiration and there is effort, but not necessarily a policy focus in the right area.

Key Challenges in Participation

Some of the key challenges in the U.K., which recent research has highlighted, include the fact that white, working-class males are the least likely to finish school without any certified qualifications (either vocational or academic), let alone attend university – and that is the case for both boys, and for men (Baars, Mulcahy, & Bernardes, 2016). But it has to be said that the current government policy targets only boys (i.e., under 18). There have also been huge decreases in the number of so-called "mature learners" – a point I will return to – and a big fall-off in progression to postgraduate study. Postgraduate progression for those in the poorest areas is, of course, much lower than the more well-off areas (Butcher, 2015; Wakeling & Hampden-Thompson, 2015).

Key Challenges in Study Success

We also know that there are some issues around differential outcomes (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has funded some research that has shown that there is an unexplained gap of three percentage points in the proportion of 2013-2014 graduates from quintile 1 (those least likely to progress to higher education) obtaining what we call a "good" degree, compared to people in quintile 5 (those most likely to progress). U.K. degree outcomes are classified according to the aggregated score a student achieves across all of his or her study, and a first class or 2.1 outcome is considered a "good" degree.[1] So we can see that there is an

unexplained gap, and the research has suggested that there are issues around the curriculum that really show that higher education qualifications are not having an equaling effect in terms of employment outcome.

Moore et al. (2016) undertook some additional research around social mobility and differential employment outcomes that very clearly demonstrates that educational capital in the form of a degree is insufficient to guarantee employment of graduates. For some areas of work, such as in the highly rewarded finance sector, it is essential to have undertaken unpaid internships, starting even before degree-level study, in order to have a chance of getting in, even with a degree from a good university. Moore et al. also identified that the tacit knowledge requirements – for example, knowing that you shouldn't wear brown shoes with a blue suit if you want to work in banking – make it even harder for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to progress into certain types of employment. That research is ongoing, and the HEFCE has funded some additional projects to look at the ways in which those differential outcomes might be overcome. However, the Social Mobility Commission's (2017) most recent report suggests this will continue to be an uphill struggle. One of the big challenges, of course, is that when you are working with employers, they are not necessarily as concerned about equality as those of us working in education.

Another serious challenge for us as higher education providers relates to the attainment of black and minority ethnic (BME) students (HEFCE, 2015; McDuff & Barefoot, 2016). According to research, ethnicity and skin color add to the challenges of social mobility and social justice, which people of all ages experience. It is worth mentioning here that as an institution, we at The Open University have taken what we think is a very important step in changing our discourse. Rather than referring to the BME "attainment gap," we are referring to the "degree-awarding gap," recognizing that we as an institution have to change our practice, rather than pathologize the learner and expect them to change. So there is a whole host of issues swimming around, particularly for adult learners and lifelong learning.

Part-Time Entrants to Higher Education (England)

There has been a big fall-off in part-time entrants to higher education in England – currently 61 percent since 2009-2010 (Bolton, 2017). The real acceleration in the decline comes around 2012-2013, and that's the point at which student fees in England tripled from 3,000 pounds to 9,000 pounds

– that is, from about $3,900 to $11,600. The impact appears to have been compounded by other factors, such as employers no longer being prepared to pay for their staff to study, partly because of the huge increase in fees, but also because loans are now available for part-time students. So employers would say: "Well, I don't need to pay. You can go and get a loan." It is ironic, actually, that many adult students will never, in fact, pay back the full amount of their loan because of their age, but for obvious reasons, this isn't advertised too widely (Belfield, Britton, Dearden, & van der Erve, 2017).

Robbins Report of 1963

I want to move back now, having painted the picture of where we are at the moment, to where I think the roots of our current policy reside. There have been many defining moments in the history of U.K. higher education, as we've moved from an elite, minority participation model through to a mass model, if not yet a universal one. The Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963) is one such moment in policy development and marked the start of real expansion as the so-called Robbins principle took hold. That principle was that university places should be available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them, and to all who wish to do so. This was immediately accepted by government, and is important because it moved away from the idea that the number of students should meet the U.K.'s employment needs – which was never very successfully calculated anyway – to a much more supply and demand-driven approach. The Robbins Report also successfully countered the "more means worse" argument, which I've mentioned – it has not gone away, despite Robbins' rebuttal, and is still used as a reason for why standards are declining. His work was solidly evidence-based, and it allegedly challenged his own views, and persuaded him to change his own mind about the need for expansion – something he was against initially.

One of the things Robbins did not address was how the expansion would be funded, but politically, he was pushing at an open door, because at the time, the British Labour Party, led by Harold Wilson, was about to win the general election. Wilson (1963) had already put down a marker for change in his assertion that Britain would be "… forged in the white heat of [the scientific] revolution" (p. 7). I think it was no accident that it was that same Harold

Wilson who conceived of my own institution, The Open University – or the University of the Air, as he first conceptualized it – to address a chronic waste of talent that the entire higher education system engendered.

University of the Air

The first chancellor of The Open University, Geoffrey Crowther (1969), was very clear about its mission and values, saying:

> The first, and most urgent task before us is to cater for the many thousands of people, fully capable of a higher education, who for one reason or another, do not get it, or do not get as much of it as they can turn to advantage, or as they discover, sometimes, too late, that they need. (p. 1)

Crowther was very clearly locating that waste of talent among the adult population and was challenging the existing system, which as he said, "… misses and leaves aside a great unused reservoir of human talent and potential" (p. 1).

I think what is striking about this is the second chance provision for which it argues. Tim Blackman (2017a), who I mentioned earlier, suggested that widening participation is very much about innovation, and about innovating particularly in curriculum. He argues that all fields of knowledge are social constructs and reflect aspects of the social world. What The Open University tried – and still tries – to do is to develop curriculum relevant to the student body – to their understanding and to their experience – and to deliver it in novel ways. There is also a commitment to excellence in there, which is really important. Some would say that this has constrained us as a university to always seek a platinum solution for everything, and to be somewhat conservative in our governance; I have heard it described as "byzantine bureaucracy," but that's another story. Nonetheless, the intention to provide something for those who had missed out is very evident, as is the determination to ensure excellent provision.

Disruption and Innovation

The initial name, University of the Air, related to the intention to use television and radio lectures, in addition to correspondence courses. As the white paper, *A University of the Air,* of February 1966 put it, however, there was no room for compromise on standards:

> From the outset it must be made clear that there can be no question of offering to students a makeshift project inferior in quality to other universities. That would defeat its own purpose. Its status will be determined by the quality of its teaching. Its aim will be to provide, in addition to television and radio lectures, correspondence courses of a quality unsurpassed anywhere in the world. (as cited in MacArthur, 1974, p. 6)

Harold Wilson famously said that he conceived of the whole university between church and lunch one day when he was on holiday. I wish we could come up with innovation so quickly now.

Innovation Versus Quality

The principle of open entry is central. The Open University does not require any entry qualifications from our students, excepting some professional programs and postgraduate study. You can come and start a course with us if you left school 20 years ago with no qualifications, or if you left school last week with high grades. The problem is that many such students are not prepared and find it quite difficult to stay the course, and that is something that has always had to be recognized in our provision.

> The position is still the same and we still face the same fundamental dilemma. The principle of open entry remains as a pillar of our structure, yet many of those who wish to start in the University are ill-prepared and fall by the wayside through inability to cope with the demands even of the foundation courses. Many more, no doubt with a greater gift of insight, see and recognise their own inability to cope with a foundation course before starting, and are therefore inhibited from 'having a go.' (Perry, 1976, p. 56)

What we have done to address this is to introduce enabling curriculum, known as access courses, and provide additional support, including scaffolding of skills and approaches to learning within the curriculum. The concern regarding dropout, however, is still very considerable. Part of the problem that we face is that we are now measured in terms of things that may not be so appropriate for students who just want to enhance their knowledge or skills in a single area. Changes in the fees and funding environment require that to be eligible for a loan, a student must register on a "qualification,"[2] and success is measured in terms of the completion of that qualification. So if you just come for a small amount of learning, or you want to extend your learning over a number of years that doesn't fit within the right time frames, your success cannot be "measured"

and withdrawal is classified as failure, even though you may have achieved the quantity and level of learning you required. This is nothing new and was recognized by the very first vice chancellor, Walter Perry (1976):

> The great danger of a system of open entry that does not demand any entrance qualification, is of course, that a great many students will drop out. The critics of the idea of The Open University held this out as the likeliest prospect before us and, had they been proved right, our very survival might have been in jeopardy. We were, therefore, most concerned to minimise dropout. There was another very cogent reason for our concern. One is anxious not to inflict the trauma of failure on students who are trying very hard and have perhaps bitten off more than they can chew. (p. 59)

The Game Changer?

I want to move on now to another defining moment, and one that I think marks the shift to a much more neoliberalist conception of how a higher education market might operate. The Dearing Report (Dearing, 1977) of higher education reported at a time when the huge growth in student numbers was effectively being financed by a diminution of the overall resource; in other words, there was no more money coming in – universities were just teaching more cheaply. The idea that higher education should, in part, be paid for by those who stood to benefit most began to take hold at this time. That was the point at which the slippery slope was stepped onto, and we have since lurched into a position where the state, in England[3] at least, indirectly funds higher education through the loan system, and students and employers bear the bulk of the cost of higher education – something I know colleagues in the U.S. are already familiar with.

On a more positive note, Sir Ron Dearing actually laid the groundwork for enhancing the quality of teaching. He wanted "more" to be better, and emphasized the need to widen participation. I understand that one of his regrets – he died a few years ago – was that he didn't address part-time study, but I don't believe that had he done so, we would be seeing a radically different trajectory because of the gradual and insidious spread of market forces that began at this point, and the further segmentation within the higher education sector that it heralded. So the initial annual fee of 1,000 pounds in 2003 rose within three years to 3,000 pounds; and to 6,000 pounds in 2010; and then to 9,000 in 2012. At the same time, grants for even the poorest students began

to decline – so there are no grants now for anybody, only loans. The recently approved Higher Education and Research Act (UK Parliament, 2017) has now effectively made it possible for all caps on fees to come off, by linking the ability to increase fees to a ranking system of teaching excellence, which I will come back to later on.

What is the University?

It is in this context that many people have been reflecting on what university is and what it is for. I just wanted to include this quote from *Stoner,* John Williams' (2012) novel, which was first published in 1965. This extract comes from an early-career researcher asking his fellow instructors whether they have ever considered the question of the true nature of the university. I like his description:

> It is an asylum or – what do they call them now? – a rest home, for the infirm, the aged, the discontent and the otherwise incompetent. Look at the three of us – *we* are the University. (p. 30, emphasis in original)

He was really commenting there on the way in which, as people move into the ivory tower, they become embedded and melded into the structures and the processes and the systems that make it very difficult to change and to react to the outside world.

What is the University For?

Perhaps a better question in the context of this discussion concerns what the university is *for.* Sir Tim Wilson (2012), in his review for government of business-university collaboration, took a very instrumental view of universities as contributors to economic growth, and served to underline the role of market forces:

> … [There is] a growing realisation … of the central role of universities in providing high-level skills, a world-class research base and a culture of inquiry and innovation. Universities are an integral part of the supply chain to business – a supply chain that has the capability to support business growth and therefore economic prosperity. (p. 1)

In contrast, Stefan Collini (2012) – a Cambridge University academic who has written a number of books about the purpose and state of higher education – took a more idealistic, if, I think, highly politicized, position of something that is pure and admirable, to be defended against the idea that it might train people for work, unless, of course, they are doctors, lawyers or politicians.

> [Universities are] perhaps the single most important institutional medium – for conserving, understanding, extending, and handing on to subsequent generations the intellectual scientific and artistic heritage of mankind. (p. 198)

So there is a dilemma – a tension – here relating to our understanding and belief about what university is for, which is perfectly encapsulated in these two quotes and Tim Blackman's (2017a) assertion that universities might just be about preparing people for the "grubby world of work."

Higher Education Markets and Entry Tariffs

As I argued earlier, there is a higher education market that predates the introduction of fees and can be seen in the entry qualifications demanded by different institutions. Effectively, a student's educational capital in the form of their school examination results "buys" their place at a university. The tariff tables produced annually by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (2015) show just how complex this market is. Institutions set their own entry tariffs that vary by program and may require additional entry tests. They are also able to specify what type of qualifications the tariff can be made up of. For example, an "elite" institution might set a numerical entry tariff but insist that all points must come from purely academic qualifications, whereas more accessible institutions might allow a combination of vocational and academic qualifications. In theory they hold equal value, but in reality their value is determined by social ascription, and it is out of the control of any individual or constituency to influence this. So the market already exists, and it has been exacerbated to a great extent by the economic market that has now been introduced, and these constraining factors make it very difficult for people with the passion to bring about change and innovation to actually make it happen.

Green Shoots?

I do want to mention a couple of the "green shoots" of lifelong learning, which I think may emerge from some of the research that is being undertaken, and some of the policy developments that are in place. The new political movements relate to a much greater consciousness among young people that they can determine their futures by engaging in democratic processes. So you will probably be aware that at our most recent general election in June 2017, which was called to strengthen the hand of Prime Minister Theresa May, the youth vote increased massively, and caused a considerable upset in the current balance within Parliament. Such political movements are becoming more influential, and young people are becoming much more active in participating as citizens – and that is, I think, a green shoot, which is linked to an avowed commitment to social mobility and social justice – and when I say "avowed," it is not necessarily followed through with action, but it is there. We could be seeing some changes.

I think there is also quite a lot of new thinking going on in the higher education sector. At the time of writing, I was looking forward to publication of *The Comprehensive University,* by Tim Blackman (2017b), based on some of the material I cited earlier. In this piece, he presents a much wider conception of what the university is, which takes all abilities; recognizes diversity; recognizes diversity of perspectives; and identifies the importance of those critical dimensions to any problem-solving that you might want to undertake.

The other area that I think is gaining some interest is a focus on the recognitive benefits of higher education (Tett, 2017). Those are about the self-awareness and the self-confidence developments that come from higher-level study, which can influence employability, but really make the life-changing experiences that students go through. So it isn't just about the redistributive benefits, where you get a degree and that spreads qualifications equally; it's more about the enhancement of self-worth that, for some people, the acquisition of the degree brings about.

These ideas underpin the thinking behind some new alliances developed within The Open University:

- The Social Partnerships Network (SPN) is something that I set up here at The Open University (n.d.-a), and that is a partnership with around seven or eight other national organizations in the U.K. that all have an interest in widening access to higher education with a focus on adults. These include

the Association of Colleges, the Workers' Educational Association, and Unionlearn (Trades Union Congress). They all have access to huge numbers of adults in the workplace who are looking to be upskilled. We pulled this group of people together to try to lobby for changes in government policy, to find routes for adults returning to learn, and to find ways to support them, and we have been quite successful in influencing reports that are going in to the politicians.

- One tangible output is a resource that was produced by SPN with some funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. It is called "PEARL": Part-Time Education for Adults Returning to Learn. It is a web resource that also has free courses for adults who are thinking about changing direction and looking for opportunities to develop further (The Open University, n.d.-b).

The Need for Slug Pellets

I presume you understand that a slug pellet is what you put down to keep the slugs and snails from eating your green shoots. I think although there are green shoots, there are potentially some threats. Peter Scott (2017) recently made this beautiful, tweetable comment that "Policymakers' attitude to lifelong learning is characterized by condescension and ignorance." I think that is quite strong, but I do think that policymakers have a view that education is something that starts when a child is three and goes to nursery, and finishes when they graduate at 21, or perhaps a little later if they do postgraduate study. They have a view of a boarding school model of education, which is the one they experienced – you go away to study, and you study for three years, and you may or may not go to lectures, and then you get a degree, and then you go to work in the civil service. That framing of it is influenced very much by their own experience, and that is something that we need to be aware of, and something that we need to lobby against.

The second concept (and made up word) that I've included here is "deliverology." There is a new regulatory body in England called the Office for Students, which is in the process of being established, to replace the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The newly appointed chair of that body is Sir Michael Barber, who first coined the phrase "deliverology." What he means by that is that everything should be measurable, and everything should have KPIs (key performance indicators); if you want to improve things, then

you have to establish your KPIs relating to your objectives, and then measure your progress against them. His new position suggests he may apply this approach to higher education. We have, of course, always done it, but I think it is perhaps more insidious now with the introduction of something that you may not yet have heard of: the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). This is a process by which universities are being allowed to link their excellence in teaching to raising fees. Within this framework, excellence is measured in terms of the retention of students, student satisfaction and employment outcomes. Most people in the sector would argue that none of those actually measure teaching excellence, but that is the situation we find ourselves in … so there is a huge increase in the use of metrics. However, we need to work to identify better metrics for measuring the success of adult learners, and influencing their use in the measurement of our progress.

The other thing to be aware of is that lifelong learning as an income generator. There is a tendency for institutions to see this as another way of meeting the financial needs of the institution rather than as something for a social or public good.

So those are things that we need to be careful of and alert to. I am, however, optimistic, and I do believe that there are some important developments being made.

Notes

1 Percentage totals are converted on a scale as follows: 70-100% first class (1st); 60-70% second class, first division (2.1); 50-60%, second class, second division (2.2); 40-50%, third class (3rd); 0 – 40%, fail.

2 Such as a bachelor's degree, or a diploma or certificate of higher education.

3 The funding situations in the devolved nations all vary – Scottish students do not pay fees; Welsh students are still heavily subsidized.

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Are Our Institutional Models Contributing to Student "Failures"?

Lael Dickinson

Liz Marr's talk provided a valuable opportunity for us to gain a fuller understanding of the importance of education and the challenge for inclusion we all face. It also offered us a chance to think about and compare issues in the United Kingdom with those we see at my institution, SUNY Empire State College, and with the entire U.S. higher education system. Marr focuses on key inhibitors of inclusion and success for adult learners, part-time learners, minorities and young people living in less prosperous parts of the world. Her assessment introduces myriad interrelated variations that point to exclusion and student failure as the norm, particularly if we as educators do not intervene, take action, reach out to and engage these learners.

Marr pushes us to acknowledge and respond to the challenges for higher education to be successful in attracting, including and graduating these students within the constraints of resource limitations, funding and academic accreditation. She also reminds us of the ongoing debate about the balance between open-entry systems, quality and student satisfaction. I was left with a visceral sense that on societal, cultural and economic levels, higher education in the United States must survive, and must not waste the potential contribution of any individual. As education can contribute to the quality of life of an entire society and culture, the reverse is certainly true: without providing educational opportunities for everyone, not only may the economy be negatively impacted, but, in ways that cannot be predicted, the entire society can be damaged.

Missions and Outcomes

Some may say that, by definition, "adult" means that one's life path has been determined. As Marr points out, social and educational status, ability to learn, social training and other characteristics are factors that one could argue have pre-determined mobility and learning once someone is what we term an adult.

Perhaps the perspective of those who believe that adult means "unmovable" is based on a lack of understanding of the possible scale of change, and the degree to which different levels and types of learning and education can – and do –

impact individuals and entire societies. Those who believe that the "university" is "a rest home for the infirm, the aged, the discontent and the otherwise incompetent" (Williams, 2012, p. 30) would have to believe that a university is a place that pretty much remains unchanged. And, as Marr points out, there are those like Sir Tim Wilson (2012) who believe that the purpose of the university is to teach high-level skills and be part of "a supply chain that has the capability to support business growth and therefore economic prosperity" (p. 1). Then there is another university purpose identified by Stefan Collini (2012) as an institution charged with "handing on to subsequent generations the intellectual scientific and artistic heritage of mankind" (p. 198). Williams' definition speaks to the individual; Wilson's and Collini's to the macro level of economic prosperity.

In a recent message to the State University of New York (SUNY) community, new SUNY Chancellor Dr. Kristina M. Johnson (2017) cited Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. Using the philosopher's ideas, she identified seven key higher education purposes – "missions of the university" – which are to: "pass on culture to the next generation; educate researchers; train professionals; prepare citizens for public service; develop a competitive workforce; serve our local communities; address global issues" (slide 3). Such a vision of higher education incorporates elements of Williams, Wilson and Collini, albeit with a more practical tone. Adult learners may not be the full beneficiaries of supply chain, macro-level economic growth and prosperity, but they can be key players in passing along an intellectual scientific heritage to subsequent generations, as trained professionals and researchers, and as those who have and will continue to serve their local communities. Adult learners have already contributed and have much more to contribute.

But here is the problem: Somewhere between the research cited by Marr on the variables that are hypothesized to be related to determining individual and demographic group engagement and success in higher education as a system, and Johnson's description of Ortega y Gasset's philosophy, there is a gap. It leaves us with many questions about the relationship between purposes and outcomes – about what exactly causes what.

For example, Marr points to the argument that in higher education, the call to individual inclusion puts the quality of higher education at risk. But, as she argues, the line between inclusion and reduction of standards is *not* at all clear. Indeed, exposure to education can improve confidence, which stimulates

an individual's motivation. The effects of instilling confidence and efficacy by telling a child he or she is intelligent or capable is known across cultures, not just in the U.K. or U.S. How this translates to adult learners is not as clear or commonly discussed, but what if it matters? What if confidence at an individual level could inspire intellectual engagement in students considered those "not suited to studying at university level" *(Times Higher Education,* 2010, para. 15)? If this is true, the argument that inclusion reduces standards may be untrue or at least shortsighted. Can new confidence be gained at the individual level, especially in adult learners? If it can, how does it take place?

And here is another example: As researchers, we tend to look for commonality in data, which leads us to easily measurable information about populations such as racial groupings, but what is understood to be a sense of belonging was reported to be strongly related to student success. The forming and quality of ongoing institutional relationships are, therefore, a key factor in understanding students' success. Could it be that many adult students, who we know need personalized support to develop the confidence they require and the relationships they depend upon, may struggle with automated support and other anonymous processes that are linked to the university's evolving business model?

An Evolving Business Model of Higher Education

As institutions depend more on technology-based engagement, effectiveness and efficiencies, might they be creating an academic – an institutional model – that makes it that much more difficult for adult students to succeed? Do standardization, centralization and mechanization of academic services work against the very students they claim to better serve? Is there, in effect, a possible mismatch between organizational structures and business processes, and the needs of students, as well as of staff and faculty? What happens to the learners? Are we setting them up for more failure while blaming them for not fitting in?

Today, many institutions face system overload – stress on staff processes and on ground-level people teaching and administering students who are frequently stereotyped as "not suited" for higher education. It also may be taken for granted that it is as less difficult and more motivating for faculty to teach engaged students who do not require preparatory or significant ongoing support. An individual who, from initial contact to completion, is thought of, and thus is treated, as ill-prepared or not suited to study, may indeed drop out. If instead, students identify themselves and are understood by others to be part of the

vision and purposes of the higher education system, and receive the kind of academic support they need, confidence and sense of belonging can be created. This is especially difficult at a time when institutions face budget constraints linked to funding, and that contribute to the establishment of more elaborate systems of standardization of business processes in orientation, increased use of the online teaching, and automation of student services that depend on a technology interface rather than human interaction. Once again, are we measuring inclusion and student success using a model that does not respond to the students who need our institutions the most?

Where Do We Go From Here?

Liz Marr's presentation is provocative because it leaves us with more questions than answers. The number of variables involved in the important and complicated research she presents make it very difficult to sort out what matters and what exactly determines entry and success in higher education.

For example, how do we reach and engage individual learners, as well as entire groups of learners? Is success really individual in nature, and what should be considered a success in an open-entry higher education system common to many adult programs?? Is a "failed" attempt to complete a higher education degree in some ways a "success" for the learner who has made the attempt? What is the proper balance between quality and cost? How should quality be measured? And, given the restriction of the business model, how can we as educators build relationships with students who struggle with foundational preparation and with the demands of their lives?

What stands out in these types of questions is that the environment in which we work is extremely complex. Attention to the macro level means awareness of funding and accreditation issues, and at the micro level it means awareness of an individual student working with a mentor while struggling with preparedness, home, family and work. SUNY Empire State College and other adult learner institutions all over the world are also facing new competitive market forces in which two- and four-year colleges, both private and public, are moving more toward an online modality, and the younger demographic of the American population has expectations for much higher levels and types of support during the educational process. There are strains and conflicts all around.

And we return again to the question of where the responsibility lies: Does it lie in the offices of faculty and support staff where scaffolding is built one student at a time in a labor-intensive, personal relationship? Or should more of the responsibility be shared with policymakers and those who establish funding and resources to expand capacity for foundational-level learning and further student engagement? Within budget constraints of public higher education, additional resources seem out of the question in many cases. But if so, we have to deal with the fact that the lack of our ability to work intensively with students one-on-one as we focus on the standardization of business processes may actually *increase* attrition rates. If a student is already at risk of dropping out and we are not able to address their academic, personal and financial needs, they may be more likely to withdraw to avoid the added stress in their already complex and difficult lives.

All of this provides grounds for the proposition that, while higher education business models evolve in the face of funding and accreditation constraints, colleges and universities must do whatever it takes to ensure that the relationship-based, organic nature of individualized student experience is not lost. Leaving the responsibility for this effort on the shoulders of change-fatigued faculty and staff without additional support may lead to disastrous consequences for all concerned.

Given the ongoing financial constraints, and considering the educational and personal needs of the learner population, how do we accomplish this monumental undertaking? The question becomes how to balance the critical need to increase enrollment and access and control costs through standardization, with the needs of individual learners who struggle to enter, engage and complete higher education degrees. While we cannot forget the broad institutional and system levels, I also think that we would all benefit by more research on student experiences and outcomes at an individual level. In that way, we can better understand what a diverse group of adult students needs to succeed.

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Lael Dickinson has over 30 years of experience combining academic and practitioner work in the fields of organizational behavior and information technology. With a B.S. in industrial management from Clarkson University (New York), she began her career in manufacturing engineering at Texas Instruments, returning to the Northeast for a position at General Electric in ISO 9000 quality engineering, and continuing in computing logistics at General Electric after completion of her MBA from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (New York). Dickinson returned to Rensselaer to earn a Ph.D. in organizational behavior and information systems integration, and then joined Rensselaer as a full-time faculty member while continuing work as a consultant to multiple New York and Connecticut state agencies, as well as private sector organizations. She now works as an assistant professor of information technology and a mentor at SUNY Empire State College.

Integrating Life Course Design in Adult Education: Can I Get a Witness?

Donna M. San Antonio

Liz Marr's presentation, "Adult Learning, Social Mobility and Social Justice: A View from the U.K.," deftly weaves policy and practice, historical and current contexts, personal and political themes, pointed questions and clear recommendations. She challenges historical concepts of social mobility and the structures of adult learning, and she offers a social justice perspective that takes shape in her impressive work at The Open University.

As I began to write this response, President Trump announced that he would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, leaving nearly 800,000 young adults, who came to the U.S. as children, in agonizing uncertainty about their futures. We know the "Dreamers" – they are adult learners in our classrooms, they assist our elders in nursing homes and our children in day care, they are professionals, volunteers, parents and neighbors. This reversal of President Obama's 2012 executive action is one more in a series of recent policy changes that will have painful consequences for young immigrants who represent the hopeful aspiration and striving of human beings to construct meaningful, fully-engaged lives.

The DACA announcement came one day after I attended the Bread and Roses Heritage Festival in my hometown of Lawrence, Massachusetts. The festival commemorates the successful 1912 textile worker's strike that brought together immigrants from dozens of ethnicities, languages and religions toward a common purpose. My grandparents, newly arrived from southern Italy, took part in that strike; like so many other immigrants, education and good work were in the foreground of their hopes and dreams. In my large extended family, dozens received high school and college diplomas years or decades after they were adolescents; I grew up around adult learners. A poem written by James Oppenheim (1911) became associated with the 1912 strike; for millions of people today who are looking for a life of possibility, the words are as relevant now as they were more than 100 years ago:

> Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes; / Hearts starve as well as bodies; … / No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil where one reposes, / But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses, bread and roses. (lines 7-8, 15-16)

This, I think, is at the core of education and the meaning it has in the lives of millions of people.

Social Class Matters, and Rural Does, Too

Over the last 100 years, the U.K. and the U.S. have meandered toward, and away from, policies that promote equity and access to education for all. Liz Marr's policy critique is important: "… neoliberal ideology that sits behind policy development has a skewing effect that diverts both funding and intent toward a very narrow interpretation of social mobility, and has a limiting impact, in particular, on adults and part-time learners." Where are we now and what's next? Liz Marr calls for redefining the commitments and practices of the university, and for a social justice-oriented understanding of social mobility. As she points out, the current cost of education is a key deterrent, and for those who take on enormous debt, the cost of a degree can hobble life choices for decades to come. We should not create avenues toward higher education without simultaneously creating access through financial support.

In my work as a school-based counselor with low-income rural adolescents, I often heard stories like this: "My sister went to college for a year and dropped out. Now she has a big loan. I'm not going to make the same mistake." In a research cohort of 29 participants that I have followed over the last 18 years, only half of them had a college degree by the age of 25; their education debt reached up to $100,000, and averaged $40,000. Economic strain and job insecurity/unhappiness contributed to a sense of precariousness for many of them (San Antonio, 2016).

I appreciated Liz Marr's discussion of social class, and her astute suggestion that our language needs to reflect systemic institutional problems rather than problems within individuals; instead of *educational attainment,* we need to speak about *degrees awarded.* Two years ago, *The Atlantic* analyzed a report out of the University of Pennsylvania that used recent U.S. census data. Results show that social class inequality in the U.S. is deeper than in the U.K., and the education opportunity gap between rich and poor is growing wider. Seventy-seven percent

of 24-year-olds with bachelor's degrees were from the highest two income quartiles, up from 72 percent in 1970. Only 10 percent of the degrees awarded went to people from the lowest income quartile. And black and Latino low-income people have the lowest rates of degrees awarded to them. Furthermore, those from rural areas lag behind urban areas in educational attainment; rural young people are deterred by cost, distance, lack of college preparation and cultural dissonance (Zinshteyn, 2016).

Liz Marr also makes the important point that higher education avenues and access tend to be targeted toward adolescents. In terms of transition to college for adult learners, virtually no attention is given to the subtle but highly consequential uncertainties like what to wear to school, how to position yourself in an admission interview, how to present your experience on a resume, how to cultivate a mentoring relationship with a professor, or how to ask for a recommendation, and so on.

One research participant, also quoted in my 2016 publication, was the salutatorian of her high school class and earned a full scholarship to an elite college, but she left after a year and came home. "College was a disappointing culture shock," she said. "I went from 18 years in the woods, with working-class parents, to the most expensive school in the country near NYC, for a totally unstructured liberal arts degree" (San Antonio, 2016, p. 257). Her statements point to many of the questions raised in Liz Marr's presentation: What is the purpose of a university? How can young people whose families have historically been left out of higher education be prepared socially, emotionally and practically for higher education? Indeed, the policy focus on access and achievement is not enough; we need a policy era of *inclusion* with significant changes in practice. What might that look like?

"Hearts Work": Where Social Mobility and Social Justice Meet

In the remaining paragraphs, I share additional thoughts sparked by Liz Marr's presentation that come to me from my experience and research. These ideas funnel toward one particular proposition that I feel is pressing at this time: Inclusivity in adult education requires insight-oriented practices that embrace complexity, curiosity, desire and the way individuals make meaning of their lived experience. While adult education policies are made with the collective in mind, adult education practices need to recognize the unique aspirations, motivations,

expectations and desires of individuals. Life course theory (Elder, 1998) and life course design (Guichard, 2005) offer a practice direction that is guided by the idea that what animates a sense of purpose in someone's life is uniquely shaped by a complex array of factors. These include what we value, what we do (work, learn, play and volunteer, for example), how we make meaning of our lives, and the social, cultural, historic, economic and political contexts in which we live.

When research participants in my study discontinued school, they did so for complex reasons. Mental health needs were a major factor in their decision-making calculus, as were commitments to family members, ties to rural communities, and the ups and downs of romance. Likewise, when research participants chose to continue education, job opportunities and financial reasons were often not as salient as other motivations, such as a desire to contribute something significant and to gain a sense of competence and confidence (San Antonio, 2016). I was moved by the way some research participants spoke about their pursuit of higher education. After years of family instability, many school transitions, economic hardship and a college application process that she described as "horrendous," one research participant found her way to volunteering and internship opportunities that then led to new educational goals. She returned to a rural area to start an independent school, and she wrote, "The school I spoke about opening has taken off with such momentum! It has been an outrageously full summer, but I have found that this is truly my heart's work" (p. 262). This young woman was particularly persistent and confident; importantly, she enlisted good mentors. But many others are not afforded opportunities to explore what is at the core of their being, to construct a sense of self as a person with knowledge and agency, and to find a way to bring their "heart's work" to life.

People learn from a multitude of formal and informal experiences, but adult learners often find that these experiences may not be honored as valuable and usable knowledge. Not only is there a crisis of inadequate access and financial support, but there is also a crisis of confidence in one's own knowledge. Adult learners are often asked to demonstrate what they know from prior learning, but for people who have been out of school for years or decades, articulating what they know is no easy task. Also, we often tend to think of our lives as a series of disconnected events, rather than a sequence of related experiences. Adult learners need a process that facilitates life course understanding, so that they can

connect their life experiences to a sense of self that is authentic and whole. How can we support adult learners to know what they know, to claim it as their own, to see the coherent threads that run through their life stories, and to speak it?

When I look around my rural county, I see examples of vibrant "green shoots": the political consciousness of young people, increased energy in social entrepreneurship, new ways of leveraging and distributing resources, more civic engagement, thoughtful use of social media, and efforts conducted with innovative democratic processes. Community education is being revitalized in some areas, as are community colleges and libraries. New projects such as makerspaces are changing the way people in communities think about learning and teaching.[1]

Learning is much more than training for work, an important but incomplete picture of the purpose of education. This is particularly true for adult learners who have more life experience and who often carry more life burdens than do their younger counterparts. Many adult learners arrive at the threshold of higher education in response to external demands posed by the dominant discourse on the need for a college degree. While the access to college messages are useful, what gets lost are the internal processes that contribute to a decision to continue education. We need to construct a new narrative – one that adds nuance and complexity to the solitary focus on economic advancement. It may be true that if we do not educate the masses, we will be losing a "great unused reservoir of human talent and potential" (Crowther, 1969, p. 1); however, when we consider personal gains, we also honor a sense of pride, agency, awe, accomplishment, a new awareness of a diverse world and one's place in it, and so on. We need to start young with the idea that there are all kinds of ways to learn, and that learning is lifelong, not something we do for 12 years, plus four more. When I think of what adult learners are asking for, and what is so hard to find in most settings, I am reminded of Marvin Gaye's refrain, "Somebody, somewhere … Can I get a witness" (nessam72, 2009, 00:29)?

Note

1 "Makerspaces combine manufacturing equipment, community, and education for the purposes of enabling community members to design, prototype and create manufactured works that wouldn't be possible to create with the resources available to individuals working alone" (Makerspaces, n.d., para. 1)

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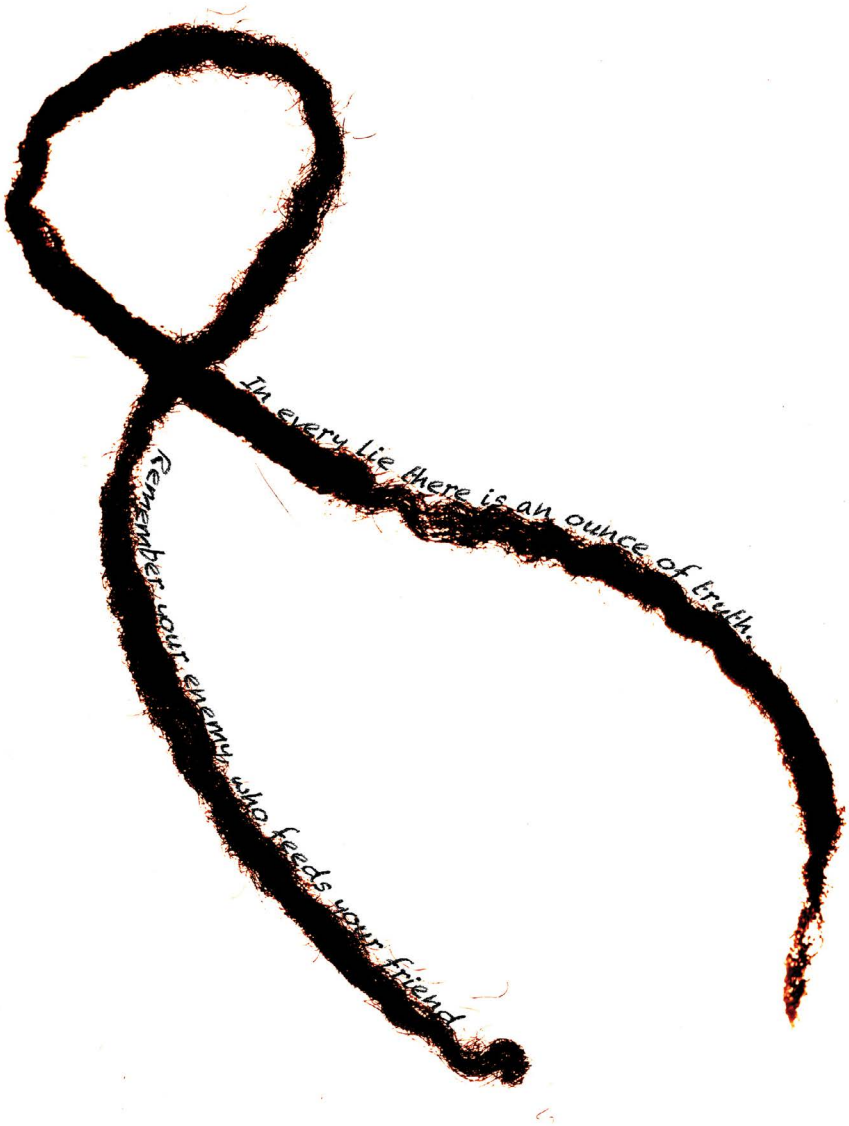

Untitled 4, 2013, Digital pigment print, 17″ x 22″

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