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Elice E. Rogers

Cleveland State University

Jonathan E. Messemer

Cleveland State University

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The Changing Nature of the Adult Education Professorate: New Roles and Responsibilities in the 21st Century

Elice E. Rogers, Ed.D. and Jonathan E. Messemer, Ed.D.
Cleveland State University, USA

The purpose of this session is to discuss how the roles and responsibilities of the adult education professor have changed in the last 30 years and how the level of power has shifted amidst such change. An examination regarding the changing nature of faculty roles and responsibilities is important because faculty are now challenged in colleges and universities to operate under *market driven models (Kotler & Fox, 1995). In many institutions, faculty are micro-managed to become “organization” men and women, which greatly alters the teaching and learning contract we have with students; resulting in adult education faculty operating as brokers among constituencies for power, influence, and control. Politics and positionality readily becomes a part of this new market driven relationship or model (Cervero & Wilson and Associates, 2001; Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Kotler & Fox, 1995).

The literature reveals that the United States is experiencing a great deal of growth and diversity, hence our colleges and universities are reflective of this enhanced diversity and growth. In the field of adult and higher education, we have recognized that professionalization and credentialization play a critical role in enhancing the adult learners’ desired socio-economic position and/or professional status (Martin & Rogers, 2004; Merriam & Brockett, 2007;). Adult participants are encouraged, as part of pursuing the American Dream, to obtain the necessary degrees that will engender a level of success meant to enhance the adult learners’ positionality or status. Adults are currently responding to the market-driven messages and models adapted by institutions of higher learning and now view themselves as “products” rather than students, or adult learners as they access and navigate the higher educational enterprise. Today’s adult education faculty are challenged to address new student relationships, which have emerged on the educational front in ways that perhaps their academic training had not prepared them for, or could not provide. Due to these new student relationships, faculty now operate with a “new type of tension” evidenced by policies set forth by administration regarding their commitment to promoting adult education principles, excellence in teaching, and scholarship.

We will discuss four ways within which this tension manifests itself in adult education. We will define the struggle over the nature of academic work versus knowledge work. Second, we identify the tension between the struggle over intellectual capital, and third, the transitioning of adult educators from “priests to bishops.” Finally, we discuss this tension as evidenced by the “academic pimping” which occurs in adult education.

Academic Work versus Knowledge Work

Amongst the adult education professoriate academic work is consistent with teaching, research, and service. Also, academic work requires the cultivation of intellectualism, scholastic inquiry, and critical interrogation of ideas, theories, the knowledge base, values, and the world around us. Academic work is the way within which we seek to transform community, change society and leave adults better than we found them. It is more than ideas and theories it is about the preservation of life. And, most importantly academic work involves expressing and challenging inconsistencies within the system, for this is the hallmark of academic freedom (Gould, 2006). We experience the tension between academic work and knowledge work. Knowledge work can be defined as knowledge that translates into profit in a market-driven economy. Knowledge work concerns itself with the technical rationality associated with a capitalistic system in higher education which focuses upon enrollment management and the allocation of resources that maintains profit, productivity, and innovation in a market economy. Thus, we see a proliferation of on-line learning, weekend accelerated learning, blended learning, and distance learning. And, the traditional learning or face-to-face learning, which is consistent with, and is the hallmark of academic work is becoming less valued because it’s seen by higher education administration as being economically profitable.

The Struggle Over Intellectual Capital

Due to the fact that organization's prize and value knowledge work over academic work there exists tension with regard to intellectual capital. Adult educators are being challenged to produce a capital that goes beyond words and the critical interrogation of ideas (Gould, 2006). We are being challenged to generate an intellectual capital which also focus on people and work, which is consistent with the work of a corporate manager. Thus, adult education faculty must be prepared to live and work simultaneously in two conflicting cultures; the intellectual culture of words and ideas, and the culture of people and work. As a result, adult education faculty are required to participate on different playing fields that are grounded in varying philosophies within both cultures. And, the survival of adult education faculty becomes dependent or predicated upon a deep understanding of the varying philosophies and the role that power, politics, money, interests, positionality, and social location plays in one's ability to adapt and compete in both cultures.

The Transition from Priests to Bishops

With participation in both cultures, faculty are gradually being baptized into doing the work of organizations and management. Those who reap the greatest rewards must transform and or transition themselves from "priests to bishops." By this we mean, that priests are those faculty who have taken a vow to make the world a better place with the cultivation and generation of an intellectual capital focused "on-the-ground" through the critical interrogation of ideas, a generation of new knowledge, a preservation of existing knowledge, a commitment to enhancing the lives of adult participants, and making a contribution to society. There exists real tension when market-driven forces in higher education challenges faculty to assume the role of bishop when that is not their intended purpose inside the university and such faculty are challenged to accept values consistent with the role of bishops, which might conflict with their own standpoint and epistemology as priests within the profession (Brand, 2000, 1997). One might argue that perhaps this is the new hidden agenda of the market-driven economy-that of transforming faculty in adult education from priests to bishops.

Academic Pimping in Adult Education

We have found that the nature of work as it relates to adult education faculty is similar to that of a community playground found in the world of prostitution. The nature of prostitution is such that the pimp is the person who holds the power, the goods, the rewards, and engages in the distribution of rewards. Now, this distribution is never proportional. The pimp always justifies why he or she should have more and receive more of the profit. The pimp also works on the cognitive, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the prostitute's thought processes in an attempt to exert influence and maintain power and control. Also, a pimp sends the message that the prostitute cannot survive or thrive without the support of the pimp and that matters that affect the pimp's world affect the prostitute's world. We note further that the economic and social exchange between the pimp and the prostitute is such that the prostitute is always dependent upon the pimp, whereas the economic and social positionality of the pimp is not ever dependent upon the services of the prostitute because the prostitute is viewed as expendable.

Because of the factors which influence the adult education professoriate, we feel that it is the responsibility of Adult Education as a field to address this ever present tension by addressing a) how do adult education professors negotiate between the multiple levels of influence, b) the influence power and positionality have on the decisions adult education professors make in a market-driven model, c) the influence race, gender, and socio-economic class have on the adult education professors' ability to negotiate with critical interests, and c) how adult education professors equip themselves to address and deal with the tension generated by a market-driven model in higher education?

Note *A market-driven model among many things holds that the main task of the institutions is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and to satisfy them through the design, pricing, communication and delivery of appropriate and competitively viable programs and services.

The references are available upon request.