Challenges and Possibilities
For a Diverse Field: Making a Difference

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Since it Early Days as a Profession

- Adult education has been characterized by
  - Diversity of Definitions
  - Diversity of Purposes
  - Diversity of Contexts
  - Diversity of Professional Roles

- As the conference theme “One Chorus of Many Different Voices” suggests
  - The strength of our field can be found within its big tent approach
  - Welcoming all who seek to support the learning of adults
Our Discussion will Focus on:

- The Complex World of Adult Learning Today
- Unities of Purpose?
- The Profession and the Adult Education
The Complex world of Adult Learning

Today

- Adult learning is ubiquitous, thus, it follows that adult education is expansive
- Participation in various forms of adult education has increased—along with demands for continued “schooling” and program accountability
- Still, inequalities persist
- What roles can we play as adult educators in supporting lifelong and lifewide adult learning
The Ubiquitous Nature of Adult Learning

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) described adult education as encompassing three forms or modes:

- Formal education
- Nonformal education
- Informal education
Formal and Nonformal Adult Education—Come to Mind Most Frequently

- **Formal**
  - Adult Basic and Secondary Education; GED Preparation
  - English as a Second Language
  - Accelerated and Adult Degree Programs
  - Graduate and Preparation Programs for Professionals

- **Nonformal**
  - Employer-Sponsored Job Training
  - Continuing Education Offered by Universities and Community Colleges
  - Adult Education within the Military
  - Continuing Professional Education
Community-Based Education
Primarily Informal and Nonformal

- Nonformal and informal learning of individuals
  - Faith-Based organizations
  - Cultural organizations
- Nonformal and informal learning in groups
  - Community development
  - Volunteer education
- Informal learning (primarily) within social action/social movements
  - Environmental Justice
  - (Dis)ability Rights
  - Black Lives Matter
Access to Adult Learning/Education Expanded

- Technology plays key role
  - www
  - Mobile technologies
- Globalization
  - Fosters trans-national migration
  - Exchange of information via www
Economic and Sociopolitical Forces Compel Increased Formal and Nonformal learning

- Market forces necessitate continuous adult education education and training
- Adult education increasingly marketized and commodified
- Credentials may open doors—but for whom? how wide? For how long?
Yet, Inequalities Persist in Participation and Completion (Formal, Nonformal A.E.)

- Prior educational attainment
- Income
- Employment status
- Race-Ethnicity
Increasing Demands for Program Accountability

- May negatively impact adult learners - especially the underserved
  - *Adult basic education programs*
  - *Community college and technical programs*
  - *University-Based programs*
Lifelong Learning or Lifelong Schooling?
Another Dimension-Lifewide Learning
Jost Reichmann (1986; 2014)

- Encompasses
  - *Intentional (formal, non-formal, self-directed learning), and*
  - *Unintentional learning of 3 types*
    - Parallel to activities planned for other purposes
    - A single event-prompted learning
    - Mosaic Learning—embedded across parts of life
What May be Roles of Adult Educators in Lifewide Learning?

- Declining emphasis on *teaching/training*
- Increasing focus on *supporting* adult learning
  - Advising
  - Mentoring
  - Coaching
  - Consulting
  - Animator (within social movements)
- Program evaluation
What Can Unify Us as Adult Educators--Across Sectors?

- Recognizing and supporting ALL forms of adult learning
- Engaging with adults in “new social movements” for social justice
- Advocating for policies favorable to adult learners
  - At various levels of government
  - Within institutions and programs
Unities of Purpose?

- Is there any categorization of purpose that includes multiple perspectives?
- How have these multiple perspectives been viewed historically?
- What are the implications for public policy and the field?
Commonalities or Underlying Issues

- Many different ways of thinking about the purposes of adult education
- Underlying questions of individual development and ultimately social change
  - Accretion of knowledge and rational decision-making
  - Recognition that rational decision-making is not based on information
  - Basic education is for individual growth, human capital formation, and social change or the reallocation of community resources
- Different philosophical categorizations
Historical Understanding in adult education
Categorizations

No one narrative – rather multiple ways of viewing this past

- Enrichment or self-development
- Higher Education
- Literacy and Basic Education
- Workplace Education
- Community Education and social change
Quality of Life

- Nussbaum & Sen looking to develop, define, and measure a metric for quality of life
- The development of human capabilities
  - *Human development approach to economic development and social change*
  - *Asking what are the basic parameters of quality of life*
  - *Or put another way, “Which criteria are truly relevant to human thriving?” (p.1).*
Human Capabilities - Sen

- Capabilities are the underlying basis for a theory of social justice
- Two aspects
  - Human capital aspect: capabilities are the knowledge and sum total of the ways that an individual can interact with broader society
  - All functioning associated with living
- Functioning is broadly defined
  - Maslow’s hierarchy all include functioning
  - Self-respect and social integration are also part of functioning
  - Complexity of Freedom included
  - Also value and differing values
Capabilities - Nussbaum

- Basic capabilities are internal
- Functionings are what the individual does with basic capabilities
- She focuses on the basic capabilities and the development of choice and freedom as the areas for development
- Core value of choice, along with respect and non-humiliation
Public Policy

- Builds out from these
- Asks where the public interest is
  - *In the US also examines the constitutional limitations*
  - *Education is not listed in the constitution*
- Therefore seen as a local and state issue
- Exceptions made where the national interest is overriding
Human Development Approach and the future

■ Nussbaum and Sen
  - Policy and our definitions limit the possibility
  - Centrality of development of capacity beyond simple job training
  - Includes what Lindeman called “the search meaning” as the basis for adult education

■ Multiplicity of purposes and definitions
  - Underlying approach, historically is development and building capabilities
  - Often lose track of this
Commonality of Purpose: Adult Education as Capacity Building

- Broad understanding of capacity
  - Individual capacity
  - Community building
- Differing definitions of community
- Includes economic development
- Work
The Profession and the Adult Educator

- Commitment to adults as learners and leaders
- Development as professionals across borders
- Enhancement of professional community, networks, and advocacy
Centrality of Adult Learning

* Challenge that adults are an important and often neglected learner group, with many having limited access and quality learning options.

* Need for policy and champions towards establishing societal supports for adult learning

* Focus on development of adult learning principles in the leadership for and by adults = This is the major societal force for change in our society.
Evolving Development of a Professional Identity – A Journey

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.  T. S. Eliot
What is your professional identity?

• Self as a knowledgeable, critically reflective practitioner
• Self as a change agent
• Self as a promotor of quality learning focused upon both diversity and inclusion
• Self as a passionate lifelong learner – and creator of knowledge
• Self as contributor to the ever-changing field of Adult and Continuing Education
• Self as an explorer of the differences == crossing borders and exploring disjunctures, helping others deal with this conflictual world
What is your mantra for an identity?

- A professional identity (and hopefully the core of your mantra) means core knowledge, socialization to the professional community, contributions to the field, and leadership in your world of work in ACE. But it is more:

- As noted by Maya Angelou:

  “My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so, with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style.”
The Dynamic Community of the ACE Professional

Historical belief in the stability of profession -
an anchored existence.

Today’s world – focuses upon being a professional
and the interplay of the professional community (a.k.a. the profession)

Recognition of the instability of our lives and worlds, AS WELL AS, the knowledge base

Recognition the interdisciplinarity of our actions
with our complex, contextualized world of conflicting values
Key elements of the ACE community

- Unified in sharing, having compassion, and having commitment to grow together
- Valuing the diversity and learning through the differences
- Historic concern for being at the margins... Rather, we should valuing the marginality of our worlds
- “Marginality does have its benefits including greater independence to be creative and respond to needs and establishing distance from parent institution to prevent from being co-opted into the organization’s mission. When one stands at the margins, astrid the boundary between tribes, one stands also at the center of a larger, more adequate whole (Daloz et al., 1996, p. 77)
Challenges to our Field

- We are a “work in progress”, we are on a journey.
- Challenge of knowledge as commodification and neo-liberalism
- Challenges towards a more robust practice and research foundation
- Lack of clear and effective societal supports and policy – Creating a more solid infrastructure for adult learning
- Recognizing that the “local is global”. UNESCO refocused upon lifelong learning (ignoring adult literacy and related learning needs for life survival and stability) = International Council on Adult Education
We continue to both be part of the world of the past and present

We also are the explorers of the future

Adult learners are the key to our legacy and the future of our planet