



Publish or Perish is a formula for teaching failure

Adult learners are now filling classrooms. Are traditionally 'pedagogic' colleges in fact adding 'andragogic' expertise to their offerings? How long will the marketplace wait quietly for colleges to change?

Among the criticism focused on our industry recently by the U.S. Commission on the Future of Higher Education is a "need to embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement by developing new pedagogies, curricula and technologies to improve learning." Add to that a "preoccupation with research and too little attention to innovative teaching techniques."

While they are acknowledged to be subject matter experts, few college instructors have received much training in teaching others. They tend to replicate the teaching model that they themselves experienced. They transfer subject matter via the lecture.

Meanwhile, even fewer instructors have been trained to educate adult learners. Are adult learners doubly doomed?

Not necessarily. But a perfect storm may be brewing.

Pressure from peers

A growing number of colleges have faculty development centers. For example, the University of Calgary helps graduate students and faculty help each other become more proficient teachers. Four-week instructional skills workshops demonstrate interactive engagement, and participants practice teaching in front of peers. Attending a second session yields a 'teacher of higher education' certificate.

Endowed with a \$500,000 grant from the Belk Foundation, Elon University recently opened its Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. The center promotes excellence and assists faculty members with self-evaluation. The well-equipped building itself enables experimentation with different classroom setups.

Meanwhile, professors who have made teaching as important to themselves as their research and publishing are highly revered on their campuses. Noted Harvard physics professor Eric Mazur conducts boisterous lecture classes, eschewing simple content transfer in favor of succinct lectures, peer instruction and critical engage-

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ment. Even in large lectures, he gauges students' grasp of concepts, using clickers to get real-time feedback.

The teachers of adults

Like many movements, the study of and promotion of andragogy—the art and science of teaching adults—has been a grassroots phenomenon. It originated at the fringes, and it's slowly moving into the mainstream.

For decades an informal cadre of educators has been building on the work of Malcolm Knowles and other early pioneers. They study the adult learner, and they develop and distribute best andragogy practices. They all seem to know each other. They correspond or meet with some regularity, and they have developed an impressive body of research. In fact, they seem to inhabit a somewhat closed society. But the larger system needs access to what they know!

The original pioneers among them have plied their skills in the community college and in extension and continuing education departments. The new-age pioneers among them are often online curriculum designers and instructors.

Randy Garrison is director of the Learning Commons and a professor at the University of Calgary. He says, "As an industry, we know about adult learning, self-directed learning and the importance of critical thinking. We talk about it. But we do not give the student in the classroom the chance to discourse critically."

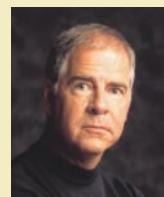
Improving classroom learning

Calgary is a campus-based institution that attempts to replace less effective techniques with a hybrid approach that combines classroom instruction with online discussions, collaborative projects, online tutorials and simulations.

Meanwhile, an ad hoc community is spawning formal organizations that may produce another generation of thought leaders. Here are two that may have a positive effect.

The Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) has 1,600 members faculty, administrators, teaching assistants, consultants and others. The POD Network and its members participate in various faculty,

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instructional and organizational development activities.

The Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C) is devoted “to helping learning organizations continually improve quality, scale, and breadth of their online programs, according to their own distinctive missions, so that education will become a part of everyday life, accessible and affordable for anyone, anywhere, at any time, in a wide variety of disciplines.”

Sloan-C maintains a catalog of degree and certificate offerings from a wide range of member institutions and organizations. Sloan-C provides speakers and consultants to help institutions learn about online methodologies. The consortium hosts a listserv and wiki, as well as conferences and workshops. Sloan-C also offers an awards program and an effective practices database for members to share the lessons they have learned.

While Sloan-C is centered on online learning, Burks Oakley, associate vice president of academic affairs at the University of Illinois says, “It’s the same faculty. They are now re-thinking what they do in the classroom, bringing constructivist styles from the online program to the classroom.”

Pressure from the top

Modern teaching techniques and adult learning theory have been slow to find their way into practice for other reasons. For example, merit pay increases and tenure have historically rewarded research and publishing—not teaching. But that is changing.

“Assessment is huge and growing,” says Hoag Holmgren, POD’s new executive director. “Terms like ‘evidence of teaching effectiveness’ have found their way into faculty job descriptions. Many applicants are now expected to show teaching portfolios.”

Pierce Howard, an expert in organization development and a professor at Pfeiffer University, is critical of accrediting bodies that call for grades to be distributed in a bell curve. “That can make me a good teacher for attaining mediocrity. We should be teaching to

mastery—where all students get A’s.”

On another hand, Ralph Wolff, president of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, notes that in 1998 Congress shifted the emphasis to outcomes. He says that the emphasis on faculty credentials and research are important, but do not necessarily result in successful learning. “You can’t judge a restaurant by its great menu. You have to eat the food.”

Compared to records of courses taken and passed, outcomes can be difficult to measure in instruction. Wolff envisions that outcomes will eventually be presented competitively with cross-institutional data, normed and referenced. Meantime, universities can provide incentives such as recognition, release time and merit pay for faculty members who adopt new techniques and focus on outcomes, however they are measured.

Marketplace pressure

The strongest force for change may be the marketplace itself, despite its seeming docility and willingness to accept mediocrity dished out at high prices. The Spellings Commission may have plenty to say about fixing an antiquated system that is overpriced and underperforming. The early reports, although toned-down most recently, seems to describe a customer-driven commercial marketplace.

Increased student participation in instructor evaluations is likely in the offing. According to Pierce Howard, today’s evaluations usually stop at the first of Fitzpatrick’s four levels of evaluation—“was this a satisfying experience?” That question awards “smiley points” for popularity. However, the untouched next three levels are lessons learned, changes in behavior and ultimate difference on the bottom line.

Howard believes academic freedom should not be an excuse for laissez-faire oversight or a shield from accountability. “If instructors can be fired for ineptitude—for not knowing their math or their biology—why shouldn’t we hold their feet to the fire regarding ineptitude as a teacher?”

Acrimony is not the solution. Partnership between instructors, education policy committees and students, will forge a stronger relationship with which to progress.

Burks Oakley draws this analogy. “General Motors used to look down the nose at small, poorly built imports. But GM’s market share has dropped from over 50 percent to less than 25 percent, and it is virtually bankrupt. Toyota and Lexus are now the gold standard.”

As we watch the scene, colleges who put students and teaching success first might well overtake schools who are overly dependent on their venerable reputations. ■

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posal that did not result in student-friendly, faculty-friendly or staff-friendly outcomes would be dropped. Fritz filled the leader role admirably. He painted a vision, aligned resources behind that vision, and communicated constantly with stakeholders throughout the university.

Project management was performed by Cherise Peters, who today is GSU’s registrar and assistant vice president for enrollment management. Peters oversaw the myriad of day-to-day management jobs. She had the assistance of hired talent from the outside who brought schedule and control tools to the table.

The GSU story has a happy ending. The project finished on time, on budget, and with very few quality problems. The division of leader/manager responsibilities was a significant success factor. “It took a combination of great leadership and great management for us to succeed as we did,” says GSU Provost Ron Henry.

The resources consumed in an ERP project are enormous. The skill sets utilized and expanded are vast. World-class communications are needed. Be prepared to apply the right kinds and amounts of leadership and management talent. ■