Chapter 50

Congruency in Higher Learning:
Developing Sustainable Adult Education Program Policies for the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The core elements of people, processes, technology, and stakeholders remain similar for most higher learning institutions today. Yet, to culturally promote any one particular 'form' of adult education as 'ideal' for 'all' adult learners is increasingly exclusionary. The objective of this chapter is to enable future educational instructors, administrators, and leaders to respond to the changing needs of adult learners regarding congruence between core elements of higher learning institutions and sustainability of adult education program policies. Emanating from the seminal thinking of Carl R. Rogers, the opening sections of this chapter address personal and peripheral congruence. Then, the main section of this chapter puts forward a congruency-based framework for sustainable adult education program policies in higher learning institutions. Developing 'congruent form(s)' using core organizational elements will likely result in more socially just and culturally inclusive adult education and higher learning for diverse and global learner cohorts in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

In the globalized and knowledge-based economies of the digital age, there is little doubt that the need for sustainable adult education programs in higher learning institutions will become exponentially important (Duderstadt, 1997-1998; Jarvis, 2000). Today's adult education programs in higher learning institutions are on trajectories of extraordinary change. The impending questions are not whether transformation will happen or not, but rather, how so; how quickly; and most importantly, how often (Bates, 1997; Daniel, 1996).

'Sustainability' for this chapter refers to adult education programming policies that remain relevant and responsive to a global and diverse cohort of adult learners, whilst also remaining socially just and culturally inclusive. At the same time, to suggest any one particular 'form' as 'ideal' for adult learning is also increasingly problematic from these very adult education programs. In examining the 'form' of an organization in the broadest sense, for example, the argument could be forwarded that all organizations, whether they are engaged in higher learning or not, include similar core elements, like people, processes, technology, and stakeholders (Benjamin & Levinson, 1993). An organization comprises of people. People in turn work alone or together in a group through processes. Groups may be isolated or interact with other groups with the aid of technology. Finally, the organization itself, as an amalgam of individuals, groups, technology, and processes, also interacts with external stakeholders as well as society and the environment. The core elements of people, processes, technology, and stakeholders are common across most organizations.

Although finding the one 'best practices' form for higher learning institutions of 'the future' commands considerable discussion today, it will likely be in the many, varying pedagogical and policy approaches and instructional technologies that will eventually come to serve society's educational and vocational demands, that social and cultural needs will be determined and adult learning accomplished (Remtulla, 2007). A universal, meta-narrative approach encompassing all adult education program policies and higher learning institutions will likely not meet the needs of a global and diverse cohort of adult learners (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002; Fenwick, Nesbit, & Spencer, 2006).

A more socially just and culturally inclusive solution (Popkewitz, 1996; Remtulla, 2010; Williams, 2008), then, may be to enable higher learning institutions to address their core elements in a culturally relevant and socially sensitive manner so as to develop their 'true form' instead. Enabling adult education programs in higher learning institutions to develop their 'true form' will provide more socio-culturally relevant programming for adult learners, and provide a sustainable, adult educational policy response to socially marginalizing and culturally exclusionary programming that inadvertently erases learners' voices, needs, and identities (Walters, 1997).

This chapter lays out the foundational principles upon which a congruency-based framework may be constructed for the development of sustainable adult education programs and policies towards congruency in higher learning institutions. An actual congruency-based framework is also constructed. Ideals, guiding principles, and strategic policy imperatives are put forward to enable adult education program policies and higher learning institutions to: (a) develop core people, process, technology, and stakeholder elements in an institutionally effective and programmatically responsive manner so as to seek out 'true form'; and, (b) evolve each of the 'dimensions of true form congruence', that is personal and peripheral congruence, between present and future, for sustainable and congruent adult learning over time. The objective of this chapter is also to impress upon future educational instructors, administrators, and leaders the importance to adult learners of personal and peripheral congruence between core elements of higher learning institutions and adult education programming. This ability to acknowledge, address, and transform 'congruent form(s)' will likely result in more sustainable and meaningful adult education and higher learning for a global and diverse cohort of adult learners.

The interaction of present and future ideal forms, 'true form' uniqueness, core elements, and the 'dimensions of true form congruence' are illustrated in Figure 1 in the congruency-based framework proposed by this chapter. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on Figure 1 and the relationships illustrated therein.

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