Explorations in Adult Higher Education

An Occasional Paper Series

Access, Identity and Power in American Higher Education

Cover and Inside Art by Raúl Manzano

Raúl Manzano's paintings have been shown in museums, consulates, galleries and community centers in Canada, Spain, Israel and the United States, and have been published in scholarly peer-reviewed journals, magazine covers, catalogs and periodicals. He is an award-winning artist, who most recently received a second prize award at Strive, a national juried art exhibition; and a grant from the Puffin Foundation Ltd. for his project, "In the Eye of the Beholder." Manzano has lectured at leading New York City museums and universities, and served as a juror at exhibition panel committees. His doctoral degree, in interdisciplinary studies with a concentration in museum studies, is from Union Institute and University. He earned a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies with a specialization in Studio Practice and Curatorial Studies at SUNY Empire State College, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration and Painting at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

While most of Raúl Manzano's artistic ideas and exhibitions have been devoted to raising awareness about social issues, nature has been the motto for his new work. As he described: "While I enjoy the pleasure of painting for its own synergy whether depicting a complex ideology, a representational or abstract form, the contours of organic forms and the beauty of nature's colors capture my imagination. The free spirit of sketching or a thoughtfully rendered drawing energize my creativity. I hope that these notions are embedded or suggested in my artworks for the viewer to interpret." Raúl Manzano is a mentor in the visual arts at ESC's Brooklyn and Hudson Street locations. In Barcelona, Spain, he directs the School of Visual Arts' Painting in Barcelona summer program.

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

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Red Star

Access, Identity and Power

Shantih E. Clemans
Director, Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation

Alan Mandell
College Professor of Adult Learning and Mentoring

SUNY Empire State College, Co-editors

All acts of kindness are lights in the war for justice.
– Joy Harjo, "Reconciliation – A Prayer" (from
The Woman Who Fell from the Sky: Poems, 1994)

Higher education is in a whirl. It is difficult to understand what is going on except to acknowledge the tensions and conflicts – the precariousness of the world of higher learning today. Yes, a handful of institutions are thriving, but many are folding, others are looking for partners, and still others are desperately trying out new forms of teaching and learning that are marketable, streamlined, and seek legitimacy by being wrapped up in the call for access. In effect, colleges and universities are all trying to keep up, to make their mark, to reinvent or reimagine themselves in new ways in order to preserve their relevance and, so they hope, propel us into the future.

And problems abound: student debt is astonishing, public funding has significantly dipped; costs have escalated; students are not receiving the academic and personal supports they need; the number of full-time academic jobs has dwindled; many (inside and outside of the academy) complain that students – particularly adults – are much more interested in degrees, badges, and the proliferation of certificate options (hoping they can all get stacked up) than they are in learning much of anything, and; perhaps most tellingly, more and more people are just wary of the value of schooling altogether. The entire enterprise seems, at times, to be up for grabs.

In two webinar series presented over a two-year period, we were incredibly fortunate to have the voices of eight scholars who offered us new information, angles and insights, and, in so doing, sparked the kinds of discussions we know we need to have about the state in which we find ourselves institutionally, and as faculty and professionals.

Above all, we wanted to learn more about the experiences of our adult students, particularly about those for whom access is problematic, identities at stake, and their power often misunderstood or fragile. We wanted to challenge our assumptions and practices about how we teach, in what ways students learn, and how we value what students have already learned. In this way, we wanted to try to remind ourselves of our responsibilities as members of an academic community – and as citizens – to acknowledge and respond to the experiences of underrepresented adult students: black students, Hispanic, Native American, formerly incarcerated, and others struggling economically and in so many other ways. How, we asked, can educators find understanding and direction, as well as hope and inspiration, amidst so much that is going on around us at such lightning speed? How can we discern what *really* matters in our work with our adult students and in public higher education today?

As the essays and reflections in this volume show, each of our guests provided us with valuable critical analyses and clues to possibilities for change. In our first webinar series, Lisa Merriweather pushed us to reexamine our understanding of and commitment to diversity and its underlying "polyrhythmic sensibility." In her focus on Hispanic-serving institutions, Becky Klein-Collins reminded us that there are learners whose experiences, skills and knowledge we just too often routinely neglect, and should not. John Chaney and Joni Schwartz pointed us to the importance – for individuals, families and entire communities – of responding to the needs of "people coming home from incarceration"; and Stephanie Waterman encouraged us to recognize the "diversity of indigenous people in North America" and the ways in which the "four Rs" – respect, relevance, responsibility and reciprocity – can serve as core values that should inform all of our work as adult educators.

Our second series continued to emphasize different dimensions of the theme of "access, identity and power." David Scobey offered us a crucial historical context of the status of so-called "nontraditional students" who have become "the new majority." Geleana Alston pushed us to recognize that, for all of as learners, discomfort is necessary, and that educators, students, colleges and universities

need to feel unease in order to grow and move forward. And Sara Goldrick-Rab's work on "real college" and the myriad costs college students incur showed us how many students are "living the new economics of college facing rising prices, stagnant wages, coming from families that are struggling and entering institutions that are struggling, as well."

Thank you to these generous scholars/practitioners, and thank you, too, to our SUNY Empire State College colleagues – Frances Boyce, Ruth Goldberg, Elliott Dawes, Jeffrey Lambe, Rhianna Rogers, Margaret Clark-Plaskie, and Renata Kochut – for their important reflections that, we hope, will keep the questions flowing and our work robust. We are also so appreciative of the beautiful paintings by ESC mentor Raúl Manzano that are an important part of this publication.

Finally, we need to remember how resilient so many of our students are and how sure we must be in our understanding that their struggles and their successes and our work with and for them are indelibly tied to our ongoing quest for a more just society. Business as usual will not propel us forward. As Klein-Collins urged, let us "search for the uncommon" while remaining unwavering in our focus on students and on academic quality. At every turn, we must nurture and learn from experimental approaches in our serious engagement with our students. Such creative innovations as described in this volume hold promise to move us toward a more inclusive world of higher education. There is so much more we can and need to do.

Hibiscus

Negotiating Polyrhythms: Moving Toward a Praxis of Inclusive Adult Education

Lisa R. Merriweather

I am extremely honored and humbled to have been asked to share in this wonderful series. Here, I will discuss diversity using music as metaphorical philosophy.

Hausman (1981) described metaphorical philosophy as philosophy's dependence on metaphor for originality and creativity. He said, "Metaphors use language in the only way capable of taking established meanings and relating them so that they can articulate unique intelligibility" (pp. 195-196). I believe music is a metaphorical language that offers a unique insight into diversity and inclusion.

From where I stand, part of the problem with making progress toward inclusivity is the concept of "benign neglect." Benign neglect is a policy that is based on the hope that ignoring a problem is the best solution to it. Benign neglect is ubiquitous in our society, especially when considering race. Think about the notion of "colorblind." Have you ever heard someone say, "I do not see color"? I find that to be irksome, but I also am rather amused – well sort of – when I hear this. I wonder, when did I become translucent? If someone looks past my blackness, looks past my womanness, looks past my unique personhood, I feel as if they have looked past *me*. They did not see me or value my existence, as if it was unworthy of being acknowledged; my story was not worth listening to. While being black is not all that I am, it is a part of who I am.

Or think about the idea of post-racial society. Consider this: The statistics of "shot while black" continue to stagger. The disproportionality of black and brown people in prison still defies imagination. And how can we forget the consistent reminders that black lives *don't* matter? The $4 wrongful death suit settlement in 2018 awarded to the family of an unarmed African American man shot by the police in Florida is a clear example of this (McLaughlin, 2018). As early as 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois said, "The problem of the twentieth century is

the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker and lighter races …" (p. 13), a problem *Amerikkka* has yet to fully reckon with, a problem it continues to neglect.

Benign neglect is a dangerous practice and a fairy tale we tell ourselves to help us sleep better at night. We convince ourselves that these practices are, in fact, benign and not harmful. We sell ourselves on the myth of good intentions and doing the best we can. As individuals involved in adult education, we must reject the notion that such practices are culturally benign. Let me let you in on a little secret: There is nothing benign about neglect. If you neglect to water your plants, they will die. If you neglect to feed your dog, it will die. If you neglect to study for your exam, your grade will die. If you neglect to actively listen, acknowledge and value differences, your relationships will die, and in many cases never begin to grow.

Given that effective adult learning is predicated on relationships, neglect cannot be part of the recipe for success in our vocation. As a result, how we think about, approach and operate when confronted with difference is an indicator of how effective we will be as adult educators. In other words, a big part of our job requires negotiating cultural differences. People matter; in fact, when you get right down to it, at the end of the day, when it is all said and done, people are what count the most.

I have to confess that I do love music. I come from a family of musicians. My brother and I started taking piano lessons when we were in primary school. We played in the concert and marching bands. My brother played the baritone, tuba and sousaphone, and I played the clarinet, bass clarinet and oboe. We were the next generation in a long line of fore-parents for whom music served as a balm for one's soul. My grandmother, who is 92 years strong, played the organ and continues to play the piano at her church and nursing homes that she visits to pass on God's blessings through song. Her mother was an accomplished pianist who also played for her church. My dad, too, was a musician, and he was always creating. His creativity was most evident in his music – music that came from his soul. He was a keyboardist and a saxophone player, both soprano and tenor. He played on very different stages. He was a member of various bands that traveled throughout the Southern and Midwestern United States playing funk music. The Bad News Band was one of the bands in which he played. I knew from these experiences – concert and marching band, the Southern Baptist

church choir, the funk band – that there is value, an inherent diversity, in music and I realized how instrumental music has been in shaping my understanding of the world.

Music as Philosophy: Getting in Touch with Our Polyrhythmic Sensibilities
Our commonplace understandings of diversity, wherever they come from, offer some ideas, concepts and ways of thinking about difference that can be instructive to the project and process of inclusivity. But what else is there? How might a metaphorical philosophy cultivate an even richer, nuanced understanding of inclusivity?

The ways in which philosophers look at and interrogate issues speak to me in powerful ways because I am, at heart, a philosopher. I think about epistemology, which is the nature of knowledge. What counts? What doesn't? Who decides? I think about ontology, the nature of being. Who counts? Who doesn't? Who decides? And I think about axiology, the nature of value. What is value? What is devalued? Who decides? These are the essential questions that I feel we should pose to ourselves and our colleagues on a regular basis. It keeps us aware of our biases, our tendencies to discriminate, and keeps us cognizant of our sense of connection with other people, particularly people who do not look like us, sound like us, live like us, or believe like us. Music offers an organizing epistemological, ontological, and axiological schema worth consideration.

Music as Diversity

I see music as diversity: blues to salsa, opera to rock-and-roll, reggae to Celtic. Some are harmonic and some are discordant. For a long time, harmonic music was the cultural gold standard for music, which left music built from discordant sound and rhythms as an inferior form of music, and at worst, it was just considered to be noise. Harmonic melodies were often seen as better, but more and more, discordant sound is being recognized for the richness that it offers the world, and this is occurring on the world's largest platforms. For instance, Kendrick Lamar, an American rapper, won the Pulitzer Prize for Music for his album, *DAMN*. The Pulitzer Prizes' (2018) announcement said the album was "a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life" (para. 1).

So to me, this begs the question, is perfect harmony overrated? In 1982, Paul McCartney, a white Brit, and Stevie Wonder, an African American, through song, suggested harmony was the golden ticket we should seek. You remember the lyrics, don't you? "Ebony and ivory / Live together in perfect harmony / Side by side on my piano keyboard / Oh Lord, why don't we?" (McCartney, 1982, track 1). The song forecasted what Rodney King, himself a victim of police violence, would say a decade later: "Can't we all get along?" But I wonder if this notion of harmony has been overstated or perhaps misunderstood. Is that really what we want all the time? While useful, harmony is not the only way to get along, but it is the way inclusivity of diversity has often been characterized. We need to ask ourselves if the ideal of perfect harmony acknowledges *and* values difference.

Few musicians would argue today that discordant sound, or what some might consider polyrhythms, is in any way inferior. It has become a staple in a musician's toolbox. I submit that polyrhythmic sensibilities should also be part of our toolbox. As metaphorical philosophy, polyrhythms suggest that discordance as a conceptual idea can also offer useful ways to acknowledge and value difference.

Polyrhythmic Sensibilities

Polyrhythms are not a new concept for adult education. Dr. Vanessa Sheared introduced the concept of "polyrhythmic realities" to the field in 1994 as a way to create more inclusive spaces for African Americans in adult basic education classrooms. According to Sheared (1999), polyrhythmic realities highlight the complexity of learners' and teachers' lived experiences with an emphasis on the intersection of race, gender and class. She asserted the lived experiences of learners and teachers are grounded in their "sociocultural, political, and historical context" (p. 37). In this view, polyrhythmic realities emphasize awareness and acknowledgment of multiple realities, their intersections, context, power and oppression, which lead to a more dynamic inclusivity. Sheared described these realities as contradictory yet complementary, distinct but not completely separate, while converging and simultaneously diverging. The realities are undeniably connected.

Polyrhythms in Action
I want to extend this idea using music, especially polyrhythms, as metaphorical philosophy of inclusivity.

Polyrhythms are defined as "the simultaneous use of two or more conflicting rhythms that are not readily perceived as deriving from one another" (Polyrhythm, 1986, p. 646). "The rhythmic conflict may be the basis of an entire piece of music … or a momentary disruption" in an otherwise harmonic score (Flashcard Machine, 2018, card 24). The ideological concept of polyrhythms can be seen all around us. Polyrhythmic variants show up in society through things such as tap dance (see, for example, Povoli, 2009). You can also see it in architecture, through quilts, and you may also hear it in songs. If you have ever heard Rachelle Ferrell's "Sista," (Multiplicityme2too, 2012) it is a song that is filled with this idea of polyrhythms; this idea of how to negotiate and think about rhythms that are not necessarily seen as harmonic. C.K. Ladzekpo, the director of African music at the University of California, Berkeley, sees the philosophical nature of polyrhythms, and polyrhythms in practice as both musical and philosophical tools. Polyrhythms, as evidenced in Ladzekpo's 1994 African drumming demonstration, have unique intelligibility; What I feel that Ladzekpo demonstrated in, "Drum Rhythm Principles of Percussion Polyrhythm from Ghana, West Africa," (Humperdinck, 2012) was a metaphor for inclusion. The metaphorical language of music's polyrhythms should awaken our sensibilities about the nature of inclusivity. Negotiating polyrhythms is, therefore, a metaphorically-informed response to the problem of benign neglect. It rejects the notion of neglect in favor of active engagement.

Response #1: Question

We learn to question taken-for-granted assumptions about the importance of harmony through this unique intelligibility. Synonyms of harmony include agreement, consensus, like-mindedness while inclusiveness suggests a practice of including what is different. Think about the main beat as you were clapping the secondary beat. The secondary beat was that which was different being included.

A quick scan of the internet revealed a frequent coupling of harmony with inclusiveness. For instance, Australia celebrates Harmony Day, a day dedicated to inclusiveness and diversity. In another example, a business promoted harmonious and inclusive workplace development as a key strategy in its diversity management plan. The United Nations conjoins harmony with inclusiveness in its Millennium Declaration. The coupling, therefore, brings to mind the melding of the one with the other, a harmonization, a

minimizing of difference. One definition of harmonization, in fact, is the process of minimizing conflict in favor of rooting out what is common. The unique intelligibility of polyrhythms suggests perfect harmony, the search for a common, is not the only pathway to inclusivity. It is an awareness that striving for harmonic resolution includes the search for the *uncommon.*

In my opinion, tensions or conflict created through polyrhythms can also be pathways to inclusivity. The key to negotiating the polyrhythmic conflict is equitable balance. Cheryl Willis (1998), in a chapter she titled, "Tap Dance: Manifestation of the African Aesthetic," highlighted the importance of balance. Balance is achieved through the contrasts and requires flexibility and openness to change and openness to challenges. She said "to dwell at one level is to lose the precious power balance inherent in human capability" (p. 149). Polyrhythmic sensibilities exist *in* and *through* relationships – relationships that are reciprocal, relationships that are balanced, relationships predicated on give and take. Relationships, as Willis reminded us, require the dancers to receive what the musicians are playing, and the musicians' willingness to receive what the dancers are dancing. Polyrhythmic sensibilities require openness to receive and a shared sense of balance in power.

Response #2: Inclusivity Involves Intentionality

This unique intelligibility of polyrhythms also requires intentionality. Polyrhythms intentionally introduce tension, change and energy into the dynamic of the musical score. Instead of *neglecting,* they *highlight* the awareness of the presence of such tensions and attempts to make sense of them, resulting in an augmented practice of harmony, one that we might call "syncopated harmony," a harmony that thrives on the discordant beat and involves the unexpected. The intentional clashing of the main beat with the secondary one suggests a welcoming of complexity into the musical score. Polyrhythmic sensibilities, therefore, must also make space for such complexity and embrace the continuum of feeling that comes with it. It requires being a little bit uncomfortable. Ladzekpo captured discomfort when he talked about the secondary beat contrasting or going against the main beat. "In the process of doing that, the idea is to have moments [where] everything is just cool together, and moments [when] there is just all this struggle, just like life. … Now, the moments [when] this comes together, we enjoy, and when they don't come together, we say hey, that's part of life, too. It's our way of trying to accept life

and its realities" (Humperdinck, 2012, 00:02:53-00:03:28). The rhythms become safely uncomfortable with each other, and trust that their collective sound will result in beautiful music and a beautiful life.

Response #3: Inclusivity Understands the Strength in Being "Apart" but Within a Context

The unique intelligibility of polyrhythms requires attention to context. The collectivity of the secondary beat with the main beat does not occur at the expense of the secondary beat to the main beat. Willis (1998) characterized this "context" as swing. West African dancers and drummers engage a swing feel as they operate within and between the rhythmic structures, negotiating differences. She said "West African musicians 'play apart' in the sense that each is often intent upon the production of his own contribution to the polymeric whole … this play apart gives one space in which to maintain a private and traditional meter and to express one's own full corporal involvement in what he is doing" (p. 151). It is a unique twist on the concept of parallel play, in which children play *next to* each other but do not play with each other. In swing, the musicians and dancers are playing next to each other but they are also playing with each other because they are always influenced by what the other is doing. They inform each other while maintaining their distinct polyrhythmic individuation within the broader context of song.

Ladzekpo highlighted this importance of being "apart" in saying, "The main beat scheme is symbolic of your own purpose in life and the way you're supposed to maintain it to be strong and dynamic so nothing can push it away. That's the steady, unchanging [beat] – very, very strong" (Humperdinck, 2012, 00:09:06-00:09:20). Maintaining our purpose is critical to our personhood. Ladzekpo suggested that those secondary beats crash against (are in conflict with) the main beat. These secondary beats, representing all different types of beats, are illustrative of the diversity within life. Think about all of the different forms of diversity that come together: race, gender identity, class, religion, age, sexual orientation, intersectionalitites, etc. Philosophically, according to Ladzekpo, being apart yet together and welcoming tension is a good exercise for the mind, a way to think about how we negotiate diversity and inclusion. Ladzekpo's people, the Ewe, have learned to think of those tensions (secondary beats), those crashings, in terms of polyrhythms. You just play through them

and you move on to the next measure. This tells us to expect tension because inclusivity promises it, and understand that being "apart" is not divisive but rather is part and parcel of being within.

Response #4: Inclusivity Cannot Exist in the Absence of a Main Beat

Maintenance of what I have called the "Me, We" phenomenon is the final response and it becomes paramount to this project in process of inclusivity. The unique intelligibility of polyrhythms requires honoring what Muhammad Ali called "Me, We." In 1975, Ali spoke a two-word poem during a commencement address at Harvard University. He simply said, "Me, We" (Carroll, 2015). What I am trying to say here is that polyrhythmic swing creates the opportunity for the achievement of a "me, we" society. A society where "me," our colleagues, our students and ourselves maintain our own cultural identity, while still making a contribution to the whole ("we"). Simply put, my being me, and you being you, does not stop us from being we. Inclusivity recognizes the power of the main downbeat, which is the me, and the necessity of the secondary beat, which is the we.

Musically in polyrhythms, there is always a main beat and there are always secondary beats. James Brown described it as "being on the One" (Smiley, 2011). In *Undoing Whiteness in the Classroom,* Lea and Lea (2008) affirmed the significance of the One. "Polyrhythms are intricately woven patterns, meeting at the central point called the 'One.' The 'One' is the place at which the rhythms begin and intersect. … Finding the 'One' … is hard but if you want to find it enough, it can be found. It takes a concerted effort and motivation. It takes will and commitment" (p. 98). In a genuinely, culturally, pluralistic society, no one group dictates the main beat or the One. No cultural group needs to sacrifice its beat to be part of the musical score. No matter how dominant the main beat is, the secondary beat can always be heard and exerts a powerful influence on the music. Together or apart, the main and secondary beats are key.

Ladzekpo described the Ewe philosophy of life through the polyrhythms; that is, how the organizing of epistemological, ontological and axiological moorings (what it means to know, be and value) of the Ewe is captured through polyrhythmic sensibilities. Ladzekpo said, "You will see us endless nights grooving this and enjoying the moments that the beat comes together and the

moment that they probably become much more dynamic. So the Ewe … make it human, let your emotions go into it, and you have a great groove going. Now that is the foundation of our music" (Humperdinck, 2012, 00:06:22-00:06:53).

Tension and conflict are things that are often viewed as negative and to be avoided when striving for inclusivity, but polyrhythms demonstrate that the tension resulting from this shifting between the secondary beat and the main one is integral to the project and process of inclusivity. It is within this metaphorical philosophical statement that opportunity arises for connecting, feeling and developing shared meaning.

Reconfiguring the Space

What I have tried to illustrate is that music as a metaphorical philosophy provides an avenue for negotiating polyrhythmic sensibilities through reconfiguration of the space between differences. Through polyrhythmics' unique intelligibilities, we learn that harmony is not status quo; that tension is welcome and should be intentionally sought; that being apart actually brings you together; and being on the One, which is not to be confused as harmony, is a necessity. These sensibilities create the space as well as provide a blueprint for developing a pedagogy of inclusion. Or as Ladzekpo simply put it, it is the way to have "a great jam."

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Lisa R. Merriweather is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She received her Ph.D. in adult education with a graduate certificate in qualitative inquiry from the University of Georgia. Her research focuses on issues of equity and social justice within the historical discourse of adult education, informal education and doctoral education. She explores anti-black racism through the prism of a critical philosophy and sociology of race lens and employs Africana philosophy, critical race theory, and qualitative and historical methodology to investigate topics found at the nexus of race and adult education.

Equity Is Not Sameness

Frances Boyce

Dr. Lisa Merriweather's essay, "Negotiating Polyrhythms: Moving Toward a Praxis of Inclusive Adult Education," struck many chords in me, and I have no doubt that if those chords were played, the sound would be polyrhythmic. Merriweather examines benign neglect and colorblindness, linking those critical themes to adult education and asserting that "how we think about, approach and operate when confronted with difference is an indicator of how effective we will be as adult educators." This idea resonates with me as I consider how any institution moves toward inclusivity.

Merriweather ponders: "Have you ever heard someone say, 'I do not see color'? … [W]hen I hear this … I wonder, when did I become translucent?" It is a reference to colorblindness, which posits that the best way to end racism is to treat individuals as equally as possible without regard to race, ethnicity or culture. On its surface, this sounds like the ideal of inclusivity. To borrow from Dr. Martin Luther King (1963), it is to be judged by "the content of their character" and not by "the color of their skin" (p. 5). However, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) argued that "the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards" (p. 4). In effect, the result of the new ideology is that it supports structural racism and the existing world order, and thus reaches far beyond not seeing the color of the person. The danger of relying upon such an ideology to inform policy is that it "simultaneously render[s] invisible and permissible, a more embedded, subtle, and by many accounts more insidious kind of racism" (Leaker & Boyce, 2015, p. 201).

The power of colorblind ideology in predominantly white institutions (PWI) leads us to believe, for example, that the achievement gap between white students and students of color is not structural but rather can be attributed to student deficits. Such deficit discourse, in short, explains educational inequities by focusing on attributes, skills and behaviors of individuals or communities rather than on institutional policy or practice. If it is assumed that students from minority communities come to the academy with deficits, how does the concept of colorblind treatment work on the individual level? It does not push us to recognize and critically analyze the ways in which minority students face

implicit bias and microaggressions as they navigate and negotiate PWIs. The cumulative impact of deficit discourse, implicit bias and microaggressions leaves students of color feeling isolated, alienated, and with increased self-doubt. This is referred to as the "self-worth tax" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

Merriweather states: "If you neglect to actively listen, acknowledge and value differences, your relationships will die, and in many cases never begin to grow." She continues: "Given that effective adult learning is predicated on relationships, neglect cannot be part of the recipe for success in our vocation." The use of the title *mentor* at SUNY Empire State College indicates a faculty-student relationship that involves teaching and advising. How is the relationship with students who are viewed as different in terms of color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or country of origin to develop if those differences are not acknowledged? That is, if the assumption that each student is treated the same never engages the question of difference, how does that student-mentor relationship begin to grow? The reality is that many of us are just unconscious of our own biases. It is only through conscious thought, honesty and self-reflection that the biases come to the conscious level. Without this work, how can it be assumed that each student has equal or equitable access to an education?

How can an institution compel an individual's action to develop a deeper understanding of his/her own biases? It may seem that the simple answer may be that it cannot; however, there are strategies that can be employed by the individual and the organization. In inclusivity or diversity training, many attendees may feel they are not the problem and the training is for the other people in the room. If a new approach is taken, and the training begins with an implicit bias test, then each participant can understand why he/she belongs in the room. An implicit association test (IAT) measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., unmotivated, athletic). Understanding the nature of bias means understanding that there are categories our brains use to process information as a "natural" part of cognition. Awareness of and reflection on these associations and biases can make us more cognizant of bias at the conscious level and allow us to approach our biases more openly. Discussions with others, particularly those who are different from us, in a safe space where there is an openness to different ideas and perspectives is essential. Without a

commitment to the difficult and uncomfortable work of understanding our own biases, can any institution truly offer a welcoming and equitable opportunity for communities of color?

I especially reflected on Lisa Merriweather's thoughts:

> I think about epistemology, which is the nature of knowledge. What counts? What doesn't? Who decides? I think about ontology, the nature of being. Who counts? Who doesn't? Who decides? And I think about axiology, the nature of value. What is value? What is devalued? Who decides? These are the essential questions that I feel we should pose to ourselves and our colleagues on a regular basis. It keeps us aware of our biases, our tendencies to discriminate, and keeps us cognizant of our sense of connection with other people, particularly people who do not look like us, sound like us, live like us, or believe like us.

I ponder these same questions when doing prior learning assessment (PLA). The structural nature of bias in higher education is well documented; it is unrealistic to assume it is not a factor in our evaluation of students' past learning. In fact, the "self-worth tax" might even be more strongly imposed in doing PLA. The student must bring his/her knowledge to the academy and present it for evaluation. Then the student has to trust in his/her ability to express the learning and trust, too, that the process of evaluation will be fair. However, there is a first hurdle.

Will the student be seen as having knowledge? Who makes that decision? The unconscious response of faculty who could be dependent on deficit discourse can impact the student's ability to participate, let alone succeed, in the PLA process. "Thus there is a good chance that generic PLA approaches will not provide equitable access to all students, simply because too many students of color may experience them in the same way they experience so many other academic processes in PWIs: as unwelcoming, stressful, and biased against their interests and their learning" (Leaker & Boyce, 2015, p. 202). Research has shown the power of PLA to close achievement gaps for students of color; at the same time, it has also shown that students of color have lower participation rates. At least initially, careful attention and thoughtful design are required to create a PLA process that is more equitable and inclusive. "In the context of contemporary higher education in the United States ... drawing upon

philosopher Nel Noddings, in some contexts 'nothing can be as unjust as an attempt to achieve equity through sameness'" (as cited in Leaker & Boyce, 2015, p. 202).

My final thoughts reflect on Merriweather's polyrhythmic metaphor: "The unique intelligibility of polyrhythms suggests perfect harmony, the search for a common, is not the only pathway to inclusivity. It is an awareness that striving for harmonic resolution includes the search for the *uncommon.*" Can inclusivity be required to seek out what is uncommon, different and be incorporated into the whole without losing what makes it unique? Can we reject the "melting pot" (seeking out sameness) and replace it with a stir fry in which each component is visible, distinct and retains its own flavor?

When institutions think of inclusivity, the default seems to be counting the number of bodies that are different in some way. Can the notion of inclusivity be expanded to include the inclusivity of thought? When approaching challenging subjects like social justice, can the dominant thought come from the non-dominant group?

In *On Being Included,* Sara Ahmed (2012) wrote about the "brick walls" (of prejudice) diversity workers encounter as they try to promote equity, inclusion and social justice. "To those who do not come up against it, the wall does not appear – the institution is lived and experienced as being open, committed, and diverse" (p. 174). The work of diversity and inclusion is ultimately to transform the institution; however, the walls are there to maintain and support the existing structure. The challenge is to move inclusivity from discussion – words and pictures – to hard data that demonstrates the transformation of the institution. The Equity Scorecard created by the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education (CUE) (n.d.) and adopted by the AAC&U (Association of American Colleges & Universities) was developed around the idea that the institution should be responsible for changing student outcomes. The change requires using institutional data, investigating the inequities and developing an action plan. Once the plans are enacted, they need to be tested and retested to demonstrate that they remedy the issues they were designed to address. It would not be sufficient to meet the numbers without using data to determine whether, in each of the scorecard categories, employees advance through the institution at the same rate and meet the same requirements.

Do we consider that equity and inclusivity are the search for harmony (sameness), or do we understand that equity and inclusivity are the recognition that polyrhythms invite differences to be incorporated and highlighted, thus producing an interesting and nuanced tune? Merriweather notes: "Polyrhythmic sensibilities require openness to receive and a shared sense of balance in power." This is an apt metaphor for bringing equity to an institution. It requires meeting the challenge of a new way of thinking and understanding that acknowledges that sharing access and opportunity only expands the organization.

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Frances Boyce is a faculty member at SUNY Empire State College in the School of Business. She has a master's degree in economics from Fordham University. As an economist, she is committed to reducing the barriers to a college education; as a woman of color, she is committed to ensuring that people of color have access to better opportunities than she had. Both these commitments intersect in her scholarship on equity, race consciousness, and prior learning assessment.

Sunflower-3

Considering the Adult Learner at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Becky Klein-Collins

I appreciate the invitation to be a part of this series on underrepresented adults and higher education. I am with CAEL (the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning), and for all of the organization's 44-year history, we have been working alongside institutions like SUNY Empire State College to call attention to the needs of the adult learner. For so many of these years, it was enough just to be bringing attention to adults, period. If they were not "underrepresented," they were certainly "underappreciated" at many institutions. I think that this has been changing significantly in recent years. I would argue that colleges and universities, foundations, policymakers, and public officials are understanding more and more the importance of educating adults and helping more of them succeed in completing postsecondary degrees.

But despite the progress we have seen, it is not enough: adult learners are themselves a diverse group of individuals with distinct experiences and circumstances, and we need to understand how our institutions and programs should be responding to this diversity. The underrepresented adults and under-focused-on adults could include people with disabilities, the formerly incarcerated, low-income students and people of color. We do not know enough about these students' experiences in higher education and we likely have not been doing enough to help them access postsecondary learning opportunities, much less succeed in them.

I am going to shine a bit of a spotlight on one population about which we need to learn more, and that is Latino adult students.

A piece of background: One thing we do know – and I really should have this disclaimer right up front – is that the Latino population in the U.S. is a very diverse group of people. It is very hard to talk about the "Latino experience" in general because there are huge differences based on country of origin, part of the country, and how long the family has been in the country (one generation,

two, three … five). But sometimes the data we have forces us to generalize because we do have some information about this group as a whole, even while acknowledging within-group differences.

What the census data tells us is that there are huge inequalities in educational attainment by race and ethnicity, and this really should not be a surprise to most of you. Across all groups, the percent of the population with an associate degree or higher is just under 42%. It has been growing over the last several years, so that is good. But African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanic and Latino populations have much lower educational attainment on average. This is something that we as a society really need to address, and there are many groups who are focused on this and who are making some important progress. We are also seeing some good results. Last year, for example, the Center for American Progress ran a story that included the heading, "The undercovered Latino success story" (Miller, 2018). They reported that buried in a lot of the bad news about educational attainment is some good news that the percentage of young Latinos who earned a college credential rose more than nine percentage points between 2007 and 2017.

At the same time, another fact that needs to be part of this conversation is that the Hispanics make up a large and growing part of our current population and our labor force. So it is important that we support new and innovative ways for colleges and universities to serve members of this group. In fact, projections are that "Latinos will comprise one-fifth of all college students by 2025" (Despres, 2018, The Number of Latino College Students is Rising section, para. 1).

One organization that is focused on Latino college completion is *Excelencia* in Education. It is a national nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., focused on evidence-based approaches to helping more Latino students succeed in their pursuit of a college degree. *Excelencia's* focus is on Hispanic-serving institutions, or HSIs. An HSI is defined as an institution with 25% or more of its students being Latino. Right now, there are 392 HSIs in the U.S. and Puerto Rico – that is about 15% of all institutions of higher education – and there are another 333 institutions that are considered to be *emerging* HSIs, meaning that they have between 15% and 24% Latino enrollments.

Excelencia has a growing library of information that focuses on what works in terms of evidence-based practices. I am not going to detail all of them – they probably have 15 or 20 of them – but I will provide three examples. The

first one is, "First-Year Support: Educate students in a way that is culturally responsive, including language, customs and values." A second one is "Family Engagement: Systemize approaches that amplify parent and family investment in students' on-time degree completion," which is about bringing in parents and families to be really invested in students' academic experience. And then there is a third, "Pathway and Pipeline: Form partnerships among early college high schools, 2-year institutions, and/or baccalaureate institutions to streamline articulation and time to degree completion" (Santiago & Cuozzo, 2018, p. 3). There are more of these kinds of recommendations on *Excelencia's* website, housed in the Growing What Works database,[1] so if you are interested in this, I encourage you to look at what they have been working on.

But when CAEL and *Excelencia* got together and shared notes about our work, we all had many questions. We wanted to know, for example, whether we knew anything about Latino *adult* student enrollment – a question that *Excelencia* had not thought much about when we first talked with them – and, further, we wondered about that populations' experience of higher education. What are their outcomes and do we know what strategies work for serving Latino adult students in college? Do strategies need to be different in some way?

We recently received funding to support a three-year initiative that is going to serve 15 HSIs and the students there. The project will start by having each of the participating institutions administer CAEL's Adult Learner 360 diagnostic tool[2] – this is something that CAEL developed that examines an institution's overall approach to serving adult students.[3] The results of this tool identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, and in this new project with 15 HSIs, the results are going to be viewed in the context of the Latino adult students they are serving: Are they enrolling these students? Are those students succeeding? What do those students say about their satisfaction with programs and services at those institutions?

CAEL and *Excelencia* will then work with the institutions on action plans for new policies and practices. There will also be technical assistance from the two organizations, and also an academy – like a community of practice – where the 15 institutions will convene in one location and share their experiences and plans with each other.

As we gear up for this project, CAEL and *Excelencia* recognize that we may draw on some of the work we did together several years ago when looking at the experience of Latino students with prior learning assessment (see Klein-Collins, 2014; Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014). Now, I know that there are probably many people who know prior learning assessment well, but there may be others who have not heard much about it, so I wanted to describe what prior learning assessment is.

Essentially, a good number of adults come to higher education not right out of high school, but after several years of working or from the military or just from living their lives, and these students may have college-level learning that they acquired from their life experiences. Many colleges – but not all colleges – offer something called "prior learning assessment" or PLA, and these are ways to formally evaluate that learning and award college credit for it. It is also called *credit for prior learning,* and sometimes it is called *recognition of prior learning* (RPL).

For those of you who are not familiar with PLA and do not know much about it, I want to make very clear that PLA is *not* about awarding credit for experience. It is *not* about colleges sitting down and saying, "Oh, let me look at your resume … I see you have five years of experience in project management for some major company so I think that is worth 9 credits in business administration." That is not what PLA is; rather, colleges require the student to prove what they know through an exam or another method of evaluating the student's learning. College credit is only awarded if the *learning* has been evaluated and not the *experience.* I should also point out that there are quality standards for PLA that CAEL has established, the Ten Standards for Assessing Learning;[3] all of the regional accrediting bodies across the country reference these standards and see PLA as an acceptable part of a student's degree plan.

I would like to briefly describe the various methods of PLA. There are standardized tests – you may be familiar with CLEP (College-Level Examination Program) tests, the DSST exams or UExcel credit by exams. There are also ways to formally evaluate industry-recognized certificates. There are processes in place that evaluate non-college training, so if it is corporate training or military training, you may be familiar with the American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service, or the National College Credit Recommendation Service. Those are two organizations that provide some recommendations on more common external training programs.

"Challenge exams" are another method; they are exams that are developed by faculty specifically for the purpose of evaluating a student's prior learning. And then there are individual assessments like student portfolios or performance assessments. Typically, there are some fees that are associated with these kinds of assessments, but not for every PLA method, and fee structures vary widely from institution to institution. In fact, some colleges find ways to offer many PLA methods free of any charge. When there are fees, though, they are usually nominal and nowhere near the full cost of taking a course outright.

There are many reasons why colleges would offer prior learning assessment. One is that it would save students time and money so the student earning prior learning credit does not have to then take and pay for the equivalent course. Another reason is that research has found that it is really validating for the student; students who may not feel like they are "college material" have proof suddenly that they have already learned at the college level. And yet another reason is that research suggests that some methods of PLA can be transformative, helping students' self-awareness and self-confidence, sometimes even problem-solving skills and self-direction.

But the big research finding was that students with prior learning assessment are much more likely to persist to graduation, and this comes from the study that CAEL conducted in 2010, *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success* (Klein-Collins, 2010), in which we looked at records from more than 62,000 adults students at 48 colleges and universities. We examined who earned credit for PLA and who did not, and then we tracked them over time to see what happened to them in their educational journey. What we found was that students with PLA credit were two-and-a-half times more likely to persist and complete their degrees than were students with no PLA credit. And then we also learned that the relationship between PLA credit-earning and graduation held true for students of different ages, of different genders, and students of different racial and ethnic groups.

One of the more striking findings was for Latino students. Those with PLA credit were *eight* times more likely to persist and graduate than those without PLA credit, so that was really great news. The other piece that we looked at was usage by these different groups. What we found was that Latino students were much less likely to even *participate* in PLA: only 15%, compared to 24% for black students and 33% for white students.

We wanted to learn more about what is going on here, so we designed a study to examine the Latino experience with PLA in greater depth, and we did the study in connection with *Excelencia* in Education (Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014). We wanted to know what methods students are using, in what kinds of subjects they are earning PLA credit, and most importantly, what colleges and universities are doing to make sure Latino students are even taking advantage of this opportunity.

We identified 10 institutions to participate in the study – a small sample – but they all offered a range of PLA options and they also served either large relative numbers or percentages of Latino adults. These institutions provided us with their student record data, and we supplemented this data with information from interviewing the schools about their PLA programs and interviewing the Latino students who earned PLA credit from these institutions.

As I mentioned earlier, we really came into the study with data that said that Latino students were underperforming as far as PLA usage was concerned, so we wanted to dig into that and find out what was going on. What we learned was that Latino students were just as successful as other groups as long as you control for the type of institution they attended. We looked at different types of institutions and identified three different types into which we organized our participating institutions:

1. Associate degree institutions. They both had large student populations and a high concentration of Latino students (two total).

2. Large schools that had strong adult learning cultures with significant access to online courses and PLA. We called these "adult-oriented" for short (five total).

3. Colleges that had a separate small division focused on adult learners within a larger institution. So that is what we called "small adult-serving divisions" (three total).

What we found when looking at the different usage rates by these institutional groups was revealing. We saw that students at the adult-oriented institutions were most likely to use PLA, and the institutions with dedicated adult divisions were not too far behind. Further, Latino students at these institutions were just as impressive in their use of PLA, if not more so. So the big difference was with the associate degree schools, they were much less likely to use PLA,

and the Latino students were taking advantage of PLA at very similar rates as other groups. Similarly, we looked at credit-earning and found the same kind of pattern. Thus, we saw pretty impressive PLA credit-earning at adult-oriented institutions and small divisions without a whole lot of difference with Latino students, and then smaller numbers of PLA credit-earning at the associate degree institutions. But the data really suggested that PLA is more an issue about being underutilized in certain types of institutions where Latino students may be concentrated. Regression analysis supported this conclusion, so no other factor was as significant an influence on PLA usage as institutional type.

Some other findings that we think are very interesting were that Latino students were more likely to earn PLA credit in the area of foreign language (see Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014, p. 3). One of the things that we heard in a lot of interviews with PLA staff was that many colleges immediately refer Latino students to the Spanish CLEP exam. One person said, "If you grew up speaking Spanish at home, why not just get college credit for that?" So we were not surprised to find out that this showed up in the data. Overall, Latino students are nearly six times more likely than non-Latinos to earn PLA credit for foreign language. There is some variation by the type of school: Adult-oriented institutions in small divisions had 23% usage/credit earning in a foreign language and 30% at the small division schools for Latino students. But at associate degree schools, almost two-thirds of all PLA credit comes from foreign language, and without a much difference between Latinos and non-Latino students (see Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014, p. 3).

We thought this was interesting but not entirely unexpected given what we had heard in the interviews we conducted, but we did have an additional question, which was this: Was earning CLEP for Spanish was a one-and-done thing, or did those students also earn PLA credit in other areas? What we found was that about half of Latino adult students who get PLA credit for a foreign language also get PLA credit in other areas. This is also true at small division and adult-oriented schools. The exception is associate degree institutions where only a few students earn PLA credit for more than one area of study.

What we took away from this is that Latino students may start out by getting PLA credit for foreign language, but they also are likely to earn credit in other areas of study, as well. It is possible, then, that foreign language could be a gateway for some students to go on to earn other kinds of PLA credit.

Our research also showed that Latino students found PLA to be empowering and validating. Throughout our interviews with institutional representatives and students, we often heard the word "validation." Many institutions believed it was important to honor and give value to what students had learned through their own experiences.

One PLA method, in particular, portfolio assessment, was seen as giving students the opportunity to reflect on their own abilities and develop a greater sense of their own knowledge. The majority of student interviewees mentioned at some point how this aspect of the PLA process had a positive effect on their feelings of pride or self-worth. One student said:

> *I went from being someone not college educated to being successful. It changed the way I thought about myself. I have abilities, or I wouldn't be where I am.*

Another finding was that current PLA marketing strategies may not always be effective. Making sure that students hear about and understand PLA is a major challenge at many institutions. In a questionnaire, the institutions told us that they used a variety of ways to get the word out, like advisors and websites and catalogs and even advertising. But when we talked to the students at these institutions, we were told by the majority that information about PLA was not very easy to come by. While these institutions were clearly taking steps to disseminate information on PLA, the outreach did not always hit the mark. In some cases, faculty were not well-informed or even aware of PLA at their own schools. About half of students ended up finding out about PLA through word of mouth from friends or family, and one even said it was her tax guy who first told her about it. The other half heard about PLA through institutional avenues like advisors and websites, but clearly, there is more that needs to be done to get the word out.

Finally, we learned from the colleges in our study that there is some concern that PLA may be a challenge for students who are new to higher education. To a first-generation student, regardless of ethnicity, everything in higher education can seem like a foreign language. When first-generation Latino students come to a largely white institution where most of the students and faculty are white, they are intimidated and feel like they need to prove that they belong there; and then on top of that, the message of PLA might be, "You need to prove your learning." So asking this particular student population to *prove* what they know can be a loaded message.

This fact was on the mind of one institution, in particular, that participated in our study. This institution had learned of our earlier research and wanted to find a way to improve the PLA take-up by Latino students, as well as other students of color. And you might be curious to know which institution this was, but you probably will not be surprised to learn that it was Empire State College (ESC). Faculty members Cathy Leaker and Frances Boyce (2015) from ESC had observed that first-generation students, and particularly women, may internalize a lot of messages saying that they do not belong in college, and feel like they are constantly having to prove why they should be there. Hearing that PLA is about proving that you have learned something may reinforce those other messages ("prove that you belong here!") that are chipping away at their feelings of self-worth in an academic environment. So these innovators at Empire State decided to approach PLA in a very different way: through a more self-reflective and self-expressive program that helps students to explore and articulate their life experiences.

In closing, I want to touch on some key recommendations for institutions from our study. The main way to make sure that Latino students have access to PLA is to make sure you offer PLA at your institution. So if you do not have a program in place, please do consider implementing that, and if you want to learn more about PLA, please visit the CAEL website, contact me or come to CAEL's conference in November.[4] But for those of you with PLA programs already, here are some lessons from this particular study (Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014):

1. Get the word out. Really, it is all about marketing and outreach to students, and not relying on word of mouth to be the most effective way to get students engaged. Institutions can do a lot just by making information about PLA more available and easily accessible. And it is not just about providing it on your website, but it is also working through the advising process, orientation/promotional materials.

2. Consider foreign language fluency as a possible gateway to PLA. As I described earlier, foreign language PLA credit was a popular option for a lot of Latino students and it served as a gateway to earning other PLA credit. Of course, not every Latino student is fluent in Spanish, but for those who are, you could use that as a way to get them started. Having an early success

in Spanish CLEP, for example, can boost their confidence in the process, and get them excited about what other college-level learning they may have acquired from their life and work experiences.

3. Track it. In order to understand how PLA is used or underused by target student populations, you have to look at the data. Who is using PLA in your institution? Populations with lower PLA usage rates should give you a signal that you might need to examine how messages are reaching different types of learners and if they see this as something that is right for them.

4. Build in guidance. We learned that programs with high usage of PLA typically offer some sort, of course, to help students explore what prior learning they might have. This can help them develop a plan for PLA and really think through what kinds of learning they may have from other parts of their life experiences.

5. Provide a range of options and do not forget portfolio assessment. Developing portfolios can be a really powerful and educational experience for the students – the process of putting together a learning portfolio involves a lot of self-reflection and building an understanding of the learning process itself.

6. Consider whether you might need to customize PLA approaches for special audiences (like what Empire State had identified as an issue). If you are seeing a lot of first-generation college students at your institution, you might want to consider using messages about PLA in a different way other than "proving what you know in order to get credit." You might want to reach out to them in a very different way and use language that emphasizes the value of their individual expertise and experience, rather than language that may emphasize the need for them to prove themselves.

The research on PLA and the Latino student experience really helped us at CAEL learn more about this student population, but we know that there is so much more that can be done to engage this population and help them succeed. We really are hoping to learn a lot more through our ongoing project with *Excelencia* and the institutions that will be working with us on this new project.

Notes

[1] The Growing What Works database can be accessed at https://www. edexcelencia.org/programs-initiatives/growing-what-works-database.

[2] For more information about CAEL's Adult Learner 360, go to https://www. edexcelencia.org/programs-initiatives/growing-what-works-database.

[3] CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning are listed at https://www.cael. org/ten-standards-for-assessing-learning.

[4] CAEL's website is https://www.cael.org/. Becky Klein-Collins can be emailed at BKLEIN@cael.org. The CAEL Conference is held annually in November, and more information can be found at https://www.cael.org/ conference.

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Becky Klein-Collins is the associate vice president of strategic communication and collaboration for the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), developing and managing strategic alliances that advance the organization's mission and objectives. In her earlier roles at CAEL, she led research in topics related to higher education innovations, prior learning assessment, competency-based education, and workforce development. She also is the author of *Never Too Late: The Adult Student's Guide to College* (The New Press, 2018).

Dispatches From a Burning Building: A (Grateful) Response to Becky Klein-Collins

Ruth Goldberg

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.
— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014)

In her essay, "Considering the Adult Learner at Hispanic-Serving Institutions," Becky Klein-Collins raises powerful questions for educators to consider. She focuses on a single (albeit diverse) population of students, describing the educational achievement gap of Latinos in the United States, less than half of whom complete an associate degree.

Klein-Collins suggests that improving college completion rates for this population could be one meaningful, transformative objective within a complex landscape of racial and economic disparity, and she points to prior learning assessment (PLA) of college-level learning as one approach that can help institutions achieve this goal. She reminds us that successfully completing PLA makes Latino students eight times more likely to complete their degrees, and yet they are much less likely than other groups of students to attempt PLA. She suggests that for these reasons, PLA should be prioritized as a core practice for institutions that serve adult Latino students.

I am rereading Becky Klein-Collins' essay in a hotel room in São Paulo, Brazil. Outside, a pro-Jair Bolsonaro (current president of Brazil) rally consumes the neighborhood of Avenida Paulista with the angry noise of chanting and bullhorns and sirens. One of the topics of today's rally: the "complete eradication" of educator Paulo Freire's legacy from Brazilian history.

Education in Brazil is in crisis. Bolsonaro's rhetoric, however, ignores the complexities of that situation, and creates an easy scapegoat: If Freire's leftist legacy is infused in Brazilian education and Brazilian education is failing, the argument proposes that Freire's progressive ideas must be to blame, and must be excised. There is no blocking out the noise from the rally outside. It is loud.

For many of us who became educators in innovative, experimenting institutions, particularly the kinds of adult-centered programs that value experiential learning, Freire is a foundational inspiration.

Critical pedagogy, he argued, required complete transformation, both of individual teachers and of pedagogy itself. Freire (2013) asserted that the ingredients of the method are basic aspects of our own humanity: love, faith, dialogue, hope; writing that "education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage" (p. 34). Having been a poor student without enough food to eat, he later wrote about the impossibility of learning while hungry, and the authoritarian conditions under which students become "bad students" as he was. He strongly believed that it is impossible to be an effective teacher if one does not love their students.

And now the tides have shifted once again. Even though the fight over Freire's legacy is about the future of education in Brazil, it is easy to see that it is really a war over values that mirrors larger ideological polarizations around the world, during the current global shift toward right-wing populism. These are old cycles that repeat throughout history, but still, it is easy at this moment to feel disheartened, outnumbered, even shocked by what we are hearing; besieged by the neoliberal and conservative forces that are reshaping higher education in our own contexts. Listening as the noise from the street builds to a crescendo, I have two windows open on my computer screen: Klein-Collins's words and Freire's (2014) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Full disclosure: I am crying.)

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Klein-Collins approach to promoting PLA in Hispanic-serving institutions as a pathway to the complex goal of "student success" is sensible and logical, rooted in careful research protocols, and it is also (frankly) heartening to read at a moment when many educators are wary of the "achievement discourse" that so often locates student achievement in the measurement of college completion rates, to the exclusion of more substantive discussion of learning (Rose, 2018).

Klein-Collins complicates this often overly narrow focus by framing the issue as being, in part, an epistemological one. She opens with a frank admission: "We do not know enough about these students. …" More specifically, she says, we do not know enough about these students' diverse *experiences* – either prior to or during their lives as college students – to be able to serve them well.

Framing the issue this way, around our own inadequate understanding, points to a set of questions that are dear to us as educators: What do we need to learn before we can make a valuable intervention? How can we learn what we need to know? Indeed, this awareness that we do not yet know enough brings us directly back to Freirean ideas about the importance of horizontal and fluid teacher-student dialogue to produce knowledge: We cannot learn about these students without asking them to teach us.

Klein-Collins focuses on institutional research, which proposes that colleges that serve adult Latino students must prioritize outreach, inclusion and access to PLA. These suggestions are welcome and important and fitting. Reflecting on her talk leads logically to many questions and avenues of inquiry that remain to be explored, including questions about:

- The larger forces shaping education in our historical moment.
- About individual institutional practices and about student experiences and what factors may influence "student success."

Perhaps given more time to share this research, she could have raised questions about the institutional pressures, schisms and politics that sometimes undermine efforts to promote PLA. And given more time, she could have discussed some of the tensions in the field, where PLA has a polarizing effect among academics. After all, even in institutions where PLA is offered, there are faculty members who simply do not believe in doing it at best, or who see it as a dangerous threat to education at worst.

We can imagine that educators without formal training in the rigorous best practices of portfolio development for prior learning assessment may not have had experience working with adult students like the Grammy award-winning musician (currently my student) who played with Miles Davis and has recorded dozens of albums as a bandleader and composer. Once you meet him, it seems reasonable to imagine that he could compile a portfolio demonstrating knowledge equivalent to that of a traditional college student

earning an undergraduate degree in jazz composition anywhere in the world. There is no shortage of examples of impressive experiential learners or rigorous evaluative standards within the world of PLA. The point is that PLA exists in multiple overlapping cultural contexts (an educational system, an institution, a department, a faculty advisor's office) in which struggles over the dominant ideology and its embedded class interests may complicate outreach, access and inclusion, the values on which Klein-Collins proposes acting. Cultural shifts are needed if those goals are to be achieved.

Data analyses that Klein-Collins offered here and are taken up in other writings (e.g., Klein-Collins, 2014; Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014) are necessary, but they are not sufficient to convince critics of the value of PLA. All of us are vulnerable to believing that "learning" or "college" are synonymous with uncritically reproducing ourselves and our own educational pathways. The power of ideology cannot be discounted. Educators who have never worked with adult students on PLA may not consider whether they are dismissing college-level learning simply because it was acquired outside of formal educational hierarchies. Those educators might be horrified at the suggestion that they could be inadvertently policing certain borders of social control, but this question is always worth considering, because, as French social theorist Michel Foucault would remind us, the production of knowledge cannot be easily separated from questions of identity and power.

Historically, PLA aligns with traditions of creative resistance and experimentation within higher education, sometimes tied to liberation struggles and projects of self-determination as in the cases of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in South Africa and First Nations people in Canada. That is not to suggest that PLA should be defended uncritically. There are extreme divisions within the field, and the current turn toward competency-based learning and pre-established subject outlines or course match models is worrisome for PLA practitioners who understand PLA portfolio development as a rich learning experience within itself, an iterative and complex process of developing critical consciousness (see Harris, 2001; Leaker & Boyce, 2015; Michelson & Mandell, 2004; Michelson, 2015; among others). Indeed, PLA under neoliberalism, by contrast (e.g., the current direction of the field), could very easily come to embody the banking model of education that Freire railed against, rooted in pre-evaluation and the belief that any learning can be codified without substantive attention to reflection, growth or student agency.

Even among educators who believe in PLA, there are those who value PLA for its ability to move students along toward graduation but do not necessarily value the reflective learning process involved, and want it to be quicker and easier. Unless we can promote the more rigorously creative ways of approaching PLA, that is, unless we defend an alternative, the current instrumentalist direction of the field could easily lead us toward exclusively using pre-evaluated or prescriptive measures and methods, vastly reducing the value of PLA to honor experiential learning.

In addressing these concerns, Klein-Collins cites the work of Leaker and Boyce (2015) in looking at the challenges facing students of color who pursue PLA and the benefits that successfully completing PLA offers to those same students. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (2014) wrote that, "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects that must be saved from a burning building" (p. 46). Leaker and Boyce's (2015) research echoed this sentiment and pointed to related, Freirean questions, which all of us would be wise to consider: Even with the best of intentions, to what extent are we ourselves acting as gatekeepers, replicating racist and sexist hierarchies and discouraging or dismissing the participation of students of color in structuring PLA in the way that we do?

And here again, we must ask our students to teach us, as we consider how our PLA systems, even the best ones, may fall short of their potential in ways we have not considered.

Amidst all the noise, and only partially fulfilled as the revolutionary potential of PLA may be, the building in which we are standing is undeniably burning. In her essay, Becky Klein-Collins stays focused on the lives at stake, addressing one population of underserved students, even knowing that institutional or individual interventions are imperfect, often inadequate. And yet, on any given day, we have to start somewhere; and ideally, we find ways to do that, as Freire exhorted us to, in hope and faith and dialogue and love.

And in gratitude for solidarity, wherever we may find it.

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Ruth Goldberg is associate professor of arts and media at SUNY Empire State College, where she teaches film, media studies, and screenwriting. Since 2001, she has been a member of the visiting faculty at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in Cuba. She is a member of the women's filmmaking collective Coletivo Vermelha in Brazil.

Orchid

Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens

John R. Chaney and Joni Schwartz

Overview of Research

John R. Chaney: We are pleased to contribute to this important discussion about adult students today. We are focusing on the findings of a yearlong internal study that took place at LaGuardia Community College (the City University of New York [CUNY]) between 2015 and 2016. It includes our experiences and observations, and hopefully what we share will resonate with those of you who are also engaged with this population. We also want to encapsulate for you many of the views that were expressed during the focus groups that we organized that clearly indicate that racially-driven policies intersected with issues impacting quality and accessibility of education for people coming home from incarceration. We believe that these represent perhaps the most important civil rights issues of our time.

Joni Schwartz: In addition to the LaGuardia Community College study John just referred to, we will also include research, case studies, autoethnography and participatory action research that we highlight in our book, *Race, Education and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens* – encompassing about 10 years of research (Chaney, & Schwartz, 2017). We also want to present a phenomenological study, the findings of which come from the documentary *Counterstory: After Incarceration.*[1] This highlights the phenomenon of entering college after leaving prison.

J.R.C.: Finally, we wish to share with you some of the key experiences, highlights and future plans that we have in connection with the recent launching of our school's volunteer teaching project at Queensboro Correctional Facility.

Mass Incarceration and Education

Before we even get into the intricacies of the studies, it would be dangerously naive and probably irresponsible not to preface this whole conversation with the fact that so many of the individuals we do see coming home to us and into our schools are coming from underserved communities that are decimated with poverty, drug infestation and destruction of the family unit. These are often caused by other racially- and economically-driven policies that are highlighted in Michelle Alexander's (2010) text, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. We do know that according to a Hamilton Project (of the Brookings Institution) report that "there is nearly a 70 percent chance that an African American man without a high school diploma will be imprisoned by his mid-thirties" (Kearney, Harris, Jácome, & Parker, 2014, p. 11). We know that we have privatization, represented by organizations like The GEO Group and the Corrections Corporation of America. And, another piece of important information, it is a fact that nearly two-thirds of private prison contracts mandate that state and local governments maintain a "bed guarantee" or "lockup quota," the most common being a 90% occupancy rate (Watson, 2015), and of course, much of this has been exacerbated by the so-called "war on drugs" that began in the '90s.

J.S.: Then, connected with education, is that, as a nation, we are now more segregated than we were during the landmark Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954 that basically said separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. We are segregated in our public school systems now by race and class because of white flight, because of the property values that support schools, and by unequal funding for schools based on race, all of which create unequal educational opportunity. As Michael Holzman (2017) said when he spoke about the prison-to-school pipeline, "unsatisfactory educational outcomes in America are associated with race, which is associated with poverty and both are associated with inadequate school funding (p. 8)," which is associated with incarceration.

Critical Race Theory

That brings us to critical race theory, which frames all of our research. For those of you who may not be familiar with it, it began in legal studies – Derrick Bell is one of the founders – and it is, in brief, a systematic race-based critique of legal reasoning and legal institutions. More recently, critical race theory

has moved to other fields, particularly education, cultural studies and political science; and as John already mentioned, it highlights the idea that race matters in police profiling, the war on drugs, harsh sentencing, and the swelling of our prison populations, and separate but unequal schools and educational inequality. Critical race theory also focuses on white privilege, which is germane to this conversation. And for anyone who may not be familiar with that term, "white privilege" refers to the myriad social advantages and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race (being white in America).

Why this is relevant is that most of our higher education system and our adult education systems have mainly white educators. We think that grappling with privilege is important for us, and for me as a white educator and researcher. It pushes us to understand our privilege and how it affects our teaching and our perspectives, particularly on formerly incarcerated citizens. And then finally, there is the concept of interest convergence. As a white scholar, as a white writer, as a white educator, I publish and I benefit from talking about race and oppression, and that puts me in an "uncomfortable reflexivity": I benefit from the oppression of others. Wanda Pillow (2003) from the University of Utah has great research on this idea of uncomfortable reflexivity for white educators.

Case Studies and Autoethnography

This clip from our documentary talks about critical race theory:

> Dr. Richard Brown: *I ran away from home between the ages of 14 and 15 and that period of time, and I was caught and back home and away again, and so I eventually ended up stealing a motorcycle and I used this motorcycle to the library that was further down the road so I was interested in relativity theory for instance, and I got caught with the motorcycle and arrested, so that began my official incarceration, and of course they wanted to send me back home; I didn't want to go back home, so to make a long story short, I lied about my name … it was a whole big institution. So that was 14 or whatever, and I ended up staying incarcerated from 14 to 18. We live in a culture where the incarceration rate is astronomical, and when you look at the populations of these prisons, you can't help but notice a pattern – it's obvious – that the pattern is one of class and race. In our society, being white on the outside is what counts, and I can't discount the effect that that had when people look at me and assume innocence rather than guilt, when I was just as guilty as anyone standing next to me at the time, at least. I wonder sometimes really seriously if someone with*

my aptitude – same resume, as it were – starting in my position but with a different skin color, would they have made it where I am right now? I'm not saying it's impossible; I think it would be much more difficult, though, because of the way the system is set up itself. (LaGuardia Community College, 2018a)

Now, we are going to look at some other case studies, autoethnography and participatory action research that looks at the advantages and challenges of returning citizens coming into the classroom. One advantage for education, we know, is that it reduces recidivism – all the research is clear – and it creates new social capital. It is necessary for returning citizens to form new interpersonal relationships, have new networks, gain new knowledge. Colleges and GED programs provide that new social capital in place of their previous negative capital. Also one of the challenges for returning citizens is that they need to learn a new culture. Academia is a culture: they need to learn the jargon (registrar, GPA, associate degree); modes of behavior; habits of mind. Another challenge is trauma. We know that some returning citizens come back with post-traumatic stress disorder and that they need to have special accommodations and support in the classroom from the instructors. They often need to sit in the back of the room and keep their eye on the door; they cannot be with crowds, and that needs to be addressed.

J.R.C.: One of the most formidable barriers that we can also encounter in this work is that ever-present toxic cloud of stigmatization, that, unfortunately, some actually feel should be a perpetual cloak of shame that should be worn by anybody who has ever been convicted of a crime, and unfortunately that also includes the people who are in our classrooms. Honestly, if truth be told, my educated guess today is that some of our colleagues in academia who received the email announcing that this webinar was actually being offered probably declined because many have actually been conditioned through negative learning or negative experiences to think that by humanizing men and women coming home and coming into our classrooms for educational experiences is to somehow be soft on crime; sometimes these colleagues are even under the disturbing delusion that this is not their problem. This group of returning citizens includes men and women who come home with either weak or nonexistent family ties; a good number of our students will come home who have burned their familial bridges or their families died while they were in prison. The pursuit of education can be substantially enhanced when projects actually include support through community mentoring and peer mentoring, which also include support from faith-based communities. These are initiatives

that can serve to enhance self-esteem, self-efficacy, and also help to set the building blocks for long-term support and acquisition of the social capital that Joni alluded to earlier.

J.S.: Also we have tried to be very aware of power. We were very concerned that the formerly incarcerated citizens were stakeholders in all of our research and that their stories were being told – not ours – and that their voices were heard. Also in terms of identity, there is an acknowledgment that for formerly incarcerated citizens, names and the language we all use matter. Names like "ex-con" matter in terms of what they are called. Also, it is really important that our students create new identities: scholar, student, academician – that they take on new identities, multiple identities beyond the identity of formerly incarcerated.

Phenomenological Research Study Documentary Data

Another study that we did that resulted in the documentary and in the sample interviews provided here come from phenomenological research. It was a three-year study, beginning in 2015. We worked with 33 formerly incarcerated students – all college students, some of them now graduated, some of them in graduate school, two stakeholders who have been part of the planning to come up with the findings in this documentary. I will only address three of the findings from the study. The first is one that John earlier mentioned, "stigma," even after you've gone to college. The second finding is "giving back," the necessity to reach back after you get your education and to go back to the prisons to support those who are still there. And then, finally, there is the theme, "education isn't everything," but education is a powerful tool in terms of reducing recidivism and increasing the possibility of meaningful transformative learning. We know that from this research and from all previous research that it is essential to respect the transformative power of education.

Correctional Education Task Force at LaGuardia

J.R.C.: During 2015, the president of LaGuardia Community College, Dr. Gail Mellow, called together a group of staff and faculty from all areas of our college, those known for having experience and relevant expertise, to discuss how our college could become a landing strip for students with special needs, most notably, those coming home from the city, state and federal correctional facilities. So a group of staff met for nearly a year and

they made recommendations to the president's office based upon research, institutional need, and the findings garnered from the aforementioned focus groups that we conducted with our students, their families and also service providers. Joni's documentary highlights some of the many insightful, poignant, and, actually quite a few times, emotional exchanges that became viable tools for our task force.

Here is a sampling of one of these focus groups:

> John Powell: *What does it mean to be let out, what does it mean to be on parole, what does it mean to be on probation? Like, what's the purpose? What's the point of saying "OK, you're free to go back into society" if you can't really function in society?*

> Marquise Powell: *If you already feel that all odds are against you, you're no longer looking to prove yourself; you're looking to play on those odds.*

> Dr. Darren Ferguson: *My personal history is that I spent from 1990 until 1998 – 16 months on Rikers Island and then seven years plus in Sing Sing – and, you know, from making mistakes when I was young, and I won't go into all the gory details, but I understand the entire process of becoming a number and then trying to reclaim your name afterward. And a lot of times, it's not even the education, the opportunities and things that we can attain for ourselves relatively easily, but the difficulty is changing people's perceptions to sometimes help get those opportunities to the next level because I think there's – and I think most people agree – a stigma, there's a scarlet letter that people wear that kind of makes you think that you can't achieve but so much.*

> Brian Miller: *I could sit in front of you in a suit and tie, right, and you perceive me as this nice young man, right; where when you check that box [a "check" indicating that one has a criminal record], everything changes, right, what you see, what you feel about me changes, and I think those things matter when it comes to academia, right, there's this idea that the individual, you know, theoretically, is a changed man, et cetera, you paid your dues, et cetera, but when you come here, you have to reacclimate, not only to society but also to education. In my personal experience, I try to constantly dress in a way that does not indicate this idea of my bad past; it's … a shirt and tie every day. Now I've gotten used to it at this point but it was an uncomfortable idea of dressing like that other person who wasn't a felon.*

[Individual interview] Brian Miller: *When I was incarcerated, I was incarcerated with a group of individuals. My particular incarceration … I was to be incarcerated for 10 to 17 years, my brother as well, and because of a plea bargain I took while I was incarcerated, I was released early.*

[At scene of crime] Brian Miller: *So we're right here and we decide that we're gonna rob a taxi. So we call a cab to our building and give them my actual address, right here. We get him the address, we take a garbage can from right here, we take the garbage bag and put it in the back of the trunk. I pull out the gun and I go to rob him right in front of the building, he pulls up, almost runs me over, and these dudes laugh. So, to show you where our mind was, right, and the beauty of is that we had people outside – older guys – that were encouraging us to do this nonsense stuff, you know what I mean. So stuff like that, right, as nice as the neighborhood looks, if you got the individual to give you the support and kind of give you the right mindset, it's what you end up with though. A few blocks down by my family, I figured I'd be killed there. To kind of make it to here, kind of, and I'll be back, it's kind of a good look. The emotion associated to the place, right, and how different things look, right, and how I thought, quite frankly, that this is …I wouldn't make it out of here, and how honestly I felt like I'd probably die somewhere around here.*

[Individual interview] Brian Miller: *When I initially came – initially I was in the CUNY [City University of New York] Start Program – and the CUNY Start program was part of LaGuardia, but it didn't feel like … it was school, but it was different, right. I learned that I was good in math, or I figured that I was good at math, right, so it encouraged me to stay, right. So I asked the administrators if I could stay for both classes. The way CUNY Start worked is that you'd be in class from 12 to 4, and you have another class from 5 to 9. So I would sit and stay from 12 until 9 every day, and when the administrators asked me why, I explained to them that if I leave here, I'll probably get in trouble, right, so if you let me stay here, you'll be saving me from trouble.*
(LaGuardia Community College, 2018b)

Student Voices – Challenges and Recommendations

There were a number of these focus groups, of course, so we are glad we had a chance to at least give you a better understanding of what we actually encountered as we did each of these. But over and over again as we would

engage our students and also, on occasion, the family members, certain themes kept resonating. Here are examples of probably the most commonly expressed sentiments that we heard:

- "I didn't have anybody to talk to who understood the process." Male, 53
- "For individuals that are formerly incarcerated, one of the things that is necessary is that there's a liaison here who understands the process, somebody that understands the space." Male, 22

Our students were basically making us realize that our school, as I am sure is true for many other schools, probably takes a lot for granted, assuming that promotional flyers and handouts will somehow suffice in getting the word out.

These quotes focus on hoping that our school would somehow have contact with the outside agencies:

- "LaGuardia could have some kind of contact with the probation and parole office." Male, 35
- "I really think there needs to be a reentry program for students that is already in school and also for students coming in. And those of us who have experience and have knowledge would be able to be more of a counsel than somebody with just book knowledge who's never been to prison." Male, 25

When we started hearing comments like these, we came to become even more cognizant of both our strengths and our limitations as a place of learning. The main message that was clear was that we were institutions of learning; we are academia, that is our area and we cannot do it all. But if we really wanted to make a positive difference for the men and women coming home to our institution who have special needs and concerns connected to their criminal justice involvement, we knew that we had to take proactive steps in developing healthy and effective partnerships with key agencies within our community.

Potential Barriers

Some of the other issues that would come about during these focus groups had to do with things like students not realizing that they had to go online in order to submit a college application not knowing how to navigate through complexities and the intricacies of the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Some even had erroneous ideas on what was actually available

in the workforce for those who have criminal histories in addition to having a college degree. Not surprisingly, many were not even sure what type of employment they might be eligible for if they should decide to defer education, or knew details of the new legislation in New York City, the Fair Chance Act,[2] which significantly levels the playing field for all who seek entry into the workforce. And a significant number of them come from transitional housing – we heard that quite a bit. Some come straight from shelters or three-quarter housing, housing that provides less supervision than a conventional half-way house. When they do have stable addresses, many times there are issues where they are unable to access crucial documentation so they can get eligibility for various college resources such as financial aid or specialized state programs like ACCES-VR, which stands for Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation. Some students do not even have enough documentation to secure public assistance.

Student Recommendations for Proposed Continuum of Credit and Adult and Continuing Education Classes

J.S.:

- Reach me early, preferably in prison. Of course, the Bard Prison Initiative is a model for that, and there will be a PBS documentary coming out on the Bard Prison Initiative in November 2019 and the restoration of the Pell Grant.

- Support me as I reenter and begin college. That means social capital, creating networks, a new community, mentoring not advising. They need advising, yes, but mentoring is different. Mentoring involves the emotional, the spiritual support as we talked about the trauma and navigating through teaching, the jargon, the academic culture, new technology (technology is brand new for most of them).

- Assist me with transferring options.

- Connect me with the necessary resources and services I will need to succeed.

- Let me go. Often these mentoring relationships are very intense with formerly incarcerated citizens, and we as educators have to look at our own boundaries and our own patronizing, and let people go as they grow.

J.R.C.: The next challenge was for our task force to determine our college's ability to provide the full, essential array of resources and services and staffing: a thorough, brutally honest inventory and capacity assessment. We wanted to begin with an overview of the college's track record of providing educational services of our returning men and women, and we saw that in terms of expertise, that we've been there. We've been involved with our correctional facilities off and on for the last 30 years, but that was the main issue right there – the off-and-on piece – because our classes and our engagements have been, at best, sporadic. We've had long lapses of inactivity sometimes because of staffing changes at the facilities, sometimes some changes at the college, and unfortunately, in some cases, we have had really no kind of a lasting partnership with the facilities at all.

But, of course, we also wanted to look at recruitment; look at how clear the course is (our Adult Continuing Education [ACE] courses, degree offerings, what have you); and our current method of promoting what we have to offer. What we have to offer at LaGuardia is considerable, actually. We have 60 majors and programs that lead toward degrees. Almost 19,500 are currently doing that. We have 80 continuing education ACE programs going on and we have over 26,000 people taking that. The problem was that we did not really have anyone inside our local correctional facilities who knew about these resources due to the sad reality that we did not really have any ongoing involvement in these facilities. We really needed to develop a regular communications network to get that word out – maybe through a college staff spokesperson, maybe through peers or a peer advisor, or maybe through a whole new resource altogether, specifically charged with the task. We saw that this was something that was more and more apparent.

J.S.: LaGuardia has a huge spectrum of resources. We have a Wellness Center, Single Stop, Black Male Empowerment Cooperative, Fatherhood Program, the Multicultural Exchange, and Veterans' Office. But to train professionals in these offices to be aware of this particular population and sensitive to the population is really important. In effect, the left hand needs to know what the right hand is doing so that we can help our students to effectively and painlessly access these services and the existing infrastructure.

One important thing is this navigator piece of having someone who understands the criminal justice system and the barriers, the stigma – all that we've been describing – and this individual or individuals who can then navigate

returning citizen through the college experience. And then training; we are in this process now of at LaGuardia of doing professional development for the faculty and the staff.

Continuum of Services

This is a continuum of services: from prerelease in prison, to navigating through the existing services; from providing ongoing mentoring and continuous support, and doing so from a community college perspective, to then ideally transferring to a four-year college and beyond.

J.R.C.: At the end of the day, we realize that our forte is teaching and also advising. Over the time of this initiative, we began to realize that in addition to the important work of acquiring the essential academic and workforce development skills, that LaGuardia and the rest of our collaborative CUNY colleges needed to have an efficient service delivery system in place for our returning citizens who might be in need of transitional housing, workforce development services, aggression replacement therapy and mediation, mental health treatment, HIV services, food banks, you name it – so many other resources. Toward this end, we did have two really informative and productive meetings with direct administrative services representatives, staffing from over 20 community organizations, as well as sharing strategies in effectively realizing positive outcomes when dealing with this very special population.

Some of the organizations that sat at our two roundtable discussions included: CUCS (Center for Urban Community Services), The Fortune Society, Hudson Link, The Osborne Association, College & Community Fellowship, Hour Children, Friends of Island Academy, Getting Out and Staying Out, STRIVE, and Housing Works. We also found the need to get very much involved with securing linkages with our correctional government agencies at the local, state and federal level because no real prerelease dialog or informational literature was going out to any of the 54 prisons upstate or their libraries or administrative offices. We also really needed to strengthen our ties locally with Rikers Island. We actually had to create a brand new connection with our largest local federal facility, the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), because we learned from some of our students we have in our classrooms have actually come from the federal system, and this included our federal halfway houses. And we got to know a lot better the very special services that are offered by the New York State Department of Education, especially ACCES-VR. They service many

of our individuals who are coming home by way of substance abuse or mental health issues as a legal disability, which enables them to receive free, state-sponsored job training for career-based employment.

Recommendations

For the recommendations that we gave to the president's office at LaGuardia, we first wanted to begin very much to nurture relationships with these key providers, beginning with establishing the navigator, the liaison, and an efficient screening and vetting process that would facilitate referrals as we need them to responsible service providers. Now one of the new components to this linkage initiative also has to do with us trying to establish ties to the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' County Reentry Task Force (CRTF). They have connections with policymakers, and all of the law enforcement entities like the local corrections and parole officers and probation officers, as well. They are available all throughout the state, and we began to establish connections with our Queens Reentry task force.

We recommend also becoming a strong and regular presence at these various facilities and their resources and their resource fairs. We also considered the possibility of developing a campus office that could serve as a safe, stigma-free post-release counterspace for our returning men and women, and also a headquarters to compile accurate information that could be used to assess outcomes that related to enrollment, retention, recidivism and graduation.

Collaborating with Prisons

At the end of the day, what was really, really the top priority for us was establishing a strong partnership with Queensboro Correctional Facility. For those of you who are not familiar with this particular facility, it is one of the 54 New York state prison facilities, and it happens to be specifically tailored, however, for engaging and preparing the men who are within four months of being released under community supervision, otherwise known as parole. At any given time, there are anywhere between 400 and 500 individuals in this prison, and what is really unique about that from a LaGuardia Community College perspective is that they happen to be exactly across the street from our main campus building. And I had learned that due to staffing transitions that

took place both at LaGuardia and at Queensboro Correctional Facility that no one from our school had ever attempted to even have a class or workshop or information session meeting there, at least in the last 15 years.

This final portion of the documentary that we would like to share with you is from a formerly incarcerated individual from Attica who shares his observations about education as a possible instrument for self-healing and positive change, which, perhaps, gave him the incentive to pursue educational further, with respect to the initiatives that we have at LaGuardia.

> John R. Chaney, J.D.: *Right now, I am working in the criminal justice section of the Social Science department for the college. Right now, I'm concentrating primarily on giving the class for Corrections and Sentencing. On top of my involvement, you know, as an administrative professional with the [district attorney's] office and having dealt with this population as an administrator, I did have my own background, you know, which included, you know, periods of incarceration, with the main one being of the three years that I spent in New York state prisons several years ago, which included my working as an inmate program assistant. One of the observations that I made that really, really impressed me a lot – something I didn't even know existed – this is where we're talking way back in the time where we still had a few college courses going on. This is in Attica. I saw one of the last classes. I observed individuals that were coming out of their cells and they would studiously a religiously go to class with their books in hand, and these were people of all types in terms of the level/types of convictions that they had – everything from drug trafficking to robbery, might even have had one or two sex offenders there in a mix, capital crimes, you name it – but the one aspect, the one characteristic that they all had in common, was that when they left their cells, they would all come with their text in hand and their books in hand, and there was just something about their aura. You knew that they were very, very proud of what they were doing; they were very serious about this undertaking. When they talked about, you know, their future aspirations in trying to obtain their degree while they were there, they had strong plans of, you know, finishing up what they started because they've started to look at themselves in a different way. It really, really does give a lot of credence to the fact that people can, you know, change.* (LaGuardia Community College, 2018c)

After having seen that, perhaps it is a bit clearer to everybody why developing a partnership with Queensboro Correctional Facility (QCF), where I was actually released from some 15 years ago, took on the characteristics of a holy mission – not just a committee task anymore. So, back in January of 2017, I was able to organize a recruitment drive among our college's faculty and staff, where we were actually able to host two information sessions that were facilitated for the very first time by the QCF deputy superintendent of programs, Delta Barometre, and also Obafemi Wright, their director of volunteer services. They came and gave a really informative session on what it took to become a volunteer at LaGuardia. After a lot of processing and orientation sessions, we officially launched the volunteer project in September of 2017. Joni has been involved in this project from the very beginning, and can give an overview and a few highlights of experiences there.

J.S.: I've been at Queensboro for four semesters. We had four classes in spring 2018, and just completed the fourth in spring 2019, which were very well received by both the residents and QCF staff. We have full-time English, philosophy, communication studies, career preparation and social science faculty involved. My particular class is a writing group, and we meet for six weeks, three hours a week, and we actually do an intensive literature reading at the beginning and then intensive writing. They bring their writing to the class and we share, give feedback, they revise, edit, and we actually publish a journal at the end. In fact, three students from this last year anticipate enrolling in LaGuardia Community College – one is a journalism major, and even before he is starting classes, he is publishing in our English journal here at the college. So this is a way of prerelease preparation even before they've started college. This is a very satisfying experience, and, of course, it needs to be expanded, but it is a really solid, good start to engaging prerelease students and actually helping them through and beginning that navigation process through to full enrollment at LaGuardia or at other colleges.

J.R.C.: Since we began over there, we are now getting ready to start our summer session; we have about two additional new classes that will be there – they are both volunteer classes.

And a few quick updates on what is happening there now. We do have a great connection with the U.S. Department of Justice; we are connected now with Dr. Michelle Gantt, director of education at the Metropolitan Detention Center. For those of you who do not know, MDC happens to be the largest

federal jail in the United States – right now, they have about 1,800 individuals. We are having wonderful discussions there, trying to have a secure connection and engagement there. At Rikers Island, our faculty participate in College Way,[3] an education program for students detained at Rikers Island, and we have a couple of faculty engaged at Rikers who are very close to receiving approval for a credit-bearing class that we are hoping can be transferred to LaGuardia for those who seek associate degrees. We were also successful in facilitating some trainings for our faculty and staff, thanks to the guidance and expertise of College & Community Fellowship[4] training. CCF, a support, policy and advocacy organization assisting incarcerated women returning to the community, actually conducted the training workshops to get our faculty and staff more sensitive to the specific needs of men and women coming home from periods of incarceration.

There were some very strong efforts to create that stigma-free counterspace office at the school. The college established the ABC Office, which stands for the Advocacy Bridge to College. For a while, it was a very good liaison; it did act as a navigator, setting the tone at the prerelease level so that people would know where to come. There were some administrative bugs that needed to be ironed out, so it is basically a work in progress, but we feel that we are on the right track. We, meanwhile, were actually able to receive one year of funding from the LaGuardia Foundation for one of our honor students to be hired as our Prison to College liaison intern. Her responsibilities included providing information at weekly QCF orientation sessions for new residents, assisting in facilitating the very popular Creative Writing classes, assisting in the development of that class' quarterly publication *Transformative Thoughts,* and providing assistance for recently released men and women who became new students at LaGuardia Community College. The internship, which ended June 30, 2019, has been considered by all accounts a huge success. Additionally, Joni Schwartz's Creative Writing group actually became the foundation for the post-release Citizens' Writing Group that she runs regularly on Tuesday evenings at Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Plaza. The weekly adult writing group seeks to engage citizens who have recently returned from prison in a supportive, writing-intensive and community-oriented writing project. Participants spend time writing, discussing their writing, sharing feedback and working toward publishing. The writing focuses on personal narrative and reflective writing through the genres of poetry, prose fiction and reflective short nonfiction.

We realize that some of our school's characteristics may be unique – not all colleges have a prison across the street from them – but our collective experiences have taught us that on this sensitive topic that we are sharing with you, we all are likely to have a lot more in common than not. We do not profess to know all of the answers for you, but we do sincerely hope that something in this offering did hit home, did resonate with you. Perhaps you could take back to your colleagues, your community representatives, your returning students, and hopefully this can initiate some intelligent, informed dialog that will result in all of us reaching new levels of academic achievement, and enhancing the quality of life for our students, and eventually for all of our communities, as well.

Notes

[1] The 2017 documentary, Counterstory: After Incarceration, produced by Chaney and Schwartz, is available only by contacting jonischwartz@jonischwartz.com.

[2] The Fair Chance Act is described on the following page – https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/media/fair-chance-act-campaign.page.

[3] Learn more about College Way at http://www.college-way.org/.

[4] More information about College & Community Fellowship can be accessed at https://www.collegeandcommunity.org/.

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John R. Chaney, J.D., is widely recognized as an authority in developing effective agency collaborations that deliver essential transitional services for returning citizens. Currently an assistant professor and director for the Criminal Justice program at the City University of New York's (CUNY) LaGuardia Community College, he previously served as the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office executive director for the nationally acclaimed ComALERT re-entry program. He is also the co-editor (with Joni Schwartz) of *Race, Education and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens* published by Rowman & Littlefield (2017).

Joni Schwartz, Ed.D., is a social activist scholar and founder of three adult education centers in New York City. A professor at LaGuardia Community College and John Jay College, she also is co-editor for *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal;* two volumes of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* in the Jossey-Bass series, including *Swimming Upstream: Black Males in Adult Education;* as well as *Race, Education and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens* (with John R. Chaney; Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). Her work centers on the intersection of race and educational opportunity. Her new book, with John R. Chaney, *Gifts from the Dark: Learning from the Incarceration Experience,* is scheduled for publication in 2020.

The Rule, Not the Exception, Must Be Inclusion

Elliott Dawes

In their essay "Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens," City University of New York (CUNY) LaGuardia Community College Professors John R. Chaney and Joni Schwartz discuss a model program that they developed for people incarcerated at the Queensboro Correctional Facility. This innovative program regards incarcerated people as prospective college students and provides them with college-level classes, transitional services and prerelease preparation. Chaney, a lawyer, criminal justice scholar and the director of the Criminal Justice program at LaGuardia, and Schwartz, a documentary filmmaker and the founder of three adult education centers in New York City, have devoted much of their scholarship and practice to examining the trauma of incarceration as well as the transformative power of education for people with criminal justice histories. Drawing on their vast experiences as advocates, practitioners and researchers, Chaney and Schwartz offer us an important opportunity to consider the efficacy of higher education reentry programs that assist returning men and women who often experience difficult transitions from incarceration to higher education.

Chaney and Schwartz's essay can be considered as a continuation of their exploration of the themes discussed in their book, *Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens: Counterstories and Counterspaces,* an interdisciplinary collection of essays by higher education professionals and criminal justice reform advocates, many of whom self-identify as formerly incarcerated people (Chaney & Schwartz, 2017). A fundamental recurring theme in both their book and essay is the importance of listening to people who are most impacted by the dysfunction of the criminal justice system. For Chaney and Schwartz, advocating for the educational opportunity interests of people with criminal justice histories must begin with the intentional inclusion of voices of people who are often absent from academic discussions about the meaning of justice, equality and educational opportunity.

When exploring the efficacy of prison education programs such as the well-regarded Bard Prison Initiative, Chaney and Schwartz share qualitative data that they gathered from focus groups with formerly incarcerated college

students who provide concrete suggestions and practical strategies such as "reach me early, preferably in prison"; "support me as I reenter and begin college"; "assist me with transferring options"; "connect me with necessary resources and services"; and "let me go." Ultimately, by placing the voices of students who have been impacted by the criminal justice system and mass incarceration at the center of the discourse, Chaney and Schwartz encourage higher education professionals to consider the importance of truly listening to the students we are privileged to serve.

Federal and New York state criminal justice reforms in the mid-1990s restricted incarcerated people's access to financial aid programs including the federal government's Pell Grant program, as well as the New York state Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). The impact of these reforms effectively removed higher education programs from prisons in New York state and throughout the nation. During his second term, in 2016, President Barack Obama authorized a U.S. Department of Education pilot program, the Second Chance Pell (SCP) Experimental Sites Initiative, which gave a small number of people incarcerated in federal correctional facilities access to federal Pell Grants to fund their participation in college degree-granting programs (ED Homeroom, 2019). With bipartisan support for some criminal justice reform initiatives, the Trump administration has continued the SCP program (Green, 2019). Further, education advocates like Chaney and Schwartz hope that federal lawmakers will reconsider Pell eligibility and restore incarcerated people's access to federal financial aid. With all of this in mind, Chaney and Schwartz anticipate that, with the restoration of Pell eligibility for students while incarcerated, college degree-granting programs will return to prisons throughout the nation, particularly in New York state.

In the meanwhile, in addition to their support for the restoration of higher education programs in prisons, Chaney and Schwartz share concrete strategies for supporting the educational opportunity interests of returning men and women by connecting them with existing services. Referencing the "huge spectrum of resources" available at CUNY LaGuardia Community College, Chaney and Schwartz discussed that they began to review their institution's track record of providing educational services to returning men and women. Noting that LaGuardia has "a Wellness Center, Single Stop, Black Male Empowerment Cooperative, Fatherhood Program, the Multicultural Exchange, and Veterans' Office," Chaney and Schwartz suggest that administrators and faculty members affiliated with the aforementioned programs should receive

ongoing and continuous professional development about the unique challenges that returning men and women face as they attempt to navigate their way through college. Further, Chaney and Schwartz also share information about their attempts to connect their students to reentry programs throughout New York City. In particular, they recount their efforts and that of their colleagues to facilitate LaGuardia's inclusion and participation in citywide and borough-specific reentry task forces. By sharing their experiences at one institution, Chaney and Schwartz provide a clear example for other public colleges and universities that purport to serve all students, yet have not implemented targeted initiatives and structured programs that serve returning men and women who deserve mentorship and additional layers of academic and social supports.

But, the significant progress made at CUNY LaGuardia Community College in responding to the needs of returning men and women college students might be a reflection of an *exception* in higher education administration rather than the rule. Despite the constant societal reminders that we are living in an era of mass incarceration, the failure of many higher education institutions to establish structured higher education reentry programs that target and serve returning men and women seems more like willful blindness than benign neglect. It is my hope that Chaney and Schwartz's scholarship, teaching and administrative work in support of returning men and women will inspire academics and administrators at other public colleges and universities to: (1) engage in similar reviews of their institutions' practices; and (2) develop policies, practices and recommendations that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Ultimately, administrators and faculty members at public colleges and universities could begin to support the educational opportunity interests and needs of returning men and women by: (1) engaging them in discussion, (2) listening to them, and (3) implementing an action plan like the following list inspired by the recommendations developed by The City University of New York Black Male Initiative (CUNY BMI) (2005) in its task force report.

Encourage colleges and universities to provide strong leadership and educate the general public about higher education as a successful reentry strategy for people with criminal justice histories, particularly formerly incarcerated people.

Strengthen education programs that assist incarcerated people and formerly incarcerated people who aspire to earn a high school diploma or prepare for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC™) examination through a structured High School Equivalency (HSE) program.

Strengthen higher education reentry programs that enable formerly incarcerated people to make successful transitions to higher education.

Develop a wider constituency of support throughout the nation, particularly in New York state and New York City, for higher education reentry programs.

Support programs, practices and policies that provide incarcerated people and people released from incarceration with ongoing and continuous exposure to opportunities at CUNY, SUNY (The State University of New York) and other higher education institutions.

Develop partnerships with local, state and federal agencies to improve colleges' and universities' capacities to reach the targeted population and promote higher education as an important option and reentry strategy.

Develop partnerships with community-based organizations throughout the New York metropolitan area and New York state that serve formerly incarcerated individuals and other people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system.

1. Encourage colleges and universities to provide strong leadership and educate the general public about higher education as a successful reentry strategy for people with criminal justice histories, particularly formerly incarcerated people.

2. Strengthen education programs that assist incarcerated people and formerly incarcerated people who aspire to earn a high school diploma or prepare for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC™) examination through a structured High School Equivalency (HSE) program.

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6. Develop partnerships with local, state and federal agencies to improve colleges' and universities' capacities to reach the targeted population and promote higher education as an important option and reentry strategy.

7. Develop partnerships with community-based organizations throughout the New York metropolitan area and New York state that serve formerly incarcerated individuals and other people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system.

8. Conduct regular reviews of college and university offices, policies and practices to ensure that people with criminal justice histories, particularly formerly incarcerated people, are able to easily access campus programs and services.

9. Create a professional development curriculum for administrators, faculty members and staff designed to expose all college and university personnel to the unique challenges that formerly incarcerated people face as they attempt to access opportunities in higher education.

10. Contribute to the reduction of incarceration and recidivism rates.

11. Support ongoing efforts to return higher education opportunities and college degree-granting programs to incarcerated people.

12. Direct campus offices of institutional research to conduct research on the educational opportunity interests of students in the targeted populations of people with criminal justice histories including formerly incarcerated people.

13. Establish a collegewide body in the form of a higher education reentry program, a center or an institute to implement these recommendations.

14. Involve experts, particularly people with criminal justice records including formerly incarcerated people, in the implementation of these recommendations.

15. Establish benchmarks and hold colleges accountable for implementing these recommendations that facilitate access to higher education and promote the educational opportunity interests of people with criminal justice histories.

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Elliott Dawes, J.D., LL.M, is the chief diversity officer for institutional equity and inclusion at SUNY Empire State College. From 2006 to 2014, Dawes served as the university director of the City University of New York Black Male Initiative (CUNY BMI). Before his work with CUNY BMI, Dawes was the assistant dean for multicultural affairs at the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University (2004-2006). He earned a B.A. ingovernment and Africana studies from Cornell University; a J.D. from The New York University School of Law; and a Master of Laws from Columbia Law School. Dawes is admitted to the NYS Bar, Second Department.

Sunflower-2

A Holistic Approach to Support Adult Indigenous Students

Stephanie J. Waterman

Acknowledgment

Stephanie J. Waterman: To begin, I want to give an acknowledgment to the sacred land on which the SUNY system operates, which is the traditional, historical and current homelands of the Haudenosaunee, and acknowledge all my relatives. I wish to give thanks to Creation that I am able to be here today and share and develop relationships with you, for the waters and air, our plants and four-legged relatives, good food, for the stars, and our weather and all that makes our lives possible.

I want to turn to Dr. Jeffrey Lambe now, who will explain a little bit about our responsibility and relationships.

Jeff Lambe: *Niawen ne Skanon,* Stephanie. It is important that those of us who live and work in many parts of New York state acknowledge that we reside in Haudenosaunee territory. Haudenosaunee, the "people of the longhouse," are often known as the Iroquois. The state of New York has a very long relationship with the Haudenosaunee of which the Onondaga are central. The foundation of this relationship was established in the context of indigenous frameworks that are among the oldest ways of negotiating diversity and working together in this part of the world.

This framework is evident through the oral tradition, hundreds of years of treaty records and the realities of life today. Included in this framework is the idea of respect, whether culturally, individually or otherwise, as we bring our minds together. These differences being brought together respectfully is a source of strength, which is important because the issues Stephanie is presenting are important and could impact the future. *Niawen:gowan,* Stephanie for sharing your understanding and experience with us.

Diversity

Stephanie J. Waterman: I want to first talk about the diversity of indigenous people in North America. Right now, there are 567 federally-recognized tribes in the United States. The total population is about 2% of the total U.S. population today. This is mostly self-identified, so some of the numbers that you might see in federal reporting are often very problematic. In what is now called Canada, First Nation, Métis and Intuit make up about 4%-5% of the total population, and there are over 600 hundred bands. So there is a wide range of spirituality and leadership among our people. Our traditional values are expressions of that diversity. We represent urban, rural and suburban populations. If everybody who was Onondaga, if all my relatives, were to try to live in Onondaga in central New York, there would not be enough room. So right now in the United States, more native people live in urban environments than in reservation territories just because of the encroachment on the region's land base. And many of us are rural. I think when people think of indigenous people they think of people out West who will go to the Grand Canyon out in the desert, dry areas – that is what people tend to think about. But a very large population is suburban now just because we cannot all fit on our territories.

Some people in urban areas can maintain their relationships back on the territories with their relatives and can be very traditional; some people who are rural do not, and suburban people also can make these connections. So there is a very wide range of our understanding of our spirituality and traditions. You have to remember that if you meet somebody who is Seneca or Onondaga and they present a certain way of being, that does not necessarily mean the next Onondaga or Seneca person you meet has that same understanding and expression of ways of being.

Kirkness and Barnhart's Four Rs

I am going to talk about Kirkness and Barnhart's article from 1991 about the four Rs. Now these are two indigenous scholars who wrote this article 28 years ago, and those of us in higher education who work with indigenous students still use this article – it is still relevant – and in some ways, that is an indication of how things have not changed. In their article, the authors begin by asking: Why do universities perpetuate policies that do not work? Why are universities impervious to the existence of institutional discriminatory practices and policies? What are some of the obstacles that our students encounter? I

often wonder about today's continuation of policies that do not work; I mean, since the 1960s and 1970s, we have had financial aid and a relatively open-door policy, and still, indigenous students are lagging behind in attainment. So Kirkness and Barnhart put forward the four Rs as a way to change the discussion about how we think about supporting indigenous students.

The four Rs is also a good way to think about working with other marginalized populations and with adult students. They are: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility. They write about changing our vantage point or perspective as we try to work with marginalized populations. So when an institution thinks about student access and recruitment, it is necessarily about *coming* to the university, as opposed to *going* to the university.

University policies and practices have a long-standing relationship rooted in the broader societal and settler-colonial systems. Thus, when a student comes to the university, the student is expected to adapt to that environment. The student is expected to be socialized in and to that environment. And when the student does not stay at the institution or does not do well, the student is blamed; if the student leaves, it is that student's failure. Kirkness and Barnhart want us to think about how the student experiences going to the university and what we can gain from thinking about that experience. And this means that the university has to change.

Respect

The first "R" is respect. We have experienced great disrespect in higher education. There are many deficit assumptions around our students, and I would also say about adult students more broadly. Whenever you read an article or book about our students, it tends to start with the statistics about how we are not earning degrees; how we are so connected to home that we are not integrating into an institution.

Our students and other marginalized students are often framed as needing fixing or our communities need to be fixed; the term "at risk" is often used with our population. In the literature, we are often referred to as a population by an asterisk, especially with statistical reporting, because of the low numbers compared to other populations. So I actually got into my research because where I used to work, we did the institutional report for the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education

Data System), and there was always an asterisk every year because there were not statistically enough students to report on that data. In this way, we are erased by federal policies of reporting students on campus.

We are also disrespected on our very own land. Not all institutions recognize that they are on Haudenosaunee or other indigenous lands, or how they got on those lands, which is really not very welcoming for us. And we have experienced the residential school or boarding school system, which, from the early decades of the 19th century, was designed to strip us of our traditions, our family systems, and our knowledge systems, in order to get resources and land. Our experiences need to be respected. The boarding school experience is still impacting us today. If I had a horrible experience in school, that is my expert experience of schooling, and that has to be respected. And we need to respect indigenous knowledge systems, which have been in operation for a really long time.

I have a little note here about what Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt and Moll (2017) described as "funds of knowledge." The authors write about Latino populations in the Southwest and how schools tend to frame those families and communities in terms of their "deficits." They went into the schools and into their families and communities, and saw the different ways they expressed knowledge: They have these different funds of knowledge in the family.

In one example, a family kept horses, so the teacher was able to use that experience with the students. She focused on feeding the horses, exercising the horses, keeping the horses healthy, buying horse feed – all as a way to bring that life experience into the classroom, to make it relevant to those students, but also to acknowledge, to respect, that these families did have a lot of knowledge within them.

Relevance

And, just as the example of the horses shows, the focus not only has to be respectful of bodies of knowledge that people have, but also has to be relevant to our perspectives and to our experiences.

We tend to favor the collective or the communal. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy and Emma Maughan (2009) have written an article called "Indigenous Knowledges and the Story of the Bean." It is a really good example of how disconnected classrooms can be, and how, when school experiments are made

relevant to the teachers in the community, it went much better and people were able to use their traditional ways of teaching in the classroom. That is an example of making it relevant to our indigenous knowledge systems. And it has to be relevant to our communities. What do specific communities need? What do the communities want from higher education? We need to ask.

When I was in grade school, we actually had an activity where we learned how to cross the street with traffic lights, but on the reservation, there are no traffic lights. And when I was much smaller, there was even much less traffic. That activity was so disconnected to my experience on the nation. I walked away from that asking: What does school have to offer me?

Responsibility

Responsibility can be expressed through participation with communities within higher education, and with higher education working with communities. We have a lot of lacrosse games and socials and craft fairs in higher education, and faculty and recruitment officers can participate. You are quite welcome to come to a lacrosse game in Onondaga! It is a way to get to know us and a good place to recruit, especially for adult students. In my research, I found that older adult returning students did much better in higher education than some of our students coming right out of high school. So that is a good way to think about recruiting adult students and indigenous students. It is also a way to get to know *us* and how some of your programs might be more relevant to our communities. There is responsibility for access, but it is more than access, right? How and who are our institutions recruiting? What are you going to do with that recruitment? What is our responsibility to that student?

In my research, I found that high school guidance counselors can be real barriers to access and thinking about admission. So you might have to go directly to the communities in different ways to do that. Also, students need assistance in navigation. We use tons of forms and acronyms in higher education, there is a lot of technology, and there is that assumption that we are just going to get into these systems and start navigating. Higher education has a responsibility to learn about and serve *all* students and communities.

My particular area of research is students in postsecondary environments. In order to do that well – to do that research and to support the students in my classroom – I have to know about all students, not just indigenous students.

Think about that when you go on a trip, for example, to the Grand Canyon. In preparation, you would do a little research – you would ask people about restaurants and good hotels. Think about that kind of institutional responsibility when you start recruiting students. And the community needs to take some responsibility, too, by asking: Which institutions will best serve our students' needs or other adult students' needs?

Reciprocity

Relationships are fundamental to the indigenous population. It is a foundational, traditional concept that we are in relationship with all of creation and with each other. In my research, I found that indigenous staff work on those relationships – good relationships – with communities and families in order to serve students. It is a different way of thinking about relationships for indigenous faculty and staff because I can run into students at the grocery store or at a lacrosse game, so I want to maintain good, solid relationships. I am also responsible to my community and I have a responsibility to the academy, so it is a little more complicated for me. And it is always two ways: not only for the institution to offer good ways for the communities to develop relationships with the institutions, but for communities to reach out to institutions to say, for example, that we need information or scholarships or something from the institution. In our indigenous knowledge systems, we have responsibilities to our communities, to our families, and to creation. They have worked for a very long time, and it is that reciprocity – that you do not take too much, that you give thanks – that means that you cannot strip a community of its resources. It is something I think about as "being in balance." And it is also about giving back: Students want to give back to their communities, and they are really not sure sometimes how to do that, but if we have a good relationship built on respect and reciprocity with the institution, we can work on ways to help our students give back to their communities and families.

Negotiation

I would like to add "negotiation" to this conversation of the four Rs because we are very often negotiating reservation territory or traditional community ways when approaching a higher education institution that probably does not represent us. You are not going to hear our languages on campus on a daily basis, or see our artwork or our flags, or see us.

At these institutions, there is a different cadence of speech. Even though I have been in higher education my entire career, a lot of times things pass over me because people speak at a different rate and, as I mentioned before in regard to the acronyms, there is that insider knowledge in higher education that I sometimes miss. So you are quite literally negotiating the language of the environment. And you may be negotiating the culture of an institution on your drive to campus. It is probably a very different negotiation. There are not very many little children or our elders on campus, so that is a negotiation we have to work through.

I earlier mentioned how we are erased by federal reporting policy. And we are often considered an asterisk on campus. Also, about .05% of the total tenured faculty in U.S. institutions are indigenous, so it is hard: We are not very visible in the faculty. And about .08% of the staff people identified as indigenous. So we are really not visible on campus. And the residential schools may contribute to that invisibility; you do not read about us in your history classes, and it is very often only in an optional course that one might learn about Haudenosaunee or indigenous history, or about the Sixties Scoop, which I have learned quite a bit about while I have been here in Toronto, where indigenous children were taken from families in the 1960s and placed in non-indigenous families. Some of those records were destroyed, so these women and men cannot even find out where they came from. They were placed in homes not only in Canada but, I have learned, in the U.S. and in Mexico. So literally, there is a history of policies to make us invisible.

We have to negotiate their cultural context. We come from more collective, matrilineal communities with shared governance and ceremonial cycles. These do not match the dominant calendar that you would see on a college campus. We all could offer the major Christian holidays, but that does not match our ceremonial cycle. Also, our leadership sits for that and decides when it is going to happen, so I cannot give you a calendar that points out when that is going to happen.

In general, we have to negotiate educational systems that perpetuate colonial powers, including a culture of competitiveness that we see on campus and in the classroom and that we do not know in our communities. There are many of our students and faculty and staff who report microaggressions and blatant racism in the classroom.

I earlier described that you do not see our culture represented on campuses. For example, here at the University of Toronto, the stone is brought in from, I think, New Jersey, and it is built based on the Oxford UK model; so it is really a settler-colonial space that we are negotiating on a daily basis. In my research, K-12 teachers and guidance counselors served as barriers to our students. They were not sharing with them information they might need to think about continuing their education. Our students had few role models in the community, but the ones that they had were extremely important, and they developed relationships with those people with college degrees and also established relationships with younger students.

The microaggressions and the racisms in the classroom and in the residence halls really dampen student enthusiasm for continuing in higher education. The centrality of family and community really helps students complete their degrees. I am in the field of student affairs and we work very hard to help students feel community on campus, and to be on campus. Research shows that if you are on campus more and you are in the residence hall, you have a greater chance of succeeding to attain your degree. However, I have found that since family and community are more supportive of indigenous students, it is really important for them to go home often and maintain that connection. If they want to practice their ceremony, they have to do it at home. So they are able to maintain their cultural integrity by maintaining those relationships, which can run into conflict with some of the policies on campus.

All adult learners have families and communities to which they are connected. When I went back for my doctorate, my kids were in softball and I had all of those things for which I had to be home, so we need to acknowledge that students have other lives. And, as I learned from my research, it is really important for the people to give back to their communities. And as I mentioned before, sometimes they did not really understand nor have a plan for how that would work out, but it was really part of how and why they went back to school. And in my research, I noticed a lot of stopping out or transferring from one institution to another, and that was a way for students to find a place where they felt welcome, where they could succeed and still maintain their connections to home. That was a crucial part of their negotiating their lives as students.

Holistic Indigenous Framework: Michelle Pidgeon

So that was a lot to get to Michelle Pigeon's (2016) Holistic Indigenous Framework. She used the four Rs that surround the individual in the center, with the family of that individual around the individual, and then these other influences that we all have to negotiate: your individual nation, your community, federal and provincial, or state policies.

And then around the outside, there is relationship, relevance, responsibility and respect. Now, she added the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual influences on individual needs in this interconnected and complex framework, because if somebody is well physically and emotionally, they feel better and do much better in their relationships and their responsibilities in higher education. And this works for *all* students, right? We need to think about keeping the connections, not just thinking about our students as minds at an institution, but also physically, emotionally, with families, and with all of these other influences on their lives. It is a great way to think about how we can support indigenous students and adult students.

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Stephanie J. Waterman, Ph.D., Onondaga, Turtle Clan, is associate professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, and coordinates the student development/student services in higher education stream. She is an ACPA: College Student Educators International Senior Scholar, and a co-editor of *Beyond the Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education* (Stylus, 2013) and *Beyond Access: Indigenizing Programs for Native American Student Success* (Stylus, 2018).

Linking Our Arms Together, Haudenosaunee/SUNY: Reflections on a Very Long Relationship

Jeffrey Lambe

The Haudenosaunee, "people of the longhouse," are among the "first peoples" of New York state, southern Ontario and Southern Quebec. Commonly referred to as the Iroquois Confederacy, they comprise the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora nations. It was apropos, for many reasons, that Onondaga scholar Dr. Stephanie Waterman was invited to be a part of SUNY Empire State College's webinar series. She is an alumna of Empire State College and among the most knowledgeable and certainly the most published author of research related to many facets of Haudenosaunee experiences in higher education. Dr. Waterman is Onondaga. The Onondaga are the "central fire" of the confederacy and with this, have specific obligations and responsibilities in terms of the political structure, function and other aspects of the confederacy dating back to its founding. What Dr. Waterman shared with us was an informed and grounded introduction not only to some of the issues that indigenous peoples face in academia but also to the very long history and relationship that the Haudenosaunee have with the state of New York. She provided a window of insight and perspective, one that we can frame and view, and through which we can envision opportunities. I was reminded that this is a very old relationship – one that can move forward in constructive and positive ways through education.

Respect and reciprocity (two of Kirkness and Barnhart's [1991] four Rs that framed Dr. Waterman's discussion) are a foundation. Our discussion opened with her reminding us that most of the land on which the State University of New York (SUNY) resides is Haudenosaunee territory. She also gave thanks to the natural processes that support life. Dr. Waterman then asked me to offer a few words. I began with an Onondaga greeting, *Niawen ne Skanon*, "I am thankful that you are in good health, are at peace (mind, body and spirit)," followed by some reminders about our shared history. This format of discourse, each side greeting the other with an opening salutation prior to discussing the "matters at hand," characterizes indigenous council protocol in the Northeast prior to the arrival of the Europeans. It is designed, in part, to remind those

in attendance that we are equal and related, and have come together with a shared purpose. The Europeans, and later the Americans, were adopted into and were obligated to engage in this structure of discourse. This is evident through hundreds of years of treaty records with the French, Dutch, English and Americans (I have reviewed examples that span 472 years).

Traditionally, a council fire was kindled and wampum strings or belts were exchanged across the fire, one for each point that the speaker who opens the discussion presented (there were and remain protocols for those who speak first). Both sides listened without interruption. Once the initial group spoke (there was and remain protocol to determine who speaks first), the other reiterated and often expand upon, and only upon, each point that was spoken from those who opened the discussion. They also presented wampum belts or strings in a reciprocal gesture as a sign that they heard and considered each point. Metaphors of kinship are replete in the treaty record and oral tradition and remain to this day. Often there were reminders that although they were different people, they were related and obligated to work together for their mutual benefit, for their children and for future generations.

This is perhaps the oldest form of discourse and protocol that seeks to address and incorporate diversity in this part of the world.

We can see many similarities with Kirkness and Barnhart's four Rs and the added term "negotiation" that Dr. Stephanie Waterman introduces to us. The Mohawk word *kashastensera* offers a kind of summation: When differences are respected and brought together, "strength or power" results. The Silver Covenant Chain and Two-Row wampum represent the oldest agreements between the Haudenosaunee and newcomers. They exemplify the continence of these and other principles that frame a very long relationship. For the Haudenosaunee, these connections have not been forgotten. To this day, they are evoked and are often used to challenge those on the other side of the "fire" to remember, particularly when speaking with New York state and federal representatives. Of course, those of us who work at SUNY are not official New York state or federal representatives by any means. No fire was kindled nor were wampum strings or belts exchanged during our webinar. However, because Dr. Waterman is from the Onondaga nation and brings extensive knowledge and experience with her, it was important that we opened with a semblance of traditional protocol – a respectful and reciprocal greeting – before we formally began our discussion.

Even those with a cursory understanding of indigenous/United States history may have an intuitive feeling that the historical record does not present a flattering picture of Americans. Policies of forced assimilation and ethnic cleansing irrevocably altered family systems while eroding culture, language and territory. This, combined with the boarding school period (that began in 1860) often fuels deep mistrust when it comes to institutions of higher education. The results of forgetting or intentionally disregarding the principles I have described (or those that even remotely resemble Kirkness and Barnhart's four Rs) remain even today. Dr. Waterman details a number of contemporary realities and education and community challenges that continue to plague indigenous peoples. However, in the past, and today, the two sides have worked together with mutual respect and a sense of purpose. While reading the treaty record, I can remember many times I encountered petitions from both sides of the "fire" to "Link our Arms Together" as a show of equality, unity, strength and shared purpose. There are also many contemporary examples.

The State University of New York in general, and SUNY Empire State College in particular, are in a very good position to further a relationship with the Haudenosaunee and other native peoples throughout the state while exploring this historic and contemporary relationship as we move forward. Most Haudenosaunee who live in New York state reside on one of six reservations, one settlement, and two territories, whose proximities lie very close to Empire State College and other SUNY locations. Dr. Waterman found two significant factors (among others) that affect Haudenosaunee success in higher education: family support/connection to home; and the importance of cultural, linguistic and community relevance (Waterman, 2007). Because Empire State College and other SUNY campuses have locations within commuting distance to every Haudenosaunee reservation, settlement and territory, family support and connection can be retained. Cultural, linguistic and community relevance can be enhanced through the creation of independent studies and the use of prior learning assessment. Through the independent study model, Empire State College's ability to offer credit-bearing studies and experiences that are culturally relevant is unrivaled in the SUNY system. Further, Native American students who completed some form of prior learning assessment are 19% more likely to graduate (Valenzuela, MacIntyre, Klein-Collins, & Clerx, 2016). Elders, knowledge holders and others in the communities with expertise can be hired to assess cultural and linguistic knowledge. It is most likely that this

CAEL study reflected more common forms of prior learning than Empire's unique non-course matching pedagogy, which can be significant in terms of attention to cultural, experiential and cultural relevance.

What Dr. Stephanie Waterman offered us was perhaps a beginning, a way for us to think about the many and often complex challenges that face indigenous students in higher education. I have spent many years listening to elders, clan mothers and knowledge holders from all six nations of the Haudenosaunee. I am familiar with the history and the nature of the sacred relationships described here. Because of our shared history, combined with the fact that most of the State University of New York resides in Haudenosaunee territory, SUNY has an obligation and responsibility to reach out and explore a working relationship with Haudenosaunee students and communities in a respectful, informed and principled way. Although there have been various initiatives from different campuses and communities across SUNY, there has not been, to my knowledge, a coherent, strategic outreach grounded in: a sound understanding of the historic relationship with the state; an understanding of the educational needs of Haudenosaunee students and communities; and a review of the literature, particularly writings of Dr. Stephanie Waterman, which describe the many and in some cases complex and specific challenges that Haudenosaunee students face as they engage institutions of higher education.

How do we understand the educational needs of the Haudenosaunee? We educate ourselves, and simply ask. There is, and remains, a very old and incredibly rich relationship that carries vast potential for mutual benefit through respectful dialogue, working together, exploring, learning and moving forward, through education.

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Jeffrey Lambe is an associate professor at SUNY Empire State College. With a degree in indigenous studies from Trent University, Lambe has worked with community initiatives among the Haudenosaunee for over 30 years. Currently, Lambe serves on the academic co-op of the *Skä•noñh* – Great Law of Peace Center, a Haudenosaunee heritage center located near the Onondaga nation.

Anthurium

The Crossroads of Change: Why Adult Learners Are So Important to the Future of Higher Education (and Vice Versa)

David Scobey

Key Themes and Ideas

I want to give thanks to my colleagues at SUNY Empire State College for inviting me to be a part of this project. I am going to make an argument that brings together two different stories. The first is an overview of the emergence of adult nontraditional students as the new majority of American college students. For some readers, the data I will offer may be old news, but I have found that even educators who work every day with adult students do not necessarily have a sense of the larger demographic reality.

Secondly, speaking as a historian, I want to describe the historical context behind the rise of this new majority. I want to link the growth in adult learners to larger changes in higher education over the past 30 years. This has been a period of both turmoil and creativity, one that has made large changes in higher education inevitable. Yet the specific kind of change is still up for grabs; there are both positive and negative ways forward. We are at a crossroads where higher educators and our students need to decide together what kind of change and what kind of innovation we want.

I am going to argue that adult learners have a crucial role in both this recent history and the crossroads of change in which we find ourselves. The rise of the new adult majority is one of the key results of the era of turmoil we have lived through. And at the same time, it offers an important opportunity for positive innovation.

The New Majority: Factors and Numbers

So, first of all, a little bit of "Adult Learner 101."

In contrast to the common understanding of the public and even most academics, adult, nontraditional students have constituted the large majority of American undergraduates for at least the past 20 years. If you ask what proportion of college-goers are just out of high school, attending full time in a two- or four-year institution, and financially dependent on their parental household – that is, their parents had to sign the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form – the answer is surprising: only one out of four.1 And that is just the same proportion of the number of undergraduates who are parents. We know that about 35% of college students work full time and that almost half attend school part time. In other words, our conventional picture of the normative undergraduate is true for only a minority of college-goers.

I want to be clear about how we ought to define and measure "nontraditional-ness" among college students. Much of the current public policy conversation simply – and inaccurately – equates "nontraditional students" with "older students" – typically those who are age 25 or older. Yet the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) does not even use age as a factor in deciding if a student is traditional or nontraditional. It turns out that there are as many nontraditional students – that is, students who do not fit into the portrait I was describing earlier – *under* the age of 25 as there are over it. The 22-year-old barista is just as much of an adult nontraditional student as a 35-year-old Iraq War veteran. Instead of treating age as a proxy, this federal agency uses seven different criteria for deciding if students are nontraditional:

1. "Being independent for financial aid purposes.
2. Having one or more dependents.
3. Being a single caregiver.
4. Not having a traditional high school diploma.
5. Delaying postsecondary enrollment.
6. Attending school part time.
7. Being employed full time" (Notes section, para. 1).

This understanding of nontraditional college students is nuanced and complex. Yet I would argue that one key question underlies its multiple factors: Can a student organize her life, including even her work-life, around a central role as a full-time student? For the majority of undergraduates, the answer is no.

The New Majority: How They Differ; What They Share

This new majority is incredibly diverse in age and role. It includes veterans and formerly incarcerated citizens and full-time parents, 20-something construction workers and 30-something office workers. Across these categories, students of color tend to be more highly represented than white students, but there are significant numbers of nontraditional students across all ethno-racial and gender categories. Yet even though they are very diverse and very different, I want to stress three commonalties that these students share.

The first is the social complexity of these students' lives in terms of the roles and stressors that they have to balance: parenting, work, often community responsibilities, along with going to school. One result is, of course, enormous time pressure. As a student in a research focus group put it:

> I go to work at 5 o'clock. I work through lunch … [I] come down here [to campus] several nights a week, but I do try to take some online courses so that I can stay home once in a while, but [some nights] from 4 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night I'm not home. (Rowan-Kenyon, Swan, Deutsch, & Gansneder, 2010, p. 106)

The second commonality is the emotional complexity of being a nontraditional student. Literally, every student I have ever taught, interviewed, or spoken with expresses some kind of shame or embarrassment, the sense of being set back or emotionally burdened by not having followed the normative script of high school-to-college. And conversely they often stress the emotional power of returning to school and advancing toward their degree. An adult undergraduate from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, whom I interviewed, underscored both sides of this emotional drama:

> I always felt less-than. I feel like an imposter. Coming here has helped me find my voice. It helps me move through the world. And it's important that I can share this program with others like me. (Scobey, 2016, p. 110)

Both the emotional burdens of being nontraditional and the emotional power of succeeding in the face of those burdens are powerful factors in understanding the lives and the goals of nontraditional students.

The final commonality is the frustration of confronting an academy largely – not always, but largely – designed for someone else: for traditional students, and thus, the frustration of having to swim upstream, so to speak, to get your education. As educators who work in adult-serving programs or with adult

students know, these barriers span everything from inconvenient office hours and availability of student services, to the schedule of classes, to the ways that even committed teachers often misunderstand the lives of the nontraditional students.

All of these commonalities – the social complexity of new-majority lives, the emotional complexities that result, an academy too often clueless about these students – lead to very high levels of stopping-out. Traditional college-goers graduate at two to three times the rate of those with multiple nontraditional factors. And the more of those factors a student has, the less likely, statistically, she or he will complete on time. As a result, there are some 35 to 40 million Americans – one in five working adults – with some college and no degree, most of them carrying loan debt without the benefits of having graduated.

The New Majority: Conceptions and Misconceptions

For many years and in many institutions, this new majority was largely ignored and invisible. There were important exceptions, such as SUNY Empire State College, which has been a wonderfully adult-serving institution since the 1970s. But for the most part, adult students have until very recently been marginalized in the mainstream academy.

Happily, higher education is beginning to pay attention to new-majority students. But now they often suffer from a second form of invisibility, one that is equally important to the story I want to tell about the crossroads of change. For even as the new majority is gaining more and more scrutiny from policymakers and educational leaders, they too often assume that adult learners have straightforwardly instrumental goals: to get a credential to improve their job prospects, to get a promotion or to get a new job. As one national report put it:

> Adult learners … use a simple calculus. They ask: How can I maximize the economic value of my time in school while minimizing the amount of time I have to spend in classes? They are looking for flexibility, convenience, and accelerated progress to skills and credentials that pay off, as well as better odds for completion. (Kazis et al., 2007, p. 15)

Such a viewpoint presents adult learners as little more than job, time and credential calculators. Yet if you ask adults themselves, you get a sense of their complex needs and mixed motives. These, of course, include job and economic

goals and pressures, but such factors are often inseparable from family goals, emotional needs, community service and intellectual exploration. This interview with an adult student at The Evergreen State College captured such complexity well:

> *I came back to college because I felt like an angry underling. I had a good job, but didn't get respect at work. I felt slapped, like I didn't amount to anything without that piece of paper. So I returned to school because of my career goals. But my parents are gone, and I also came back for them.* (Scobey, 2016, pp. 109-110)

In my experience as a teacher and researcher, such comments are characteristic: for adult learners, issues of work and children and parents and self-identity blend seamlessly together.

My final point is connected to this understanding of the scale and complexity of new-majority aspirations. The assumption that adult learners are simply economic calculators is often linked with the assumption that all they typically seek is short-term job training. That is certainly true for many returning adults. But we know that four out of five incoming community college students aspire to the bachelor's degree and beyond. Indeed, if you ask that same question of incoming community college students who are over the age of 35, 60% of them say they want to earn their bachelor's or beyond. What they seek is generally more than accelerated training, and they generally link their economic goals to larger personal, family and social aspirations.

Contexts (I): Democratization and Crisis

So that is the end of "Adult Learner 101." Now I want to step back and focus on the history of these past 30 years in higher education, about the context in which this new nontraditional majority grew. The growth of adult learners is the result of a complex of different forces during that period.

First, there was a huge expansion of college-going, beginning with the GI Bill of Rights after World War II, the postwar expansion of public university and community college systems, and the embattled victories of affirmative action. This expansion was intensified by the relative decline of high-paying industrial, often unionized work, and also by the entry of women into college and the labor force in greater numbers.

At the same time that these forces increased college-going, the Reagan Revolution in the 1980s brought a stagnation of public investment in higher education. The story is different in different states and at different times; but in general, per-student funding of higher education declined, and that decline outsourced the payment for this expansion of higher education onto student debt and rising tuition.

And that has meant that the last three decades have been a time of fiscal crisis. We all know the news of fiscal stress, of burdensome student debt levels, and of growth in student wage work. All of us who are in higher education know that adjunctification of the teaching faculty has been an important effect of such budgetary stress. Especially in the regional public university and from the community colleges, where the vast majority of those working-class and nontraditional students go, the past 30 years have brought endemic fiscal stress.

I want to tie these fiscal pressures to two other crises. One is what I would call the decomposition of learning communities. Part-time faculty now offer on average more than half of the credits that students take when they graduate. More than two out of five undergraduates are enrolled part time. And most students earn credits from more than one institution on their way to their degree. These patterns of credit shopping and what is called "swirling" in attendance make it harder to build the kind of ongoing, sustained learning communities that are important for the success and learning of all students. They are especially corrosive for underserved students for whom college may seem an unwelcome environment. The result has been the languishing completion rates I have already discussed.

And all these stressors and disruptions feed the last crisis that I want to discuss: the legitimation crisis in higher education, the sense that we are not delivering on the promise that we owe the larger society for the resources and the autonomy we receive. Over the last 30 years, this crisis of legitimacy has taken many forms: battles over culture wars, over political correctness, over multiculturalism, and more recently over the "value proposition" of college-going itself.

Contexts (II): Not Just Crisis but Creativity: "High-Impact Practices"

But alongside the turmoil and crisis, the declining indicators and sense of broken promises, these past 30 years have also brought remarkable (and unremarked) creativity in higher education. We have seen the emergence of many new interdisciplinary fields, including ethnic studies, gender studies, neuropsychology, and community health. Equally importantly has been the growth of what George Kuh (2008) has called "High-Impact Practices" (HIPs). Kuh, through the National Survey of Student Engagement, came to the conclusion after interviewing hundreds of thousands of students that there was a cluster of practices that students reported as especially consequential to them. These include first-year seminars, learning communities, undergraduate research programs, study abroad, civic engagement and service learning experiences, internships, and capstone projects, among others.

HIPs are often presented, as I have just done, as a laundry list of good stuff that works. But I would argue that they constitute a more unified set of innovations, an emergent model of the undergraduate experience, an alternative to the old paradigm of "gen ed-to-major." In this model, we glimpse a different logic of the undergraduate experience. HIPs work across and against the disciplines. They tend to combine liberal, experiential and sometimes pre-professional learning. Some of the practices foreground collaboration, and others, self-authoring and individual self-transformation. Most break out of the spatial logic of the classroom and even the campus, and break out of the temporal logic of the credit hour and the semester. They are pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that suggests a holistic, integrative, engaged model of learning, a design for educating the whole student.

It is striking that nearly all of these innovative practices were developed and disseminated in the 1980s and '90s – precisely the same period as the crises I sketched earlier. They emerged from the fissures and fractures of change, driven by networks of faculty, staff and often students who were living through the tumultuous breakdown of the older undergraduate paradigm. Creativity emerged from crisis.

Contexts (III): A Second Wave of Change

But innovation did not stop with these new fields and new high-impact practices. Over the past 10 years, there has been yet another wave of change-making. This second wave is again a response to the crises, the turmoil, the stressors that I have been describing. But it reflects different priorities and values; its innovations are more institutional and technological than pedagogical and curricular. And it has been driven more by external stakeholders – policymakers, funders and entrepreneurs – than by the faculty and staff activists who led the movements for high-impact learning. I want to stress three interventions of this second wave of change.

The first is, of course, the digital turn. Here, for instance, is Tom Friedman's (2013) premature celebration of the way that MOOCs (massive open online courses) were going to revolutionize universities, but we can take it as standing for the larger growth of online courses and online degrees.

> I can see a day soon where you'll create your own college degree by taking the best online courses from the best professors from around the world … paying only the nominal fee for the certificates of completion. It will change teaching, learning and the pathway to employment. (para. 10)

Friedman and his fellow technophiles were onto something important. Currently, about one-third of undergraduates take at least one online course, and about one out of seven undergraduates study fully online. This is not a revolution, but it is a truly important innovation. And beyond online courses, there are a host of other digital capacities that I think higher education has only begun to explore: the capacity to incorporate multimedia work, for instance, or the capacity to use online, digital platforms for new forms of collaborative learning.

Another of these important, "second-wave" interventions is the completion agenda – the widespread view that languishing graduation rates and burgeoning stop-out rates require a concerted effort to boost academic completion. Here is the Lumina Foundation (2019):

> The nation faces an urgent and growing need for talent. To meet that need, many more people must earn college degrees, workforce certificates, industry certifications and other high-quality credentials. That's why Lumina Foundation works to ensure that, by 2025, 60 percent of Americans hold a

credential beyond high school – a quality credential that prepares people for informed citizenship and economic success. (Tracking America's Progress section, para. 1)

Lumina has in fact been the most important driver of this effort. Its "Goal 2025" – having 60% of Americans hold postsecondary credentials by 2025 – focuses especially on the imperative to supply the American economy with the kind of skilled and talented workforce it is thought to require.

That focus of what I would call "instrumental vocationalism" – the overriding need to align higher education with training for the labor market – is the third of these key "second-wave" changes. Here, for instance, is Florida's former Governor (and current U.S. Senator) Rick Scott:

You know, we don't need a lot more anthropologists in the state. It's a great degree if people want to get it, but we don't need them here. I want to spend our dollars giving people science, technology, engineering, math degrees. That's what our kids need to focus all their time and attention on. Those type of degrees. So when they get out of school, they can get a job. (as cited in Weinstein, 2011, para. 2)

As I have noted, students worry about jobs, and the mission of education for work has always been central to undergraduate learning in the U.S. But the last 10 years have seen a particularly instrumental version of concern: education for the job has tended to crowd out all other educational purposes, and education for the job is increasingly defined as short-term workforce training rather than preparation and discernment of meaningful work. This has meant a rewriting of the social compact for colleges.

What Kind of Innovation Do We Want?

In contrast to the high-impact practices, these more recent interventions – the completion agenda, the rise of digital learning, and the dominance of vocationalism – seem to me more contradictory and equivocal in their consequences for higher education. The completion agenda, for instance, has brought a much-needed focus not simply on access for underserved students, but on their academic success. Yet it has also intensified a kind of credentialism, as if a certain level of degrees and credentials were the goal, rather than the benchmark of educational excellence.

The case is similar with digital learning. It offers enormous opportunities for overcoming distance and reducing the time-pressures in students' lives. It can undo many of the hierarchies of gender, race, disability and temperament that can be present in face-to-face classrooms. Yet it also risks intensifying the isolationism of college learning, and it often reintroduces the sort of skill-transfer and knowledge-handout teaching that earlier innovations – the high-impact practices – did so much to transcend.

And finally with a turn to vocationalism. This has brought a truly important and useful call to the liberal arts academy to integrate work into our educational purposes. And yet it too often falls into a short-term and instrumental vision of workforce training. Again, there are equivocal consequences.

The lesson of the past 30 years – an era of multiple crises and multiple waves of innovation – is that higher education is on the cusp of dramatic change. There is no option of digging in, defending the past, keeping things as they were. It is not a choice between staying put and changing. It is a choice between different kinds of futures; between different ways of taking up these forces of innovation, each with its positive and negative implications. We are at a crossroads of change.

And adult learners are right at that crossroads.

Adult Learners at the Crossroads of Change

The very fact that we have a new majority of nontraditional adults is a result of the historical forces I have sketched here: the simultaneous expansion and disruption of college-going, the growing need for and barriers to a college education. And the "second-wave" interventions I have described are focused to a great extent on adult learners. Adults are seen as key to the completion agenda. Online learning is seen as especially benefiting the complexity of adult lives, and adults are often the primary target for online marketing by for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. Adults are seen as exemplifying why short-term, instrumental vocationalism is needed.

You will not be surprised to hear that these appeals to adult learners, this push to drive them toward short-term, accelerated, online job training, represents the most thinned-out version of educational innovation – and an inaccurate understanding of adult learners. It forgets precisely that rich complexity of needs and goals of what I have described to you.

New-majority students *do* need degrees and job advancement. They *do* benefit from digital learning. But unless these are coupled with attention to the whole adult student, to what I would call the "vision of the high-impact practices," these change strategies work to instrumentalize nontraditional students and to reinforce the least positive versions of innovations.

I would argue that adults need education that addresses all of their needs; that brings together liberal learning, vocational learning and experiential learning; that helps them break out of the limits of the campus and the weekly class, which often do not fit their own lives. They need opportunities for collaboration, peer learning and individual self-authoring. They need learning communities that include supportive teachers, mentors and peers, and such communities tend to happen more in face-to-face or hybrid programs.

The exemplary programs that I know of offer that kind of high-impact education for the whole adult student. And not surprisingly, such programs nearly always produce higher completion rates than mass online alternatives. There are many examples, but I would point you to a group of adult serving college programs called the Great Colleges for the New Majority. You can go to our website and read our manifesto (https://www.collegeunbound.org/apps/pages/greatcolleges). It is a group of about a dozen programs that for me represents a beachhead for the sort of learning that meets adults in their lives and offers them the kind of rich, engaged learning that is good for them. In the process, I believe that it points the way forward at this crossroads of change toward the best kind of innovative future.

Note

[1] For more information on the various statistics provided throughout this paper, please see Scobey (2016).

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David Scobey is director of Bringing Theory to Practice, a national project that advances holistic, transformative education for all college students through innovative practices and institutional change. He previously served as senior scholar at The Graduate! Network (2016-2018), a national organization fostering college success for adult students; as dean of The Schools of Public Engagement at The New School, New York (2010-2014); and as director of the Harward Center for Community Partnerships at Bates College, Maine (2005-2010). From 1989 to 2005, he was a faculty member in history, American culture, and architecture at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape* (Temple University Press, 2003) and other writings on American history and higher education.

Learning From Our Students

Rhianna C. Rogers

Introduction

For the past several decades, scholars and university administrators have contemplated how to make higher education accessible to and inclusive of more diverse students. In recent years, this push has taken on new urgency, as American colleges and universities are experiencing a dramatic shift in learner demographics (i.e., the rise of adult, so-called "nontraditional" students). David Scobey's essay suggests this emerging student population requires that academics reconsider how they envision the needs of 21st century learners. As Scobey states:

> This new majority is incredibly diverse in age and role. It includes veterans and formerly incarcerated citizens and full-time parents, 20-something construction workers and 30-something office workers. Across these categories, students of color tend to be more highly represented than white students, but there are significant numbers of nontraditional students across all ethno-racial and gender categories.

Because higher education's historical focus is on pedagogies that serve traditional students, nontraditional students encounter many barriers (e.g., limitations on course modalities and class scheduling, increased family obligations and work responsibilities, lack of programmatic supports for working adults and parents, rising costs of courses and textbooks, decreased access to diverse funding opportunities, as well as other socioeconomic and sociocultural limitations). These barriers have made obtaining a degree for this population ever more difficult.

What can we do to support this "new majority"? Understanding how nontraditional students engage in the learning process is a critical component of their recruitment and retention in today's higher education landscape. Scobey's premise, that we need an increased focus on adult learners in 21st century higher education, challenges colleges and universities to re-envision the tools and resources used to support the success of this population. This commentary builds on this premise and offers a SUNY Empire State College case study, "The Buffalo Project," to address this call to action.

What Does it Mean to be an Adult Learner?
A Case Study From The Buffalo Project

"Adult learner" can be defined as anyone who is not a traditional college-level student (e.g., not entering college after high school, over the age of 23, and/or having additional work-life responsibilities). Scobey suggests that increased internal (e.g., familial, cultural, regional) and external (e.g., financial, professional) pressures drive adult learners' successes and failures.[1] As Scobey states:

> [This new majority of] adults need education that addresses all of their needs; that brings together liberal learning, vocational learning and experiential learning; that helps them break out of the limits of the campus and the weekly class, which often do not fit their own lives.

Even as more colleges and universities recognize adult students' different needs as a component of their success and retention on campus, many of them lack effective strategies to ensure this population's needs are truly met (Richardson & King, 1998; Ke, 2010). Lack of supports for diverse learning approaches and a failure to incorporate alternatives (e.g., credit by evaluation and micro-credentialing) has led to the unintentional (and intentional) exclusion of adult students from many educational opportunities.

Challenging, then changing, fundamental assumptions of learner needs cannot be done without the development and inclusion of diverse perspectives (Banks, 2015). Vincent Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) seminal research on student retention suggested that without social and cultural integration of diverse perspectives, students will not be retained. Therefore, a testable foundation for analyzing cultural factors is essential. One successful example of Tinto's framework is "The Buffalo Project," a longitudinal study of Western New York (WNY) student culture on SUNY (State University of New York) campuses (AY 2010-present). Created as a study within SUNY Empire State College, this project has been successfully retaining WNY students since its inception. It is worth noting that SUNY Empire began serving adult students long before they became Scobey's "new majority"; since 1971, it has been at the forefront of adult learning strategies through its offering of academic innovations and unique credentialing (e.g., credit by evaluation, experiential and applied learning, and vocational training). Within "The Buffalo Project," Tinto's vision of adult learner inclusivity is embraced by gathering and analyzing diverse

voices as a baseline for academic programming and inclusive initiatives within the community.[2] The Buffalo Project data indicates that adult students are confronted regularly with time constraints, funding/financial barriers, work-life balance issues, family commitments and readjusting to a learner/student mindset (Rogers et al., 2018). Since the vast majority of SUNY Empire students are adult learners,[3] understanding these constraints and developing programs supporting these needs is key to retaining this population on campus. As one of The Buffalo Project respondents stated:

> *It is important for everyone in higher education to realize the magnitude of issues [facing students today], which are represented at campuses across the country ... and not be afraid to speak out and address them. Never be afraid to have and use your voice for the betterment of those around you.* (The Buffalo Project 2.0 Student Survey, SurveyMonkey, 2018)

Voices of adult learners express their need for flexibility, their focus on the monetary value of learning, their time constraints and their need for a supportive learning community built into the learning process as keys to success (Stevens, 2018). As Scobey indicates, adult students want an approach to learning that takes into account their personal and professional aspirations and that values their lifelong learning.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Considering changing demographics that make adult learners the "new majority" in the U.S., higher education needs to reconsider some of the ways we think and talk about this population. When our students' needs go unheard, individual interpretations can (and do) create misunderstandings (e.g., unquestioned academic cultural assumptions, prejudices, discrimination and biases). Ultimately, these factors limit equitable access to education and learning, and negatively affect the learning process (Bernstein & Salipante, 2017; Liu, Frankel, & Roohr, 2014). Conversely, a collective power emerges when multicultural voices are heard, like those of adult learners.

In short, we need to do a better job of asking adult students what *they* need versus what *we* think they need. Academics need to reconsider how we think and talk about people in order to develop a safe climate for all of our students, staff, faculty and administrators. Discomfort for some may lead to acceptance and cross-cultural understanding for others. As illustrated in The Buffalo

Project data set, creating healthy spaces for dialogue with individuals or groups within the adult learning community can alleviate feelings of isolation, marginalization and exclusion. As President of Northwestern University Morton Schapiro (2009) stated: "All of us deserve to be at an institution that's sensitive to our needs and to our aspirations" (para. 11). Though written a decade ago, the cultural insensitivities and lack of attention to student "needs and aspirations" Schapiro raised persist in academia. Implementing Scobey's vision of a 21st century learning environment can mitigate these issues. Adult learners can inform us of their needs, and we can use that information to shape academic programming that offers supportive learning opportunities and an empowering atmosphere that continues to include their voices.

It is the responsibility of institutions of higher education to prepare its students to be successful graduates and culturally competent members of the 21st century globalized community and workforce. As in "The Buffalo Project," the development of more data-driven, participatory action research projects across U.S. campuses can offer one way to re-envision appropriate responses to the "new majority." By doing so, institutions can raise the educational attainment of diverse student populations and increase institutional retention rates of adult learners, ultimately empowering individuals to impact their own communities.

Notes

[1] This paper defines adult learning culture as processes that improve standards of practice, bridge the perceived theory-practice gap, and create means of integrating learning with practices. Through continued trainings, elements of identity stemming from a person's race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, religion, gender/sexual orientation, mental/physical disabilities, age, among others can be incorporated into the learning process (Ward & McCormack, 2000).

[2] As stated in the 2015 U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) report titled *Better Choice for Buffalo Students: Expanding and Reforming the Criteria School Systems:*

> Buffalo has struggled with high levels of segregation for at least three quarters of a century. … In 1976 … the city was found guilty of intentional public actions fostering residential separation. [Despite this court decision, from 1993-2010] … Buffalo was still listed as one of the nation's most hyper-segregated residential metropolitan areas … which is

why the city and school district were [sued again in 1995 and 2015 and,] under court orders [required] to support … diversity. … (Orfield et al., 2015, p. 2)

As would be expected, the results of systemic racism within Buffalo schools left many marginalized, socioeconomically disadvantaged students without access to quality education (Orfield & Ayscue, 2018; Orfield et al., 2015). Recognizing the challenges and discontent that stems from the inequality of services and opportunities, Mayor Byron Brown and the City of Buffalo recommended in 2016 that institutions of learning adopt "cross-cultural awareness" activities and curriculums that celebrate Buffalo's diverse populace (Rogers et al., 2018). Through collaborative efforts, such as The Buffalo Project, Mayor Brown believed that educational institutions can (and should) help establish an environment of inclusion and equity in WNY.

[3]   In the 2018 Buffalo Project 2.0 survey, 77.52% of SUNY Empire student respondents (100:129) identified as 30 years of age or older (Buffalo Project 2.0 Student Survey, Survey Monkey, 2018).

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Rhianna C. Rogers, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at SUNY Empire State College. She holds multiple appointments, including undergraduate roles in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the School of Arts and Humanities, the School for Graduate Studies, and the Center for International Education. Rogers is currently the Rockefeller Institute of Government-Ernest Boyer Presidential Fellow in the Center for Law and Policy Solutions. Rogers has won multiple awards for her innovative approach to teaching and learning, including the 2018-2019 Explorations in Diversity and Academic Excellence Award (EDAE), and the 2017-2018 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Sunflower-1

Adult Educators Must Be Learners, Too

Geleana Alston

I was very flattered when I was invited to be a part of this webinar series. I really have followed a practice of always remembering that I, as an adult educator, am an adult learner first, and so it is my hope that you will also be able to see the significance and understand why it is so important to see yourself as both an adult learner and as an adult educator.

Key Topics for Engagement

Any good adult educator provides the audience with information or a guide, or what I call a "plan for facilitation," and so I want to begin by thinking about what it means for adult educators to really see themselves as adult learners. Then, I want to discuss the six assumptions of the adult learner according to Malcolm Knowles (1980; 1984), and to describe how these assumptions have helped me come to recognize the parallels I see between myself and my adult learners. I want to show how that recognition has contributed to my professional development as a tenure-track faculty member at a research-intensive, STEM-focused institution. I will conclude by offering some effective strategies for you and for your colleagues once you recognize yourself as an adult learner – some of the things that you can do to enhance your work as an adult educator.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Do I See an Adult Learner?

I have been very appreciative that I have been able to professionally develop in my position at a relatively quick pace. What I mean by that is that I earned tenure and was promoted to the rank of associate professor after just three years of my time at North Carolina A&T State University. I also did this while serving as the Adult Education program coordinator, advising students, participating on committees and contributing in other capacities. Oftentimes when people learned about my background or they saw my resume, they would ask: How in the world did you do all this so quickly?

For a while, I did not know how to respond – I really did not. I could not exactly pinpoint what I did, and I actually did not feel like I had done anything extra special. But as I sat back and thought about this particular material, I came to see that there was something that I had done, and the one thing that I know that I did (sometimes consciously and, perhaps at other times, subconsciously) was to reflect on myself as an adult learner. When was the last time you thought about yourself in that way? Can you take just 10 seconds to try? I encourage you to do that at least once a week: Take only those 10 seconds and think about yourself as an adult learner and ask yourself a number of questions: When was it? What were you doing? Why were you taking on those learning activities? What was the context of what you were doing? Was there a problem or a question with which you were dealing? Were you just curious about something and realized that you needed to engage in some type of learning activity to advance or enhance your thinking? All of these are questions about being an adult learner.

How Can Knowles Six Assumptions About Adult Learning Help to Focus My Vision?

I now want to describe Malcolm Knowles' (1980; 1984) six assumptions of the adult learner: self-concept and self-direction; problem-centered; experience; readiness to learn; internal motivation; and need to know the why. For those who may not be familiar with Knowles' formulation, you might consider a similar work or similar concepts that are important within the field of adult education. In some way, they are covered in just about every adult education graduate program I know of, as well as in many professional development modules or approaches, particularly in higher education.

The first of Knowles' assumptions speaks about "self-concept and self-direction." Typically, adult learners are self-directed and that is because we are in control of ourselves as adult learners. That is very important, as adult educators need to remember that this is one of the definite and obvious parallels that we see between adult learners and adult educators. Adult learners control their learning. They decide where they want to participate and whether they do not want to participate; they decide how much they want to give to it and how much they do not, and that is the same with adult educators. When you think about professional development, you need to be very aware that you, as an adult learner, are in control of how you develop; you are in control of the type

of professional development opportunities in which you participate; you are in control of what you need in order to enhance your work as an adult educator, and you are in control whether you want to do that or not. It is not the responsibility of your department chair or your unit director or even your adult learners. You are in control of your learning: You need to take responsibility for that.

I want to actually speak about the next two assumptions coupled together: "problem-centered" and "readiness to learn." We only participate in learning as adults because there is a problem that exists; it is an immediate concern or an immediate situation and we are seeking results. But until we are ready to be bothered, until we reach this level of vulnerability and acknowledge to ourselves that there *is* a problem, we will get nowhere. As an adult learner, I have to admit the problem, embrace it, and learn how to either address the problem or just enhance my situation. Take, for example, the use of professional development to enhance our engagement with adult learners. As a faculty member, you may be experiencing some challenges when it comes to connecting to your adult learners in your role as advisor. What you have done in the past may have worked, but for whatever reason with this new group of adult learners, you are having a little bit of difficulty. So this is an immediate situation because you want to figure out how to advise your students most effectively. Until you recognize that there is a problem or an area of opportunity for growth and improvement, you will not want to engage in any type of learning to address that particular issue. That is why I feel that all faculty or professional development activities must remember this problem-centered component and the readiness to learn component together. I am not arguing that you cannot separate these two assumptions but, particularly in regard to the professional development piece, it is rare that they will not be connected in some way.

The next of Knowles' assumptions is "experience." Again, this is one of the definite parallels between ourselves and our adult learners. We all come to that learning space with prior experiences, and all of those experiences really enrich the learning space and the co-creation of knowledge that occurs as an outgrowth of the engagement. However, with professional development, I want to caution you and also caution myself: We have a tendency to lean on our experiences a little too much, and what I mean by that is that you definitely want to reflect on your prior experiences – there are many things that have worked well with you in the past – however, you also want to make sure that you remember that times are changing, society is changing, our adult learners

are changing, and I hope that you as an adult learner are changing. So, yes, rely on your prior experiences, but do not let those experiences restrict you from your growth. Do not let those experiences keep you stuck at a certain level of development where you cannot even realize or see the significance of being open to other experiences or open to other information that may be connected – or even disconnected – to your prior experiences.

Knowles' assumptions also include "internal motivation." This assumption is directly linked to Maslow's (1970) theory of self-actualization and is immediately relevant to professionally developing as an adult educator. No one does *not* want to develop as an adult educator! I would argue that you should not be an adult educator if you do not want to professionally develop. No one wants to be known as a *horrible* faculty member, a *horrible* instructor, a *horrible* mentor or a *horrible* advisor, and so as a result, as an adult educator, you do have this internal motivation. I do not know anyone who is motivated to engage with adult learners because of some outside or external factors. Yes, we all appreciate being paid for what we do as faculty members, but I do not think that is what drives us, I do not think that is what sustains us, and I do not think that is what motivates us to enhance our skills, our gifts and our talents as adult educators. When you think about this as an adult learner, you want to continue to grow; you want to have a very humanistic approach to yourself; you want to think about yourself as having this unlimited potential as an adult educator. And, importantly, you are going to be very purposeful about how you dedicate your time and about how you engage in your professional development or set up professional development opportunities for others. Always make sure that you see that potential, that motivation, in your adult learners, as well. They are there because they want to be there, and because we all have choices – we are adults who can decide whether to do this or do that or not do anything at all. It is crucial to remember the internal motivation that you have.

"The need to know why" is Knowles' final assumption. As adults, we need to know *why* we are even participating in this learning. As faculty, we do not have a lot of time. I will speak for myself: I know I do not have a lot of time. If someone has a lot of time, please feel free to share – I am just so interested in how you manage your time and how you have a lot of free time! Most of the staff I speak to, whether it is at a community college or a four-year institution or a medical school, just do not have a lot of time. There are so many demands on our time; we even struggle to dedicate adequate time to our adult learners.

We have to be very strategic in our time management, so when it comes to your approach to professional development, you control your learning. Make sure that you are intentional as an adult learner about the type of professional development opportunities in which you participate. I know that we all have annual evaluations and we are encouraged to participate, but do not continue to attend certain events where you know the topic at hand is already one of your strengths. Try to enhance your understanding of an area you know you want to address, or fill in a gap that you know exists. Maybe there is something that you have not done in a while and you would like to get back in the stride of it when it comes to research or any type of community engagement, or you want to find out about a new teaching method to incorporate into your work with your students. Make sure you remember that, just like your adult learners, you need to know why you are even participating, why you are learning, and how you will apply this to your immediate situation because you have a problem or a question or because you are bothered by something.

As you move forward, I hope that you keep these six assumptions in mind and continue to reflect on yourself as an adult learner. At the same time, I absolutely want to make sure that you do *not* think that this is easy. It is not. I just do not want to romanticize this whole notion. In fact, here are four areas I feel are challenges for us as we try to see ourselves as adult learners while also acting and serving as adult educators.

Now I See … But How Can This Help Me?

The first one is taking the "time." I cannot stress how much time is an influence when it comes to reflecting on our practices as adult educators and seeing ourselves as adult learners. That was a challenge for me, especially in my first year as a faculty member. I felt like I just did not have enough time in the day. I tried to figure out my balance when it came to teaching, research and service; I tried to figure out my balance when it came to the socialization piece; and then, definitely, I tried not to neglect the time that I knew I needed to engage with my adult learners because I knew it was very important to establish rapport, to establish relationships. The reason we do what we do is based on relationships, so you have to make time to see yourself as an adult learner in order to really enhance and develop your relationships with your adult learners. You want to see yourself in them, and hopefully, they can see themselves in you. You just have to make time for it.

The next area of challenge is "competition." We know that higher education today is very competitive in many different ways. There is competition for positions, whether tenure track, non-tenure track or adjunct. So we always want to develop professionally so that we can maintain our competitive edge. Also, in many institutions today, there is a lack of funding and a lack of support, so even if your institution or your unit may not have the resources to provide you with professional development opportunities, you still need to take the time to develop a practice of reflection, and reflecting on yourself as an adult learner – this is, unto itself, a critical professional development activity that can enhance your abilities as an adult educator. It is something that you can absolutely use and demonstrate that you have worked on. And, even without the funding to get to every conference or academic gathering you may want to attend, we all have to find ways to be resourceful so that we can keep up and compete for positions in higher education.

The next challenge is "discomfort." It is just flat out uncomfortable to reflect on yourself. I do not know if you all experience difficulties, but I struggled. It is hard to put that mirror up and be honest with yourself and be honest with the fact that you are not as strong as you would like to be or you are not as developed as you would like to be, or even that you have accomplished things that you do not believe you have. But if you do not experience that discomfort, if you do not embrace the bother, you are doing a disservice to your adult learners. They are uncomfortable, as well, so just be uncomfortable together – that is a part of growth. I do not know anyone who has experienced some professional development when they have not been uncomfortable in certain situations. So take your time, do not rush through it, and be very critical with it even if it is uncomfortable.

And lastly, there are "boundaries." We absolutely want to reach a certain level of vulnerability as well as humility in order to connect with our adult learners, so once you are able to see yourself as adult learners, you hope that your students see you as a learner, too. Most importantly, they need to see you as human. They need to see you as someone who puts their pants or skirt or shorts on the same way that they do every day. That is very, very critical in order to establish, as well as maintain, your relationships with your adult learners.

There is one aspect of boundaries that I absolutely want to touch on because I would be remiss if I did not. We always have to ask ourselves: What boundaries are necessary to keep up and which boundaries are OK for us to temporality

remove? In this context, we always need to keep in mind our identities and our positionalities. That is something that for me, especially, as an African American female, is always in my mind. It not only reminds me about the particular ways in which I see the world; it also helps me know what boundaries I have to reinforce at times, what boundaries I have to take down to connect with my adult learners, and what boundaries I have to take down with myself, even temporarily, just to see myself as an adult learner. If I am going to do a straight-up reflection, I have to really strip away every boundary that I use in my day-to-day life in the academy. When it is just me reflecting on me, I should be able to see myself fully and remove those boundaries, and at the same time, recognize my positionality and my identity as an African American female adult educator and as an adult learner.

Critical reflection

I want to mention a number of strategies that I've found impactful and helpful in professional development. The first one is taking the time to "critically reflect" on yourself as an adult learner on an individual basis: take time to pause and reflect. Some people utilize journals as an approach, so they may journal every day and spend five or 10 minutes and ask themselves: How did I experience myself as an adult learner today? Or, what would I like to further take on as an adult learner? You can reflect "on" or you can reflect "for," or you can even reflect in the moment. Some people actually keep a notepad with them while they are in contact with their adult learners. It is another approach.

If you do not like to write, you can record yourself talking on your cellphone. This is something that you can do using your Bluetooth in your car while you are driving to work, or when you pull up in your car and just spend a minute or two in a parking lot. Again, here is an opportunity to take time to pause and reflect on what is bothering you. "Now that I know what is bothering me," you can ask yourself, "What am I going to do to address it? What am I going to do so that the bottom is just a temporary state of being and that I will move forward and will enhance myself professionally?"

And, of course, there may be other strategies that you and colleagues use that are helpful. We need to learn about them. If you are taking another approach, I would love to know about that. It is important for us to really share our strategies because it is very difficult being an isolated faculty member, let alone really trying to navigate your way when it comes to professional development.

Reflecting in collaboration

Another strategy could be called "reflecting in collaboration." This notion of adult education focuses on what we can do collectively. The only context of adult education that is truly individual is self-directed learning. This includes everything else we do with people, or in a group, or in a classroom setting, or in a learning space of some kind or another. Reflecting in collaboration means utilizing your peer mentors. I think it is important for faculty to develop themselves as mentors and to use your peer mentors as support. These peer mentors are probably among those who are the closest to really understanding what you are going through when you are going through it. It is just good to have someone to talk to. Also, your peers are able to be critical with you. If they are true friends, true colleagues, true peer mentors, they will be honest with you and will help you as you critically reflect on yourself as an adult learner in order to enhance your work as an adult educator.

As most of you at SUNY Empire State College know, Shantih Clemans (mentor and director of the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation) facilitates a three times per month online "open mic" session where faculty come together and just talk about whatever concerns they have and whatever challenges they are experiencing. They may not be in the same unit or the same division or even the same field of study, but it is just a safe space for them to talk and have an open dialogue about their questions, their confusions, and their desires to understand and learn – to professionally develop. A group of individuals can take that same approach and really focus it on creating an open, face-to-face space where they can critically reflect on themselves as adult learners in order to enhance as educators in the classroom, enhance as researchers, and enhance as citizens of the institution in their service.

Here are two other approaches: "Faculty squares" is an approach that is used widely in centers of teaching and learning where they intentionally group four faculty, and thus create a peer mentoring system in groups that stay together for about a year. Colleagues may not be from the same field of study or division, but they do support each other. This is a less organic composition of peer mentoring, but for some, it could be effective, especially if individual faculty members do not have colleagues in their area close by. It is a good approach to creating and using a collaborative space to engage in critical reflection. If this is something that you are interested in, I encourage you to share the faculty squares model with your office of faculty development, your dean, your provost,

your chairs, any administrator or colleague who has the ability to take this into consideration and hopefully incorporate it into a broader faculty development plan.

And lastly, in this focus on collective models, there are "critical colleague circles." This is one model in which I actually have been a part; in fact, I actually do not just have a circle, I feel like I have a constellation, because I know that when certain things are happening or when I am reflecting on certain aspects of my professional self, I can reach out to these critical colleagues because I know that they are not going to tell me what I want to hear. They are going to tell me what I need to hear. And those particular critical colleagues may be different than the ones I use for research, or different than the ones I use for mentoring and advising. So it is to our benefit to have multiple circles; it is OK to have concentric circles, and it is OK to have these constellations where there are different clusters of critical colleagues. We all have to try different models, different configurations. If a particular model does not work for you or your institution, I encourage you to try another form. These ongoing efforts will not hurt; I believe they can only help.

I want to stress that when you are engaging in critical reflection and you are keeping in mind the six assumptions, you do not have to incorporate all of the assumptions into every situation. Just as we tell our adult learners, we always have to remember that when you are an adult learner, you have to think of your context, your content and whatever the conundrum is – the dilemma you are trying to tackle. Why are you even engaging in this activity? What are your goals? It is OK to reflect on your prior experience dealing with your problem or your motivations, but do not feel forced to reflect on all of those assumptions at the same time.

I am very much interested in research on faculty development. I intend to publish information based on the webinar presentation and some other research projects that I have done in the past. I invite others to collaborate. That spirit is so important to our work as adult educators and our understanding of ourselves as adult learners.

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Geleana Alston is an associate professor of adult education at North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina. She also is the co-editor-in-chief for the journal, *Adult Learning.* Alston formerly served as the editorial assistant and the inaugural social media coordinator for *Adult Education Quarterly,* and the assistant to the co-editor-in-chief for *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education.* Her scholarly engagement focuses on the sociocultural intricacies of women, minorities and disenfranchised groups as adult learners. Specifically, her research interests include mentoring and advising adult learners in higher education, the history of African Americans in adult education, adult learning theories/methods and professional development in higher education, and critical ethnogerontology. Geleana Alston earned her Ph.D. in adult, professional and community education from Texas State University, an M.S. in adult education from NC A&T State University, and a B.S. in clinical laboratory science from East Carolina University. She is an active member within the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) and the Commission for Professors of Adult Education (CPAE).

The Learning and Mentoring Partnership

Margaret Clark-Plaskie

Thank you to Dr. Geleana Alston for the inspiration and opportunity to pause and reflect on this important topic of adult educators as adult learners, as well as on our own experiences in this realm. I would also like to thank Shantih Clemans and Alan Mandell for inviting me to be a respondent to both Alston's webinar presentation and to this current publication.

I must admit that my initial reaction was: "Yes, of course, we're adults and we're in higher education, teaching and learning, therefore we must be adult educators and adult learners!" This simplistic reaction might be related to my own upbringing and values associated with listening to and learning from adults (especially elders), and my professional focus on lifespan development (with the belief that we continue to learn and grow throughout the lifespan). My academic background is in developmental psychology, not adult education, and as others may have also discovered, the bodies of literature in these two disciplines are separate and distinct. I, therefore, appreciate Alston's overview of Malcolm Knowles' adult education theory with the emphasis on adults rather than children (andragogy versus pedagogy) and the specific assumptions about adult learners (involving self-concept and self-direction; problem-centered; role of experience; readiness to learn; internal motivation; and need to know why), along with the invitation to reflect on ourselves as adult learners.

The idea of adult educators as adult learners also resonated with me because of my 20-plus years of being a faculty mentor at SUNY Empire State College (ESC). My knowledge of mentoring was borne out of my own relationships with graduate faculty during my educational journey and also from adult developmental theories, such as Daniel Levinson's (1978) theory that proposed that young adults have mentors in their early careers to show them the ropes and possibly facilitate their professional development and that later in midlife they, in turn, become mentors to others.

But my understanding of mentoring grew tremendously with mentor colleagues and adult learners at ESC. When I joined the faculty, I learned about, and began practicing, mentoring as an educational philosophy or approach, in which the student and mentor entered into a collaborative learning partnership. (Please see Herman & Mandell [2004] for a more in-depth and comprehensive

discussion of this form of mentoring.) Indeed, faculty and students called each other by our first names (no title, such as "doctor" or "professor"); we discussed and agreed upon what was to be learned and how; and then we each signed those "learning contracts" (ESC's collaborative version of a syllabus). We met one-on-one (or in small groups) and discussed topics and readings together, and while the mentor evaluated the learning demonstrated in discussions and written assignments, it was done in a narrative instead of relying on letter grades. We worked in individualized studies (not established "courses") based on the student's interests and goals; there were dialogue and guidance rather than "teaching," "lecturing" or "professing." Students' prior knowledge could also be evaluated for college credit, thereby providing validation to what they already knew. The language we used (and did *not* use) contributed to the relatively more equal nature of the mentoring-learning partnership.

Still, while this mentoring made for comfortable relationships with adult learners, I did feel some discomfort. Knowing where to draw boundaries and sticking with them was one challenge, although that's not uncommon within psychology, regardless of the particular relationship. I was "bothered" more by the fact that students might want to learn about something in psychology or the social sciences that I had not studied in-depth, nor taught before. Didn't I need to be an expert? Would it really be OK if we discovered information together?

The mentoring relationship certainly facilitated each of our roles as adult learners, affording learning about the subject matter and also about ourselves in the process. ESC's mentoring model was rather unique, but I was not in completely uncharted territory with the tension I felt. Upon reflection, as a young female lecturer or assistant professor in traditional universities, I had questioned my own qualifications to teach (you may be familiar with the "imposter syndrome," feeling inadequate despite evidence of competence and success, and waiting for others to find out the truth). What would happen if I admitted that I didn't know the answer to a question in a large auditorium of Introduction to Psychology students? How dare I think I had something to teach adults older than me about Adult Development and Aging? Actually, that challenge was posed in public by a middle-aged male student early in my career, and while I am sure my reply was intellectually sufficient, I can still feel the wave of doubt that flooded me, and perhaps others in the class.

Over time, I did grow more confident and comfortable in the classroom and later in my mentoring role. Not only was it OK, but it was better if I admitted not knowing something so that we could go and research it and come back to share what we learned with each other. Consistent with William Perry's (1970) research, our thinking shifted away from absolutism to relativism. There is no absolute truth and no one person could have all the answers since knowledge is relative – not black and white, but with lots of gray areas. As other adult development and aging theories and research point out, adult cognition continues to develop, as adults take real life into consideration and make connections between new material and what is known from relevant work and personal experiences, as well as previous study. Not only does this enhance internal motivation to learn, but research on memory tells us that organizing information according to meaning is the best way to learn and remember for the long term. Other theories of adult cognition also propose that we continue to develop greater tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity and the ability to "find problems," in addition to solving problems. Within a trusting and safe educational context, adult learners may feel secure enough to question long-held assumptions and to try out new ways of thinking and even future roles or identities, as well as to allow others to do the same. (For more about the mentoring relationship as a "transitional identity space" allowing for adult identity development, see Clark-Plaskie & Shaw [2014].)

The importance of social and cultural context and supportive environments seemed to be a theme for Alston. She spoke of her circles of supportive family, friends and colleagues with gratitude, and she proposed collectives and collaborations as useful strategies for professional development. First and foremost, Geleana Alston credited her success to being aware of herself as an adult learner and continually reflecting on the assumptions about adult learners. We do not learn nor develop in a social vacuum, and we may experience conflicting internal and external forces (some more so than others due to various factors). I wondered if everyone could afford the luxury of being vulnerable.

The question I had asked following the Alston webinar presentation was about the potential tensions experienced when recognizing the self as an adult learner and embracing collaborative learning practices, and yet feeling pressure to prove one's self to others, particularly in academia where being perceived as an expert could be paramount for tenure and promotion. This conflict immediately resonated with Alston. She explained that it takes balance and courage, and that

she thinks about it every day as an African American female in academia. She described an ongoing process of reflecting on herself as an adult learner, but also with the awareness of her identities and positionalities. I understood her to say that there is a culture with certain expectations, and one might temporarily take one's armor off regardless of external forces and/or create one's own subcultures without the hierarchy that could create barriers between people.

Whether it is a safe classroom environment, or a trusting mentoring relationship, or a circle of colleagues, we all need a welcoming, secure space in which we feel free to ask questions, to not have all the answers, to fail and learn from our mistakes, and to try out new identities. Many elementary schools have been adopting Carol Dweck's (2006) concept of the growth versus fixed mindset, encouraging children to think about themselves and their intelligence/ learning as a work in progress, not as a fixed entity. Growth is, therefore, possible and it is encouraged and rewarded. This may be an area of similarity within effective approaches to learning across the lifespan, from childhood through adulthood.

Not having to prove one's self as an expert comes from a sense of security and confidence – even courage. This develops and is sustained within a supportive, collaborative cultural context, and it allows for continuous growth and development.

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Margaret Clark-Plaskie is a mentor and associate professor of psychology and human development at SUNY Empire State College. Her focus is on adult development and aging. She has enjoyed working with adult learners at the college since 1998. Clark-Plaskie is currently chair of the Psychology and Human Development Department and the faculty academic coordinator of the college's Corning location.

Tulip

"Paying the Price": The Costs of a College Education and the Realities of Broken Dreams

Sara Goldrick-Rab

I am really grateful to SUNY Empire State for having me, and for giving me this opportunity to share some of the work that we are doing at The Hope Center[1] and some of the research that my team has been doing over the last decade or so. I want to provide some information that hopefully will be useful to you in your practice.

It is important that when we begin any conversation about today's students, we have some understanding of why they attend college in the first place. Recognizing their ambitions and understanding their motivations and expectations can help us to align how we can support them. Research over many decades finds a variety of reasons why students are in college today, and many of those learners that we are all concerned with here – folks who tend to be older than the 18- to 22-year-olds – are often people who have families. They talk about their motivation in terms of supporting those families; they talk not only about the importance of getting a job but of using that job to improve the well-being of the people around them.

It is also the case that many people are back in college for the second or even the third time because they did not finish the first time, and the fact that they are back is a sign of their resilience and persistence. It also tells us that they are investing, yet again, in the time required to do more learning beyond high school, which comes at a cost. It is a cost for their families; it is a cost in terms of work earnings that they might gain during that time. But they are investing in further education because they have an understanding of the greater good that will come from that investment.

The data stand in sharp contrast to the stereotypes of these individuals. Many are pictured as being there only for the money. Many are pictured as not being really focused on learning, but rather only focused on getting a credential. And

frankly, the vast majority of college students are envisioned, particularly by policymakers, as being relatively advantaged folks who go through their days supported by mom and dad and enjoying a largesse that comes from federal financial aid. Our work suggests that nothing could be further from the truth. It also suggests that even the 18-year-olds in college should be called "adults" too because they really do not live the lives of "kids." Kids are people without cares; kids are people who other people take care of. In fact, many of the people in today's colleges and universities are very much on their own and even trying to support others.

In an effort to signal the difference between stereotypes of the past and the realities of today, my team calls the world of these realities, "#RealCollege."[2] Now let's think about the numbers. There are 36 million adults out there across the country who want a college degree and they started down the path but they have not yet gotten there (U.S. Census Bureau as cited in Nykiel, 2017). Some of them are pursuing bachelor's degrees, but let's also remember that the research clearly indicates they can get a lot from other kinds of credentials. They can get a lot from a vocational certificate. They can get a lot from an associate degree. But the key challenge for those 36 million people is that when they go to their dinner table every night, they sit down and have a conversation knowing that they have not yet finished their education.

Now is a difficult time to try to help students get that education, as SUNY (the State University of New York), like so many other systems across the state and across the country, are living what I call "the new economics of college" (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). I think that before we talk about how to support students, we need to acknowledge those constraints, which certainly include rising prices. It is not so much that the cost of education has gone up in this country. It is that many of the subsidies for that education, which used to come from states, have diminished, thus leaving students paying things like higher tuition. But it is also the case that we find that rising rents and rising prices of books and rising prices of food do just as much harm to students' budgets.

Many people, as I said before, care for families while they try to go to school, and so we also have to talk about what is happening to the resources of those families. Whereas the financial aid system was originally envisioned under the assumption that either one had parents paying for them to go to school, or alternatively that one was an employed adult doing well and therefore could pay their own way, we find today that most people are trying to pay on their

own and they are not doing well in the labor market. Stagnant wages are a continuing problem, even though we are told we are coming out of a recession. It is exacerbated by holes in the so-called "safety net." Those policies that are supposed to help lift people up when they are falling have been eroded over time.

Consider the example of SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). These days, this program is only available to those who either have children or those who work at least 20 hours per week. That is a big change from the 1970s where a college student in need of more support could simply meet an income threshold to get on food stamps, but did not have to meet a work requirement.

Working through college is indeed harder than ever. There is very little evidence that today's students are unwilling to work during college, and there is abundant evidence that they are trying to work. Seventy percent of American college students are employed (Georgetown University, 2015), and if we bother to ask the other 30% if they were searching for work, our research at The Hope Center shows we would find out that it is the majority of them (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Unfortunately, searching for work is a job that does not pay. Additionally, students know that if a class conflicts with the job and they choose the class, it is quite possible their employer will let them go.

Then, of course, there are the institutions themselves. While the media tends to describe American higher education as enjoying an abundance of resources and spending it on things that are not important, we know that public higher education schools are honestly strapped, and what that really means is that when it comes to educating each and every individual student, these institutions have fewer and fewer resources to bring to the table (Marcus, 2019).

So to summarize: Students now are living the new economics of college facing rising prices, stagnant wages, coming from families that are struggling and entering institutions that are struggling, as well. That creates a situation where it is easy and unfortunate to ignore the large number of students living with the lessons of Maslow (1943), finding that, in fact, their basic needs have not been met and they are having trouble doing the things that college requires that are at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid.

#RealCollege Survey

My team has been doing what we call the "#RealCollege Survey"[3] since 2015. The vast majority of states in the nation have had at least one survey completed. I would like to share with you the recently released results from CUNY (the City University of New York).[4] SUNY is going to be doing the survey in the fall. We surveyed students in fall 2018 midway through the term. An electronic survey went out to all undergraduates throughout all of CUNY's 2019 undergraduate-serving institutions and about 22,000 students responded. Admittedly, this is under a 10% response rate; however, it is 22,000 people, and we can at least learn about how they are faring.

When we look at how they are doing, we consider their food insecurity level in relation to the United States Department of Agriculture's (2018) 18-item measure of food security (see "Survey Questions Used by USDA to Assess Household Food Security"). This measure assesses not only the security of the students themselves, but also if there are children in the household, it assesses their security, too, as we know that matters for student success. We also assess housing insecurity and we assess homelessness. Homelessness is controversial in terms of how it is measured. Many people continue to believe that only the unsheltered homeless are in fact homeless; in other words, only somebody sleeping on the street. But educators know better. We know that if a student does not have a secure place to live, it is quite likely that student is going to struggle in school whether they are 16 or 36. And so we now utilize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act,[5] the federal government's definition of homelessness, which includes things like couch surfing (temporarily staying at a variety of homes), because not having a safe and secure stable place to live that you can call your own can compromise your well-being.

Taking a look at some of the numbers from CUNY, we found that almost one in two of those 22,000 student respondents are students who are food insecure: 20% are at the low level of food security, and 28% are at the very lowest level. That means that in the last 30 days before the survey (again, conducted last fall), these students said "yes" to questions about whether they had experienced things like losing weight because they do not have enough food, going hungry for a day or as many as three days, finding that they cannot afford to eat nutritious, balanced meals, or finding that their food would run out before they got more money to buy additional food. We further found that 55% of those 22,000 students experienced housing insecurity in the last year. Certainly,

that can refer to a range of things, but the most common issues were that they faced a rent increase that was difficult to pay. They also might have struggled to pay utilities. While that might not be as severe, research indicates that those challenges can lead to homelessness.

As educators, we also know it is surely difficult for a student to participate in a webinar or take an online course if they are having difficulty paying their internet bill. I urge those of you who teach students online to consider not only asking students whether they have the internet at home, but asking them how *often* they have internet at home. I find that when you ask the question that way, you will learn that multiple months of the year, students are not able to pay the bill and their internet is cut off.

Finally, let's turn to homelessness. We found that 14% of those 22,000 students in CUNY experienced homelessness in the last year. It is absolutely critical to recognize that only 3% of them self-identified with the term "homeless." Most people experiencing homelessness in this country, including nonstudents, do not use that word; it is a stigmatized word. It is also common not to use it because they believe that the term belongs to people who are worse off than they are. So if you are trying to find out if a student is enduring homelessness, I urge you not to ask them, "Are you homeless?" Instead, consider asking them about where they've been sleeping and whether in fact they have a safe and secure place to sleep at night. Of the 14% of CUNY students who experienced homelessness in the last year, 11% were temporarily staying with someone.

It is also important to recognize that these issues do not affect all populations equally. Many of the challenges that affect us and create inequity in the broader society are reflected among college students experiencing basic needs insecurity. Thus, we can also see how levels of food insecurity are affected by student responses to their gender identity. According to our survey, 47% of men experience food insecurity compared to 49% of those identified as female, and 67% of students who identified as transgender. There are also students who said that they do not identify with any of the categories of male, female or transgender, and 61% of those people experience food insecurity.

I want to give you a taste of a few of the other disparities that we see. Looking at race, we offer almost a dozen different categories that students can check off in terms of identification of their race and ethnicity. These are by no means the only categories, but I pulled the categories of white/Caucasian, Asian (not

Southeast), Hispanic/Latino/Latina, and African American because they are typically shown, and I want to give you a sense of what those larger groups of students tend to look like when it comes to food insecurity.

There is a 20 percentage point gap between the rate of food insecurity for African Americans at 59%, and the rate for students self-identified as white or Caucasian at 39%. Then we turn to homelessness. Since this webinar conversation is, in part, about students who are older, I think it is really worth noting that while much of the national conversation on homelessness and education focuses on youth and the definitions tend to go up maybe as high as 20 to 24 or 25, we see the highest prevalence of homelessness in college among students age 26 to 30, with 20% experiencing homelessness in the last 30 days. Students over the age of 30 have lower rates; closer to those for ages 18 to 20. We strongly suspect, but cannot confirm at this point, that this has to do with the disproportionate availability of services targeted to younger students.

There are a few more categories of students that many programs and colleges tend to emphasize regarding homeless prevalence in the last 12 months. Students with children: 14%; veterans, 24%; former foster youth, 30%; and people who transitioned from one system, prison, to education, otherwise known as "returning citizens" and some call "system impacted," 42%.

Many have suggested to my team that the issue is that students are not working. The data we gathered clearly shows that in fact 90% of the students in CUNY who are homeless have either been working as many as 30 or more hours a week, or they are actively searching for work. That percentage is higher than students who are not homeless. So a lack of employment or a lack of work ethic does not appear to be a root cause of this challenge. Instead, I would say that one of the biggest challenges these students face is that they live in a world that blames impoverished people for their own poverty. And they work and go to school in an environment that often blames them for what we call their "nonacademic" challenges. I hope you will join me in considering that being hungry or homeless is an academic challenge. It comes into the classroom every time a student tries to learn. But the current environment and the way that we talk about these challenges in the United States leave these students believing that they caused their own struggles. They end up feeling ashamed and alone and, saddest of all, they end up feeling hopeless.

That sense of hopelessness has impacts. It deters them from seeking more support. It also deters them from reaching out to others to create broader and systemic change. We are not going to see an activist movement among students who have lived these realities until they know they are not alone and that there is a system that has created these challenges.

Guiding Principles

My team believes and is firmly committed to doing work on these problems that go way beyond research studies because we are convinced that we can and must in higher education do a lot better than this. Rather than give you a template for this work, rather than create a single initiative that tells colleges what to do or how to do it, I am instead going to talk through a set of principles I would like you to use as you guide and inform this work and shape it to fit your own communities.

Step 1: Remember, students are humans first.

The first step is perhaps the most incredibly obvious one. It is easy to assume that the mere of enrolling in college signals that a student is ready to learn. But it is quite possible they are not. It is quite possible that their challenges as a human have not yet been addressed, so pausing, especially as educators, to first recognize the humanity of students in a world in which they are often dehumanized is absolutely important. Once you begin to integrate this into your practice and your interactions with students, I strongly suspect you will see things shift. The students will become more responsive to you. You will also begin to find that you are creating a culture of care.

Step 2: Commit to a culture of caring that goes beyond charity. Change systems, policies and practices.

I have a big debt that I owe to the folks at Amarillo College where I first got to lay eyes on what a culture of caring can really look like in an institution of higher education.[6] This is more than just about talk. This is about action. This is about ensuring that everyone understands they have a responsibility to notice things that are going on around them. They have a responsibility if they see a student in trouble or hear that a student might be in trouble to do at least a little bit of outreach.

Step 3: Ask questions. Most colleges have some resources to help students. For online students, their communities do, too.[7]

Creating a culture of caring does not mean that everyone has a responsibility to become a social worker, nor does it mean that colleges have a responsibility to become social service agencies. It does, however, mean that it will be very hard to be an effective college that gets its students to degree completion without at least some outreach and partnerships with social service agencies. To begin to build those partnerships and additional programs that might be needed, it is important that we learn to ask questions. Resources are created when someone notices the need for them. Resources are better advertised when someone asks: Why do we have this program but it is not on our website? Or, why does it not appear anywhere when we are doing orientation for students? There are often numerous programs and supports available to students. You might not consider them food insecurity programs or programs that can help a student get housing, but they can help a student to deal with a stressful situation or think through their options.

These resources may not always be on campus – they may be out in students' communities – but it is partly the role of the college to help direct them to those supports. Resources should be created with all sorts of partners. My team is studying partnerships[8] that are incredibly innovative: partnerships with housing authorities, partnerships with child care providers, partnerships with auto mechanics who see their role in their community and economic development in supporting students who need their cars fixed so that they can stay in school. Churches are stepping up to house homeless college students. Accountants and other CPAs are helping students to do their taxes so they can get the earned income tax credit. There are many things that you can try.

It's very important that while you are telling students they need to do the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), you also consider telling them that they need to apply for public benefits.[9] Many of your students will, in fact, be eligible; many of those who are eligible have no idea that that is the case. It is also important to have an emergency fund available to help students when they really do fall short.[10]

We know that across the country, enormous numbers of Americans say that they could not overcome a financial emergency of $500. We have students dropping out of college right now based on amounts and needs of that much or

even less. If you are going to deliver emergency aid effectively, you have to do it fast. It does not always have to be cash to a student, it can be a payment sent to a utility company to keep that internet on; it can be money sent to a mechanic to pay a bill. There is a variety of ways to do this and do this effectively. It is also important to do whatever you can to ensure that when a student goes to one office, they learn about the supports of another office.

Step 4: Share information on the syllabus

In my teaching, I've begun to integrate a statement on my syllabus that helps to convey the resources available to students.[11] I also think it is even more important to convey to them the important information that I care about them. I've learned that adding a statement like the following one, tweaked for your own institution, will not only help bring students out of the woodwork to reveal their challenges so that they can be targeted for support, but it will also help them to know that you have a clue; that you are, in a word, "woke" (Foley, 2016) – that you are somebody who recognizes that the modern student is not OK even with financial aid. They will respond to that, they will thank you for that, and they will be more likely to come to you when they need help.

Sample statement:

> *Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing or who believes that this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Student for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable her to provide any resources that she may possess.*

Step 5: Share the data. Share the stories. Humanize. Destigmatize.

To change the culture, to change the stigma, to reduce stereotypes and the use of those stereotypes in forming public policy that affects the funding that students and institutions need so badly, you need to help us change the story. Share the real stories of your real college students, talk about the data as you understand them, share this on social media, tell the person you go to Friday night dinner with, talk to the people who are not involved in higher education right now so that they can reflect on an experience that might not have been their own. So many people are college educated but went to school more than 10 years ago. They may not have lived these realities, or if they did, they did not know it is something we now need to talk about. Even doing your small part, to do that talking, can help to inform and develop this movement.

Of course, it is also essential that you vote. And what I ask is not that you vote for a candidate of my choice, but that when you are choosing who you are going to vote for, you raise these kinds of questions. Ask them:

• How are you going to help college students to pay for school beyond the FAFSA?

• Will you make it harder or easier for them to afford lunch when they get there?

• Will you help them to get affordable housing?

• Will you raise the minimum wage so that when they work they make enough to cover their bills?

• Will you fight to restore the promise of public education so that schools that are doing things for the public good with government oversight can do things that are inclusive and effective?

In public higher education, we need not only to enroll students but to help them finish what they started and to do so whole. Their well-being is just as important as anything else.

I want to invite you to join the National #RealCollege movement. You can find us online at RealCollege.org or hope4college.com, on Twitter (@hope4college) and Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/RealCollegeHOPE/) and also on Instagram (@realcollege). You can also come to our annual conference; see RealCollege.org for registration information. My team is available to provide support to help you survey students on your campus so that you will know how much student housing and insecurity there is among your students, and to provide evidence on practices happening around the country. Thank you so much.

Notes

[1] "The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice is home to an action research team using rigorous research to drive innovative practice, evidence-based policymaking, and effective communications to support #RealCollege students." Source: https://hope4college.com/.

2   "#RealCollege focuses on the struggles, triumphs, and realities of what it means to be in college today. Through education, innovation, and collective action we seek to change the landscape of higher education so that all students can afford and complete their studies." Source: https://realcollege.org/.

3   More information about the #RealCollege Survey can be found at https://realcollege.org/realcollege-survey/.

4   The report of the CUNY #RealCollege Survey is located at https://hope4college.com/city-university-of-new-york-realcollege-survey/.

5   Details of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act can be accessed at https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html.

6   The resulting publications are *Supporting Community College Completion with a Culture of Caring* by Goldrick-Rab and Cady, 2018 (https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/wisconsin-hope-lab-case-study-amarillo-college.pdf); and *Amarillo College's "No Excuses" Poverty Initiative: A Strategy Guide* by Cady, Crowley and Goldrick-Rab, 2019 (https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Amarillo-College-No-Excuses-Poverty-Initiative-Strategy-Guide_v5.pdf).

7   An example is Cuyahoga Community College's Benefits Access/Project GO! See http://www.tri-c.edu/paying-for-college/financial-aid-and-scholarships/benefits-accessproject-go/index.html.

8   For more on these partnerships, go to https://hope4college.com/addressing-basic-needs-security-in-higher-education/.

9   See the document, "Beyond the Food Pantry: Supporting Students with Access to SNAP" at https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Beyond-the-Food-Pantry-Student-Access-to-SNAP.pdf.

10 Two resources on emergency funds can be found at https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Emergency-Student-Aid-Brief.pdf and https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/emergency-aid-distribution-sample-protocol.pdf.

11 More information about syllabus statements, including the steps for creating them, can be found at https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SpreadingTheWord-3.pdf.

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Sara Goldrick-Rab is professor of higher education policy and sociology at Temple University, and founding director of The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is also the chief strategy officer for emergency aid at Edquity, a student financial success and emergency aid company, and founded Believe in Students, a nonprofit distributing emergency aid. Goldrick-Rab is best known for her innovative research on food and housing insecurity in higher education, having led the four largest national studies on the subject; and for her work on making public higher education free. She is the recipient of the William T. Grant Foundation's Faculty Scholars Award, the American Educational Research Association's Early Career Award, and the Andrew Carnegie Fellowship. In 2016, *POLITICO Magazine* named her one of the top 50 people shaping American politics, and she is ranked sixth in the nation among education scholars according to *Education Week.* Her latest book, *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), won the 2018 Grawemeyer Award, and was featured on *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah. The Chronicle of Higher Education* calls Goldrick-Rab "a defender of impoverished students and a scholar of their struggles," an accurate description of her life's work.

Student Debt, Poverty and Institutional Help

Renata Kochut

Sara Goldrick-Rab's report is both compelling and interesting. It makes us realize how much more must be done to help students achieve their academic, personal and professional success. Most of us working in higher education do not fully realize how much of a struggle some students must go through to earn their degrees, how many sacrifices they have made, and problems they have overcome to get to the point when they can apply for a job that might pay for their food and for a place to live so they can become independent adults.

As Goldrick-Rab so effectively shows, if we want to better understand how to serve our students and how to help them succeed in their lives, we need to understand the obstacles they face and the multiple barriers they need to overcome. It is evident that work done by groups like The Hope Center, as well as the Urban Institute and various centers dealing with poverty research across the country, is crucial in getting us the data we need, as well as in spreading awareness among institutions, state officials and even prospective students.

In this spirit, it is important for all of us to be aware of and think about the data that The Hope Center collected and to consider the approaches introduced by Goldrick-Rab that institutions should take to identify students with financial problems, create the most efficient and effective college and social policies, as well as to simply provide students with the help they need. The title of Sara Goldrick-Rab's (2016) book, *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream,* is self-explanatory. Too many people begin higher education and are unable to finish it. In her essay, Goldrick-Rab mentions that 36 million adults began their college-level studies but did not complete their higher education degrees. In 2019, I estimate that this represents about 11% of the total U.S. population or about 14% of the adult U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

As Goldrick-Rab (2016) argued, the reasons for such soaring non-completion rates vary. The costs of education and the time needed to earn a degree are two leading factors for quitting college. Since the 1990s, the cost of education increased at a faster rate than inflation. But as she pointed out in her book,

tuition is *not* the most significant price factor in the cost of education. The living costs, transportation, books, supplies, and personal expenses have actually increased at a much faster rate than tuition and fees. I think that similar to the housing bubble in the early 2000s, one of the contributing factors is the availability of student loans. Young people are expected to attend a college to achieve the necessary credential in order to get better jobs and higher earnings. However, without doing proper research on employment trends and on wages for the degrees they commit to, and sometimes falling victim to bad information and dishonest marketing appeals, students often pursue degrees that will not provide them with sufficient financial resources to even pay off their loans and start their independent lives. Honest and informed discussions about employment trends, skills and potential earnings should take place with students early in their education, even during the first year of their studies. Students need to realize that some professions will not bring them the earnings they expect and the satisfaction they hope for. And this is not only true for the 20-year-old, but sometimes even more so for the 35-year-old student who, given other responsibilities and demands, might be even more vulnerable.

Statistics about the increasing debt due to student loans are shocking. According to College Board's (2018) "Trends in Student Aid," the total amount of student aid and nonfederal loans grew from around $75 billion in the mid-1990s to over $259 billion in 2013-2014. Given these realities, how can students afford to pay off their debt and save money to buy a home or car, for retirement, or to pay for unforeseen medical expenses and other emergencies? This situation affects not only students but the whole economy. To pay off their debts, students delay homeownership, put off starting families, are not as willing to take risks and start new businesses, and become even more indebted to credit card companies when making everyday consumer purchases. These ripple effects of indebtedness need to be more fully recognized and directly addressed by the state and federal governments. Appropriate policies should be implemented in order to avoid the next financial crisis.

It is also very important to recognize that the time needed to complete a college-level degree has also increased. Based on 1996-2011 data published by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2019), only about 40% of students earned their bachelor's degrees within four years, and only about 60% of students are able to complete studies within six years of starting their college studies.

Students with whom I work at the State University of New York (SUNY) Empire State College also mention other reasons for stopping or delaying the completion of their higher education. They often need to care for a family member, have exciting career possibilities, or lack effective academic support. Still, the most important point is that these students still want to come back and complete their studies. They often bring to us the skills and knowledge gained from their work-life, and they are willing to build on this knowledge to learn how to better perform in their jobs. With proper resources and additional academic support systems in place, they have been able to make their education more meaningful and their degrees more relevant to their careers.

It is essential to recognize that people who have a college education earn more, are more likely to be employed and have job benefits such as health insurance. They also are more involved in their communities, are better communicators and have gained important experience as critical thinkers. And these successful students understand the economic and social implications of political decisions and therefore, can make better-informed decisions in many aspects of their lives.

How would you feel if you had been accepted by the best college but could not go because you did not have enough money to pay for it? Yes, this is a reality that many students face. Tuition and fees alone at public colleges for out-of-state residents, for example, can cost $40,000 per year. Students coming from lower-income families do not have this kind of money. They may not have stable financial and living situations.

Should we waste valuable talent just because someone cannot afford to go to college? Many institutions started to recognize the need for change and began to decrease the costs of schooling and to use mentoring models for student support. Excellent examples here are the State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY). The Excelsior Scholarship provides free tuition to eligible students. Some critics have said that this program covers only 3-4% of students attending these institutions (Berman, 2018). However, it is an excellent start that will encourage students to pursue their degrees and will help change the lives of many young people. It needs to expand in order to support even more students in the future (for example, those who study part time, and those who started and stopped their college studies at various points in their lives).

In addition, the state of New York has begun to invest in the implementation of open educational resources (OERs) (SUNY OER Services, n.d.). SUNY wants to use these funds to reduce the costs of study materials for high enrollment, general education studies. And to help students who need to work while completing their college studies, SUNY is pursuing the Open SUNY (2018) initiative that aims to deliver the nation's leading online learning experience that will make higher education more accessible to a more diverse student body.

Empire State College serves adult, working students who often need a college education to get a job, to continue their work or to be promoted. We use mentoring to guide students in their educational and developmental journeys. Our studies are innovative and offered in different modalities. Students can take blended, online, residency-based or independent studies. We try to make these studies relevant to their interests and work.

We hope that our students will not have to choose between education and food. However, as Goldrick-Rab shows us, most of the students we know would never come to a faculty member or administrator and admit that they face homelessness or hunger. It is thus really important that each institution provide help for such students. Educators should ask questions and get to know their students and their needs. Institutions should also provide emergency funds for students. We can help by creating on-campus food pantries or offer free meals to students in need. However, we also need to educate students about how to budget money, how to look for job opportunities and how to set goals in their lives. These are our responsibilities, too.

After listening to Sara Goldrick-Rab's talk and reading her book, many pressing questions come to my mind: How can institutions offer better help for students – not only academic support, but support structures for their living conditions and food security? How can we use the kinds of ideas that Goldrick-Rab provides to better communicate such opportunities to students without offending or discouraging them? How can governments at all levels (local, state and national) support higher education institutions in such undertakings? Can institutions afford such support for students? And, most critically, what policies or procedures should be put in place across the country to help students succeed in their efforts to pursue and attain a better life?

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Renata Kochut is an assistant professor at SUNY Empire State College's Mid-Hudson region. She received her Ph.D. in economics from American University, Washington, D.C. She also holds an M.A. in law and administration from Warsaw University, Poland. Her research interests are in the areas of labor economics, financial economics, industrial organization, emerging markets, and international economics.

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