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The Relationship of Adult Education Faculty to Their Schools of Education

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Abstract. This paper reports the findings of a descriptive study examining the relationship of adult education faculty to their schools of education. Comparing responses among adult education faculty, deans of their schools, and a comparable number of deans without adult education faculty, it was found that generally deans considered the lifelong learning theme more meaningful and relevant to their schools than did adult education faculty and that minimal collaboration exists between adult education faculty and their school of education colleagues especially in the preparation of beginning K-12 teachers. Factors that may enhance the worth of adult education in academic settings are also addressed.

Purpose of Study

Since historically adult education theorists have presented our discipline as different than and distinctly separate from K-12 education theory and practice, a study to determine the collaboration between these two educational entities was conducted to investigate three research questions: 1) What is the meaning and relevance of lifelong learning in schools (colleges) of education? 2) How prevalent are adult education faculty in schools (colleges) of education? 3) Where adult education faculty are present, what is their level of connection to activities and units outside their discipline? **Theoretical Framework** The academic study of adult education remains in a precarious position in schools of education because adult education is often viewed as neither necessary nor integral to the institution's main mission: usually the preparation of beginning teachers. In its seventy plus years of existence as an academic discipline in the United States, adult education professors have tended to focus on adult education as an "emerging" field of study and emphasizing its differences from K-12 education. A look at the contents of the *Adult Education Handbooks* from 1934 to 1990 reveals that no chapter directly discussed the connections between adult education and K-12 education. The basic argument of adult educators was to extend the legitimacy of education beyond grades K through 12. The reverse corollary, that K-12 education could be enhanced by contributions from adult education, was never suggested. In 1970 Knowles popularized the distinction between andragogy and pedagogy. The connection between adult education and K-12 education throughout the 1970's and 1980's was purposefully distinct as andragogy was viewed as an alternative to pedagogy and as many of the professorate were investigating the "deschooled" society, ala Illich. Peters, Jarvis, and Associates (1991) in *Adult Education: Evolution and Achievements in a Developing Field of Study*, hinted at problems that were beginning to appear nationally. They cited a Commission of Professors of Adult Education report issued in 1988 that noted nine threats to adult education programs; one was isolation from other fields and disciplines and a second was lack of commitment to other programs or departments with which they were affiliated. Discussion continued at CPAE meetings from 1991 through 1996. The authors speculated about whether their involvement in an undergraduate teacher preparation program was typical or unique. Their experience as educators suggested there was a meaningful contribution adult educators could make to the preparation of

beginning K-12 teachers: - the concept of lifelong learning could be a significant component of the function and mission of schools of education; adult educators were very capable of enriching the lifelong learning agenda in undergraduate teacher preparation programs; and, within the concept of lifelong learning there was an adhesive that connected educators of all age groups including adult educators. How commonly shared was the view of adult education professors as ambassadors for lifelong learning in their schools? The literature reviewed earlier did not address this possible collaboration and the Commission of Professors did not appear to embrace such a view, but was it more prevalent than it seemed? Research Design A survey consisting of 22 questions was distributed in the spring of 1996 to a purposive sample of 237 individuals. The survey was divided into five sections: 1) the degree of emphasis placed on lifelong learning in schools (colleges) of education; 2) the role performed by adult education faculty in schools of education; 3) the relationship between faculty trained in adult education and faculty trained in other education disciplines; 4) some general perceptions of adult education faculty in schools of education; and, 5) demographic information. The adult education faculty members were selected from each of 79 universities identified as having academic study in adult education in the 1991 RE/ACE Journal Index for Adult and Continuing Education Research and/or in the CPAE membership list (1994). The second group were the deans of the schools of education of the 79 institutions that had been identified in the faculty group. Finally, 79 deans of schools of education who did not have adult education programs were selected using every 12th entry from the 1995 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Directory of Members. Forty-six percent (110) of individuals responded to the survey: 53% of adult education faculty (42); 46% of deans in schools of education with adult education faculty (37); and 39% of deans in schools of education without adult education faculty (31). Information was collected from 60 of the 79 schools identified as having adult education faculty and from 31 schools listed as not having adult education faculty. It was disappointing that less than 25% (19 institutions) of the 79 schools identified as having adult education faculty included responses from both faculty members and their deans. The data were analyzed using the SPSSX program. There was a significant difference between the deans and adult education faculty in positive response to the question: The concept of lifelong learning is included in the preparation program of beginning K-12 teachers (Chi-square = 28.5, with df=6. Phi=0.50882, Cramer's V = 0.35979, Lambda - 0.41). Seventy-six percent of the deans with adult education faculty and 71% of the deans without adult education faculty responded yes to the statement, while only 26% of the adult education faculty responded positively. There was a significant difference between the deans and adult education faculty in the first three questions (see Table1).

Table 1 Percentage of Yes Responses to Questions Pertaining to Lifelong Learning Emphasis in Schools of Education By Three Groups: Adult Education Faculty, Deans with Adult Education Faculty, Deans Without Adult Education Faculty

Question	Adult Ed Faculty	Deans With Ad.Ed. Faculty	Deans Without Ad.Ed. Faculty
1. Learning is viewed as a lifelong process	69%	95%	90%
2. An emphasis on learning across the lifespan is	47%	73%	74%

included in our mission statement			
3. The concept of lifelong learning [sic] is included in the preparation program of beginning K-12 teachers	26%	76%	71%
4. Course work exists that emphasizes learning across the lifespan	71%	81%	67%

Note: Percentages rounded up if value is above .5.

Having explored the emphasis given lifelong learning in their schools of education, respondents were next asked to define the concept itself. Over half of each group of respondents ventured some definition. The definitions clustered into the following responses: Lifelong learning is defined as:

1. **formal/informal learning, in a global sense, throughout the lifespan**
2. **learning to learn**
3. **continuous learning in a professional sense**
4. **adult education**
5. **other**

Formal/informal learning, in a global sense, throughout the lifespan was the most common definition reported by 42.9% of the adult education faculty, 48.6 % of deans with adult education faculty, and 29% of deans without adult education faculty. While the definitions were diverse there was little difference in definition of lifelong learning among the three groups. The responses were not overly different for the three groups and no relationship was found between the definition posed and responses to questions one through four.

Section two of the questionnaire looked at the presence of adult education faculty in schools or colleges of education. While 81% of adult education faculty responded that an academic unit with an adult education focus was in place, only 70% of the deans reported an adult education focused unit. Also, some deans identified as not having adult education faculty responded that they did. More interesting, 30% of the deans identified as having an adult education faculty did not perceive they had such a unit in their school. Generally, respondents noted adult education faculty devoted 80% of their teaching responsibility to graduate education and 13% to undergraduate teaching (although it was not known what the area of undergraduate teaching was.) Sixty-nine percent of the respondents noted adult education faculty do NO undergraduate teaching.

The next section of the questionnaire addressed the connection between adult education faculty to activities and units outside their discipline. When asked directly if adult education faculty participated in the preparation of beginning K-12 teaches, more than 70% of the respondents said

no or that they did not know. If respondents noted that adult education faculty did participate in the preparation of K-12 teachers they were further asked to check or note the nature of these activities. Of the small number of respondents (n=27), the most frequent activities identified by adult education faculty were curriculum development (21%), conducting in service (14%), teaching in K-12 program (19%), and supervising student teachers (21%).

Section four of the survey looked more broadly at attitudes regarding the general contributions of adult education faculty to schools of education. Using a Likert Scale, this section asked respondents to determine if they strongly agreed, agreed, were uncertain, disagreed or strongly disagreed with four statements. Over 80% of each group either agreed or strongly agreed with the first statement: Adult education faculty are in a unique position to strengthen the lifelong learning emphasis in schools of education. For the statement, "Adult education faculty have much to contribute to the general mission of schools of education," nearly 90% of the respondents from each group either agreed or strongly agreed. For the third statement: K-12 teacher preparation programs are likely enhanced when adult education faculty are involved in the curricular design of the programs, over 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. More interesting though was the distribution of undecided on this question: 24% of adult education faculty, 22% of deans with adult education faculty, and 23% of the deans without adult education faculty suggests that this subject may welcome further elaboration and discussion from all three respondent groups.

The last statement referred directly to the involvement of adult education faculty in the general preparation of future K-12 teachers: K-12 teacher preparation programs are likely enhanced when adult education faculty are included as teachers in the program. Of the total for all three groups, only 27% strongly agreed with this statement. Of adult education faculty, 36% were uncertain. Of the deans with adult education faculty, 43% were uncertain; while 23% of the deans without adult education faculty were uncertain. Space was also provided for additional comments about the involvement of adult education faculty in the preparation of K-12 teachers. Adult education faculty made more comments than either category of deans. Some comments reflected programs in transition where new ideas about adult education faculty involvement in undergraduate education courses and the preparation of beginning K-12 teachers were being considered. A few comments reflected that non-adult education faculty did not desire adult education faculty to broaden their "spheres of influence" in school of education affairs, while others stated schools of education would welcome increased adult education faculty involvement in K-12 teacher preparation.

Discussion

Data from the survey provided some expected and some unexpected answers to the researchers' questions about the roles commonly performed by adult education faculty. Why would this sample of deans view lifelong learning more a component of their schools of education than did adult education faculty? Perhaps deans are more keenly aware of the ramifications of politically correct answers, maybe they are more idealistic than adult education faculty, or maybe lifelong learning is viewed as a viable part of their school's mission. If lifelong learning is viewed by

deans as a component of their mission, why do adult education faculty significantly disagree with the deans? Is it possible that the concept of lifelong learning is included in the preparation program of beginning K-12 teachers, but adult educators are unaware of its inclusion since they are not involved in the program? It is clear that the disparity in these two views is worthy of future research.

One out of five adult education faculty indicated that an adult education focus did not exist in their school. Perhaps these individuals were reacting to a lack of emphasis and support given to their discipline, or they were presently the only adult education faculty member, or they were housed in a unit not identified as adult education. This may reflect on the marginality of adult education in those schools.

Almost one-third of the adult education faculty were participating in the preparation of K-12 teachers. Perhaps these involvements are fairly informal or perhaps adult education faculty are not informing or educating their deans about their involvement so the deans may not be aware of the faculty's participation. If one-third of adult education faculty are participating, why isn't more discussion and attention given to this role in adult education research and literature? Are adult education faculty members afraid to admit that they spend a significant portion of their time preparing K-12 teachers (a decidedly un-adult education position)?

In almost every instance deans with adult education faculty were more optimistic than the faculty members themselves about the importance of their role and contribution to their schools. The only exception was that 81% of the faculty and only 70% of the deans with adult education faculty responded that adult education theory and practice complements other education disciplines. While approximately 40 to 50% of adult education faculty collaborated with other education faculty in teaching graduate level courses, collaborated in research and creative endeavors, and felt they were viewed as important to the overall mission of their school, it is difficult to understand why so many adult education faculty remain undecided as to whether teacher preparation programs are likely enhanced when they are included as teachers in the programs.

What is the meaning and relevance of lifelong learning in schools (colleges) of education? Deans said more strongly than adult education faculty that the lifelong learning theme is meaningful and relevant in their schools. As to whether "lifelong learning" was included in the preparation of K-12 teachers, over 70% of deans said yes, but only 26% of adult education faculty agreed. The survey indicated that rhetoric supports the concept of lifelong learning but that actual practice may not reflect that support, at least from the point of view of adult education faculty.

How prevalent are adult education faculty in schools (colleges) of education? Tallies from adult education sources in 1991 and 1994 listed 79 academic adult education programs in place at U.S. universities while the 1995 list of American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education listed 719 teacher preparation programs; therefore, only about 11% of the schools of education with teacher preparation programs appear to also have adult education programs. The numbers from this study indicated that only 13% of the adult education faculty's time is spent participating in any undergraduate teaching. Only 29% of those adult education faculty said they participated in

teacher preparation programs. The survey also pointed out differences in perceptions of that participation between deans and adult education faculty.

Where adult education faculty are present, what is their level of connection to activities and units outside their discipline? Findings indicate there is minimal connection between adult education faculty and other school of education faculty. Very small numbers of adult education faculty, for example, indicated they were involved in teaching, curriculum development, in service and supervision of student teachers in undergraduate teacher preparation programs and even fewer deans were aware of their participation.

Implications for Adult Education Theory and Practice

Survey results indicate that adult education faculty are continuing their history of isolation as a discipline within schools of education. Whether that is intentional or not is hard to say. But it seems quite clear that such isolation is especially unfortunate when schools of education appear to share with adult education faculty a genuine interest in themes such as learner-centered education and learning across the lifespan. Be it arrogance or the lack of opportunity, the silence of adult education faculty when school of education colleagues discuss and implement "best practice" for teachers (from preschool to post secondary education) seems doubly regrettable: besides lacking a valuable forum to contribute their varied perspectives on learning and teaching, adult educators often remain uninformed of some marvelous and successful approaches to instruction. From the direct experience of the authors of this report, the bogeyman of "unenlightened" and "unsympathetic" K-12 educators seems more a figment of the imagination than reality. The time is long overdue for adult education programs to confront their apprehensions of and their isolation from K-12 education.

On a practical and self-serving note, given the current climate in higher education that often demands integration, accountability, justification for all academic disciplines, and a sufficient number of generated credit hours, the fate of adult education programs may greatly depend on how well the faculty hear and heed the signals addressed in this study: i.e., weave themselves into the very fabric that defines the mission of their school and generate enough credit hours in undergraduate education to support their discipline. Finally, if adult educators truly believe what they profess about lifelong learning, how can they not be involved in all aspects of education, including teacher preparation?

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