One Size Fits All? Reflecting on Local Program Planning Processes Among Three Iterations of the "Clemente" Program

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Abstract: This paper reports on the first stage of an ongoing research project: how three Canadian adult education programs, which share the common mission of providing access to the study of the liberal arts for non-traditional adult learners, have evolved over the past few years. We consider both the commonalities and variances across the programs to understand how each iteration's socio-political context has informed their interpretation of the common mission.

Introduction

For the past seven years, from September to May, adult learners from the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver have taken the bus twice a week to the University of British Columbia (UBC) to learn about such topics as the Philosophy of Plato, Art History and Canadian Literature. During these same months, Eastern Religions or the History of Southern Alberta might be the focus for learners who study twice a week through a program sponsored by the Mustard Seed street agency and St. Mary's University College in Calgary. Finally, twenty to thirty students come together in a University of Ottawa classroom and in the basement of First Baptist Church in downtown Ottawa to grapple with courses such as Contemporary Issues in Ethics or Critical Thinking Skills. These adult learners have widely varied characteristics that often include the following: an experience with homelessness, low-income, social isolation, long-term physical or mental illness and/or past negative experiences with the formal learning environment. While they share the common challenge of living below the poverty line, the majority of them have the ability to read a newspaper and most importantly they all have deep-seated passion for learning. For many of these learners this first taste of university is life changing.

> The course stoked Sharpe's thirst for learning. He devoured assignments, prowled the computer lab and university library stacks. As his confidence grew, Sharpe began to regain a foothold on his life. He started a running club in the Downtown Eastside and pressed Humanities 101 administrators to help him enter UBC as a regular student. (Pfeiff, 2003, p.122)

For Tom, his dreams changed. He has an identity again. He is a student and that's really important. Before he had no hope, no dreams, and he spiraled downward. Now he has an identity, a future and he is beginning to trust. At Storefront 101 in Calgary, "these people care about me and I was beginning to trust"(Participant transcript).

Three Canadian programs, *Humanities 101* in Vancouver, *Storefront 101* in Calgary and *Discovery University* in Ottawa, all grew from an idea that was developed by journalist and social critic Earl Shorris (1997). After researching the underlying causes of poverty in the United States, he became passionate about the pathway the studies of the liberal arts provided for those disenfranchised adults within our society. Because Shorris was so convinced about the link between access to the liberal arts and an inclusive just

society, he developed an inaugural course, entitled the Clemente course, in downtown New York, which focused on Plato and Philosophy. His philosophical premise is demonstrated in the following statement: "The humanities are a foundation for getting along in the world, for thinking, for learning to reflect on the world instead of just reacting to whatever force is turned again you. I think the humanities are one of the ways to become political … if you want real power, legitimate power, the kind that comes from the people and belongs to the people, you must understand politics. The humanities will help" (Shorris, 1997, p. 6).

His motivations as well as his reflections on launching this first course were profiled in an article Shorris wrote for *Harper's* magazine in 1997 launching a proliferation of programs both in the United States and internationally. Across Canada, news of Shorris' Clemente program struck a chord and there were those who were so moved they felt compelled to create such a program in their own community. Two students at UBC, a community developer with the City of Calgary and a minister and a few members in a downtown church in Ottawa felt a common compulsion to rectify the imbalance of access to the study of the humanities believing in its radical nature to empower learners.

This study reports on the first stage of an ongoing research project: how three programs, while sharing a common purpose, commenced and evolved independently over the past few years. We consider both the commonalities and variances across the programs to understand how each iteration's socio-political context has had an impact on the interpretation of the common mission: providing access to post-secondary education for non-traditional learners.

Review of the Literature

The over-arching philosophy of the Clemente program, common to all iterations in this study, is its orientation toward critical theory in working toward radical societal change. "Program planners influenced by radical education seek social, political and economic change in society or in their organization." (Rothwell and Cookson, 1997, p. 71). Iterations of the Clemente program represent a broader discourse in adult education; the challenge to move beyond the instrumental provision of programs. In her critique of adult education Cunningham (1993) compelled us to reach beyond the vocational thrust of our field where, "learning for earning is the goal" (p. 3) and to focus on education that creates a "strong civil society, which promotes the full participation of its citizens" (p. 6).

However as already indicated, despite the common agenda of societal change, these three iterations of the Clemente program represent the socio-political contexts of their respective communities. Indeed, as Cervero & Wilson (1994) indicated, adult educators always plan programs in context defined by a concrete set of power relationships and associated interests. Like Cervero & Wilson (1996) we believe that an educational program is never produced by a single planner acting outside of an institutional and social context. Rather these programs are produced by people with multiple interests working in specific institutional contexts that profoundly affect their context and form. By locating each of the iterations of the Clemente program within its social context, we are able to map and compare the complex world of human and institutional interests (Habermans, 1971). Emphasizing the contextual dimensions (Sork, 2000) of each program assist us in understanding the socio-political context of each

iteration of the Clemente program. Such dimensions include organizational or social settings in which planners work; the sociopolitical environment; economic values and priorities; physical facilities; the policy framework; history and traditions; the role of education; and cooperative and competitive relationships (p. 181).

Research Design

Case study methodology was chosen for this research because it is complex and multilayered and is particularly useful for its rich description and heuristic value (Yin, 1994). In addition, "when more than one case is studied, the researcher can conduct cross-case analyses for comparison purposes" (Rossman & Rallis,2003, p. 104-105). As a case study inquiry, this project relies on a variety of techniques for data gathering including a demographic survey instrument for students across the three programs, document analysis, individual interviews and focus groups with a variety of participants within each of the programs. While the complete process of data collection is occurring over a two-year period, this paper reports on phase one of the research project.

Phase one involved documenting the three regional programs' history, values, mandates, contexts, clients and program delivery. Program documents were reviewed and key informants, such as coordinators, committee members, tutors and learners were interviewed In developing both the profile of each program and the initial cross-program analysis, we used two program planning approaches. "A Question Based Approach to Planning" by Sork (2000) served as our central framework. As we focused on Sork's first question, "what is the context and learning community?" we incorporated the first component of Caffarella's (2002) "Interactive Model of Program Planning." This component, examining the organizational and wider context for programs, provided us with the necessary scope and depth to locate each program within its socio-economic context. In the following we present our preliminary thematic analysis.

Report of Findings

A Common Response to the Wider Environment

Access to knowledge and place. Caffarella (2004) indicated that the "more general economic, political, and social climate within which planners work is increasingly becoming more important" (p. 65). For each of these programs there is the common political agenda of access, as noted by the philosophy and aims statement of *Humanities 101*: "The lives of the wealthy and the lives of the poor differ also because one group has access to 'the radical character of the humanities' while the other does not. To that end, our goal is to offer education to people who have a love of learning and knowledge, regardless of their financial situation or academic history" (*Humanities 101* website).

In addition to underlying and common philosophy of access to knowledge, each program has also situated itself within a physical setting that is rich with symbolic power associated with the elite in our society -- universities. Learners in *Storefront 101* attend weekly classes at Nazarene University Alliance College; *Discovery University* learners have their lectures at the University of Ottawa and finally UBC hosts student of *Humanities 101*. As well, throughout a typical term, students access a variety of cultural institutions within their communities such as museums, theatres, and public and university libraries; the message being conveyed that they are legitimately entitled to access cultural institutions. Wilson (2001) spoke of symbolic power of place and in particular the university in planning another program, however the motivation was quite similar. "In terms of seeing this place as a site for constituting certain social practices, the

college campus represented certain significant connotations and values. We collectively presumed that by meeting physically in this place we could then become deliberately associated with the putative authority and legitimacy of academic enterprises" (p. 234).

A program for the common good. As we continue to situate the programs within the wider environment, we considered Caffarella's (2004) challenging political question: "Is what planners are doing for the "common good, or does it serve the needs of a limited few?" (p. 66). All three programs not only to serve the needs of learners but they also serve the needs of society as they seek to bring knowledge and personal understanding of marginalized adult learners to those in positions of power and privilege. Those within the broader society who experience direct benefit from this program include the instructors and tutors who engage with learners. Across all three programs, instructors are most commonly faculty members within the one of the local universities. An instructor with *Storefront 101* program spoke about the high value he placed on his own learning journey while teaching a psychology course: "My conclusion is that it is the teachers and the Profs who derive the lion's share of benefits in terms of learning, growth and satisfaction … For me, teaching the course was an awesome experience. It was a privilege, a blessing, a tremendous set of satisfactions, and a time of accelerated growth and learning" (*Storefront 101*, 2004, working notes)". Partnering with the instructors across each of the programs are the tutors who come together with the learners, weekly, for two hours. Each tutor works with a student or a small student group to review course material, professor lecture notes and/or course assignments. In *Humanities 101*, tutors are UBC undergraduates and graduates and in *Discovery University* and *Storefront 101*, tutors are adults from all walks of life who want to support their program. A tutor from *Storefront 101* demonstrates at a personal level the benefits that reach beyond the students. "It seems like it's always a helpful reminder that just makes it a little bit easier to recognize your own blessings, to find genuine gratitude for the good things that you got in your own life. The challenges that they have and, yet, find it within themselves to carry on, generally to be part of a development program, a personal development program like this, I find it pretty impressive" (participant transcript).

Variances in Program Interpretation: The Organizational Environment of Each Program

The ripple effect of initial frame factors. As demonstrated in the previous theme, these three programs have a common agenda in responding to the inequality of access to knowledge and place through the provision of an entry level humanities program for disenfranchised and marginalized adults within our society. Subtle yet real differences emerge as one looks internally at the organizational context of each program. Each program has its own conception story associated with a small group of people who shaped the program through their own interpretation of the original Clemente program. These initial designers of each program introduced "*frame factors* [which] can be anything that limits the options and actions available to those planning programs. … So analyzing the context includes understanding frame factors … and being critically aware of the degree to which frame factors may unnecessarily restrict their options and choices" (p. 181). For example, a pivotal frame factor, which launched a series of domino program planning decisions and activities in each program, was the decision to either make the program a university level non-credit or credit program. Both the *Humanities 101* program and *Discovery University* determined that their respective programs would be non-credit. The chair of the planning committee from the *Discovery University* program

explains why they chose the non-credit path. "We tried to move toward the credit area. In fact that was one of my goals at the very beginning, you know to have this as a transition … our committee just from the outset just said no … that's not what we should be doing. We should just be focusing it on non-credit and open it up to anybody" (participant transcript). In contrast, *Storefront 101* determined that for those students who wish to and are able to meet introductory level university course requirements, they should be allowed to receive a 100 level entry course credit as early program designers wanted the students to have the more formalized opportunity to access university education.

      As a result of the credit/non-credit frame factor, the type of partnership and associated organizational structures between various programs and their respective university institutions has varied. For example, *Storefront 101* has established and has sustained a more formal relationship with the course crediting institution: St. Mary's University College. Course outlines need to be formally approved through a university committee process. In contrast, in *Discovery University*, while University of Ottawa program committee members select the professor and provide the classroom, course outlines and course content are not vetted through a formal university process. Finally, the non-credit *Humanities 101* program, while directly under the umbrella of UBC, has added one additional programmatic difference in relation to the other two programs as noted within the UBC course calendar (2006-2007): "*Humanities 101* offers an intensive survey of a variety of subjects in the liberal arts and social sciences…" In positioning themselves to present a survey course, the program content is not situated within a course governance process and instructors within this program commit themselves to developing and presenting their specific topic over a maximum of three evenings. In *Discovery University*, instructors commit themselves to a ten week term and *Storefront 101*, in turn, requires instructors to commit to a typical thirteen week term, and the associated grading associated with determining whether a student would be eligible for a 100 level grade.

      Who's at the table: Working committee membership. According to Sork (2000) additional key contextual information imbedded with the planning process is understood by looking at structural factors such as staffing, the system of formal organizational authority and funding. Examining the working committee membership and their responsibilities of each program reveals some further internal contextual differences regarding the above structural factors. Sitting around the table for *Discovery University* are volunteer tutors and volunteer program administrators as well as members from a number of community agencies. Presently, there are no students on this working committee. It appears that this is an active committee where power is shared equally especially since no one particular agency at the table is funding the program; nor is anybody employed to attend to implementation details. Indeed each person has a function to play in order to animate the program from referring students, to coordinating meals, to providing university classroom space and instructors.

      At the *Humanities 101* planning committee members are past and present students of the program as well as three paid part-time employees of the program which is fully funded by UBC. While the Faculty of Arts provides consistent and stable funding for the program, preferring a hands-off approach, they are not at the planning table. Instead two part-time paid program coordinators and a program administrator attend to the details of delivering the program and bring agenda items to the committee for advice.

Finally, the membership of the *Storefront 101* working committee reflects its evolution over the past five years. Members include past and present students, former instructors and representatives from a variety of community agencies and post-secondary institutions. While the Mustard Seed, a downtown community agency addressing the needs of poor and homeless Calgarians, has always been involved in the program, their position at the table has now shifted as they have taken on full-funding of the program by incorporating it within their roster of educational programs, as well as staffing the program with a part-time coordinator. In addition, because this program provides the option of university level credit, a faculty member from St. Mary's University is present... In all correspondence and posters that profile the program, *Storefront 101* is formally known as a partnership program between the Mustard Seed and St. Mary's University/College. As the tasks of the working committee have perceptibly shifted over the past few years from an operations and fund raising group to more of an advisory committee, power differentials also exist within the committee as both St. Mary's University College and the Mustard Seed have critical roles of formalized course governance and funding/program animators respectively.

Conclusions

In comparing *Humanities 101, Storefront 101*, and *Discovery 101* programs, the intent is not to evaluate and rank order these programs. Rather the goal is to more deeply understand their program planning processes and to realize how each context has informed the evolution of the three programs. For the program planners within of each these iterations and in general, it is our hope that by explicitly surfacing and critically assessing the implications of frame factors the deeper ethical question can be reflected upon: "Can I construct a convincing moral justification for doing it this way?"(Sork, 2000, p. 186).

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