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Elizabeth J. Tisdell

Robin Redmon Wright
rrw12@psu.edu

Edward W. Taylor

Perdeta Bush

Anne Greenawalt

See next page for additional authors

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Author Information

Elizabeth J. Tisdell, Robin Redmon Wright, Edward W. Taylor, Perdeta Bush, and Anne Greenawalt

Adult Education Faculty and Programs in North America: Faculty Background, Work, and Satisfaction

Elizabeth J. Tisdell, Robin Redmon Wright, Edward W. Taylor, Perdeta Bush, Anne Greenawalt,
Penn State University—Harrisburg

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Abstract: Through a textual analysis of websites of Adult Education Graduate Programs and a quantitative survey of North American Adult Education faculty, this study examined: background information about Adult Education faculty and programs; the nature of faculty work interests, motivations and satisfaction; and involvement with the Commission of Professors of Adult Education.

We work in a changing academic landscape. Numerous scholars have discussed how academic disciplines change in light of the impact of larger cultural forces (Bender & Schorske 1998), and Cervero and Wilson (2006) suggest that adult educators make decisions about programs, including curricular changes, by negotiating power and interest among multiple stakeholders. Some of these stakeholders include students, faculty, the local community, and businesses that can serve as funders in a globalized capitalist market. Professional organizations also provide accreditation or guidance on curricular development in changing times (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002). Administrators and planners negotiate these multiple stakeholder interests as they make programmatic decisions, which affect the way academic disciplines develop, as well as faculty work and job satisfaction. Such processes are at play in all disciplines but the focus here is the *academic discipline of Adult Education (AE) and AE faculty in North America*.

Numerous authors over the years have discussed the professionalization process and interdisciplinary scope in the field, particularly in the two more recent Handbooks (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Wilson & Hayes, 2000), and Greenwood et al. (2002) note the important role that professional associations play in the change processes of fields. But there is little actual data on the state of the field, on AE faculty work and satisfaction, or on faculty relationships with professional organizations. Recently, Sonstrom, Rachal, and Mohn (2012) conducted a study of how AE doctoral programs in North America attended to the 2008 Standards of the Commission of Professors of AE (CPAE) by examining AE curricula on 44 program websites. While their study gives us some information about AE Graduate Programs in North America, it does not give us an overview of the field as a whole, or tell us much about AE faculty, the nature of the programs themselves, or faculty work and satisfaction. *Hence the purpose of this study was primarily to find out: background information about AE faculty and programs; and the nature of faculty work, interests, motivations and satisfaction. It also sought to find the extent of faculty knowledge and involvement with the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE).*

Theoretical Framework

The intersecting theoretical frameworks that inform this study are related to knowledge construction in the field, as it intersects with the negotiation of varying powers and interests (Cervero & Wilson, 2006), in the way programs and curricula are designed over time in light of: the changing forces of academia; the role of professional organizations in the negotiation

process, and the faculty development literature. Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) in theorizing the role of professional associations in the change processes of disciplines note three important roles of professional organizations: “delineating the domain of a profession” (p. 62); “monitoring compliance with...sanctioned expectations” (p. 62); and bringing in ideas from the multiple communities of its members. Academic disciplines dealing with such expectations from guiding organizations initiate changes in their curricula in light of these multiple influences, and can engage in doing so based on the demands of professional organizations and their larger cultural forces and influences. For example, McCleary-Jones, Smith, and Carrithers (2013) recently discuss how this has played out in collaborations on a curricular revision project in light of the guidelines initiated by the Quality and Safety Education in Nursing Association, who developed new guidelines in response to the Affordable Care Act. Bourdieu (1986) would suggest that the processes of negotiating changes to comply with these larger forces are dependent on how individuals and organizations deal with multiple forms of capital including social, cultural, and economic capital.

This study is also concerned with and informed by faculty satisfaction literature. Many studies dealing with faculty satisfaction draw theoretically on Johnsrud and Heck’s (1998) faculty workload model, which focuses on the relationship among faculty priorities, their sense of institutional support, and their perceived quality of life. They pose a model based on prior research that showed that faculty were often quite satisfied with their professions, but not necessarily with their institutions, and examined what could be done about it. There have been numerous studies and faculty satisfaction surveys developed based on this and other models that inform the design of this study (August & Waltman, 2004; Baldwin, Lunceford, & Vanderlinden, 2005; Morrison, Rudd, & Picciano, 2011, Rosser, 2004), though none in AE. Many such studies focus on the relationship between demographic factors and satisfaction and show that, men are more satisfied than women, that white faculty are more satisfied than faculty of color, and those with tenure are generally more satisfied than those without it. Baldwin et al (2005) in their study on middle-career faculty, found early mid-career faculty (aged 40-49), are most challenged, and more dissatisfied than colleagues who were in earlier or later career stages. Many at this stage have more administrative responsibilities and have less time for research, as well as face personal challenges (family, children) typical of the this stage of life. In any case, this literature and theory dealing with faculty satisfaction also informed this study.

Methodology

This study of AE professors and programs was guided by Creswell’s (2003) suggestions for mixed methods research using textual analysis and survey development. It began by searching previous lists of AE programs made available through CPAE, doing an Internet search for AE programs, and then doing a textual analysis of these websites. Lists were compiled of universities that had Graduate Programs, and of their faculty email addresses. Next, we developed an online survey to be sent out to faculty teaching in Graduate Programs in AE and related areas. The survey itself was then pilot tested with 14 faculty from the US and Canada, and then revised in light of their comments. In the end, there were 50 questions on the survey focusing on five major areas – the identity of the educator and general information about programs; faculty work and interests; faculty motivation and satisfaction; involvement with the Commission of Professors of AE (CPAE), and demographics. The link to the survey was sent out to the Commission of Professors list-serve, and to faculty emails located in the textual analysis

portion of the study. Faculty members were also encouraged to send the link to the survey to those for whom it would be relevant.

Findings

The textual analysis of websites conducted in September of 2013 found 77 Programs in the US and Canada, and 224 faculty names (136 women and 88 men) associated with Graduate Programs in Adult and Higher Education or related areas. While this is not necessarily a completely accurate picture of program faculty, demographics, and content given the limitations of websites (ie, not being updated, not providing complete information on faculty status), it does give us some idea of the size and scope of the field. The survey findings are discussed below.

General Demographics and Faculty Roles

There were 226 people that logged onto the survey who were associated with AE higher education, though 18 of these are retired, leaving 207 respondents currently working in higher education. Of those who indicated current employment, 81.2% are from the USA and 18.2% from Canada. Of those who indicated their gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation nearly 2/3 are women (64.7%); 71.2% are white, 8.8% are Black or African American; 5.3 % are Asian/American; 4% are Latino/a or Hispanic, 9% did not indicate their racial/ethnic identity, and the remaining used some other descriptor. Ninety-three percent indicated they are heterosexual. 26% are under the age of 50, with 50% between the age of 50 and 64, and approximately 15% over 65. (9.5% didn't indicate their age).

Of those who indicated their role, 55.3% are tenured faculty members (11.1% also have an administrative role), while another 15.9% are on the tenure track. The remaining 28% either have a yearly contract or work in another faculty/administrative capacity. More are at the professor level (30.1%) or at the associate professor level (30.5%), with 19% at the assistant level, and 9.3% at the lecturer level.

Program and Faculty Interests

We were interested in the exact names of these programs. Thirty-four percent of the program names were "Adult Education", 11% were "Adult and Higher Education" with most of the remaining 55% having the term "adult" in the program title. The survey results indicated that 42.5% teach in programs that offer the PhD, 28.8 % that offer the EdD or DEd, 47.8% that offer an M.A. or M.S, and 32.3% that offer the M.Ed. In addition, 26.1% offer Graduate Certificates in AE or a related area.

The top four areas of faculty interest out of 21 choices along with an additional "write-in" category were Experiential Learning (43.3%) Transformative Learning (41.6%), critical theory/pedagogy (39.4%), and workplace learning (36.3%). The top four issues out of a listed choice of 16 choices with an additional "write-in" category of "the most pressing issues facing adults today" were social justice (43.8%), diversity and equity (31.4%), critical thinking (29.6), and work/employment issues (28.3%).

Faculty Work and Teaching

The survey asked about whether or not faculty teach online, with 17.3% indicating that they do not teach online at all, while 13.3% teach in an exclusively online program, and 25.2% indicate they teach at least one completely online class per year. In addition, 15% indicate that

they teach in a hybrid format where at least 40% of content is online, and another 10.2% indicated that some course content is online.

Most faculty also indicated that they are engaged in research, and 54 % indicated they have received funding for research internally from their institutions; 46.5% have also received external grants as the primary investigator, and 46.9% have been a co-researcher on a funded research project. Approximately 20% have not worked on a funded research project.

CPAE Issues and Standards

Only 39.8 % of respondents are on the CPAE listserv, and 40.3% indicated that they had never been involved with CPAE. This suggests that we increased our response rate considerably by sending the link to the survey to *all* the AE faculty we found online regardless of whether or not they were on the listserv. From a curricular perspective, slightly more than half (53%) were familiar with CPAE's Academic Standards for Graduate Programs. However, nearly all respondents indicated that much of the curriculum conforms to the 12 recommended content guidelines of CPAE for AE programs in that 6 of the 12 content areas were above a 3.0 (a "3" indicates that it was a "highly" included component, and a 4 indicates it is a "very highly" included component in the curriculum, while a 2 is "somewhat" and a 1 is "not at all"). These most valued curricular content areas (in order of the mean likert scale score) were: adult learning and development (3.41); introduction to the nature, function and scope of AE (3.30); AE program processes (3.21); overview of educational research (3.17); appropriate depth of qualitative or quantitative research methodology coursework (3.12); and historical, philosophical, and sociological foundations of AE (3.10).

By contrast, and despite their emphasis in CPAE, the remaining six recommendations were included in the curriculum somewhere between "somewhat" (2.0) and "highly (3.0), but all the remaining were lower than 3.0. These include: study of leadership (2.91); specialty courses relevant to unique program and faculty strengths (2.83); in-depth analysis of social, political and economic forces that have shaped the foundations and discourse within AE (2.78); analysis of globalization and international issues or perspectives in AE (2.54); analysis and study of the changing role of technology in AE (2.52); study of issues of policy in relation to AE (2.38).

Faculty Salaries

Not surprisingly, 36 or 15.9% of respondents did not answer the question about salary. Of the 21 administrators with rank, 38% earn more than \$120K per year, and 67% earn more than \$100K. Of the Full Professors (N=54), 26% earn more than \$120K, 54% more than \$100K, and 70% >\$90K. Of the Associate Professors (N=61), 15% earn more than \$100K, 48% between 70 and 90K, with the remaining earning less than \$70K. Of the Assistant Professors (N=41), 5% earn more than \$90K and 5% earn less than \$50K, with 73% earning between \$50K and \$70K. Salaries for Canadian faculty were higher than for faculty in the US by dollar figure, but one needs to keep in mind the difference between the Canadian and US dollar, though we did ask respondents to consider their salary in terms of US dollars.

Faculty Satisfaction and Motivation

In terms of issues related to faculty satisfaction, the mean scores on a 4-point Likert scale for faculty collegiality with departmental colleagues was 2.89; 2.73 for the extent they feel supported by their immediate supervisor; 2.64 for the extent they feel supported by their colleagues within the university; and 2.46 for the extent they feel their program is supported by higher administration in the university. Faculty were most satisfied with having control over

what goes on in their classrooms (3.31) and least satisfied with the time to do research (2.05). But overall, they were satisfied with their jobs with an overall mean Likert score of 2.77 (“highly” satisfied is 3.0) though, not surprisingly, those with tenure were more satisfied than those without. In terms of what motivated them in their job, they were most motivated by their job flexibility (3.33), and least motivated by how much they earn (1.94).

Discussion

The findings of the study present some interesting data on AE faculty in North America, and may have implications for the future direction of the field. First, based on the quantitative findings of the study, it appears that most faculty are relatively happy in their jobs and feel some sense of support from their colleagues. This might suggest that to some degree they are able to negotiate power and interest (Cervero & Wilson, 2006) on behalf of their programs to garner some capital (Bourdieu, 1986), at least enough to have their programs continue to develop. *How* they do this could only be determined by a qualitative study, but the findings of the survey indicate that they are moderately successful in doing so.

The findings in regard to the relationship with the Commission of Professors of Adult Education are quite interesting. While 40.3% of respondents indicated that they have never been involved with CPAE, 48.1% have attended a CPAE meeting, which might suggest that CPAE is at least meeting some of the needs of faculty. Further, while only 53% were familiar with CPAE’s curricular standards, it appears that most programs include more than half of the components recommended in the standards, particularly in program emphasis on adult learning and development, an overview of the field, and issues in program planning. However there is less of an emphasis on the use of technology, or on globalization and international issues in the field than one might expect in an increasingly globalized economic and academic reality. In any event, Greenwood et al. (1998) suggest that the purpose of professional organizations is to delineate “the domain of a profession” and to monitor “compliance with...sanctioned expectations” (p. 62), and results suggest that CPAE has been somewhat successful in suggesting curricular standards and serves this role.

In making sense of the work satisfaction among the AE faculty, it is important to keep in mind that most of the participants who completed this survey, using Brim’s (2001) definition, were at the age of late midlife (50-59) and late faculty life (60 and older). Fifty percent were between the age of 50 and 64 and 35% were 60 and over. However, despite the higher age of the AE faculty, 48% of the participants had less than 15 years or more at their current institution. This implies that even though most participants were in late career based on their age, many were in mid-career based on their years of service. This supports our experience that suggests most AE doctoral students are returning students with several years in the workforce and varied academic disciplinary backgrounds. Unlike those in the Baldwin et al (2005) study at a similar career stage who were more dissatisfied than colleagues at early or later stages, AE faculty who were at a similar stage were quite satisfied with their roles, even though they similarly were dissatisfied with the lack of time to do research. This high degree of satisfaction compared to their peers in other disciplines might be explained by the fact that even though by age they are in mid-career, by length of service they are in early career. The impact of age and career stage requires further analysis to better understand the implications.

While the findings of the study need to be interpreted with caution, given the limitations of any survey instrument, there are some implications of particular interest that merit further study. For example, faculty indicated that the four most pressing issues for the adult populations

that our discipline serves are social justice (43.8%), diversity and equity (31.4%), critical thinking (29.6), and work/employment (28.3%). Addressing these issues in our curricula and classrooms may require risk-taking, as these issues are rarely the focus of the capitalist institutions within which we labor. Programs focused on these areas would promote political and social activism and recognize that, “a small minority of individuals . . . disproportionately enjoy massive amounts of wealth, and also direct how the majority of resources are to be deployed” (Brookfield & Holst, 2011, p. 12). It would mean promoting policies that are “not tied not to enhancing U.S. competitiveness within the global marketplace, but to the creation of more meaningful work” (Brookfield & Holst, 2011, p. 18).

This study suggests several interesting implications for further research. While it does present some concrete data on who faculty are, and some of their work and satisfaction levels, it doesn't present any data on why they think what they think or how they negotiate power and interest on behalf of their programs, as that can only be gleaned from asking them through qualitative interviews or focus groups. Indeed, this can be gleaned through further study. But this piece of survey research is an important step to providing a better understanding of our discipline overall.

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