

ABSTRACT

A MODEL COLLEGE FOR THE WORKING ADULT

Neil R. Cronin, Dean
School of New Resources, College of New Rochelle

The School of New Resources of the College of New Rochelle has developed an approach to adult education which increases access to higher education, and provides a sound curriculum development process involving student participation.

The basic assumption underlying the theories and practices of the program is that the adult learner is different. A distinction is made between pedagogy and andragogy.

From this assumption the program develops form and substance consistent with the observations made over the past seven years working exclusively with adults.

Life styles, experiential learning, work schedules, life stages, self-esteem are all considered in preparing an easier access to the learning process. A different method of curriculum development, recognition of life experience, use of a seminar format, relating of life, experiences and learning, special staff selection and training, special attention to scheduling, moving the campuses to the adult communities, are all examples of the attempt to develop a non-traditional adult centered program.

The School of New Resources has an enrollment of 3,000 at six locations. The locations range from middle class suburbia to the low income urban areas of the South Bronx in New York City. There are programs at a union headquarters, hospitals, large apartment complexes and locations for retirees.

The delivery of educational services to these adults - all of whom are pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in liberal arts - is non-traditional, effective, frequently assessed and has become a replicable model for other institutions in the United States.

A MODEL COLLEGE FOR THE WORKING ADULT

Neil R. Cronin, Dean
School of New Resources, College of New Rochelle

THE THEORY:

The School of New Resources is a quasi-autonomous school within the College of New Rochelle in New Rochelle, New York. The program, leading to a baccalaureate in the liberal arts, is exclusively for adults.

The School of New Resources recognizes that its population of over 3,000 adults learns differently than the traditional college age students; pedagogy is replaced andragogy. The simple statement is the core, the root, around which the program is designed. Yet, however basic this philosophical premise may appear, the mission, goals and objectives of the School are expansive in content and form.

The school seeks to provide a high-quality academic program that is accessible to working adults, responsive to their self-expressed learning needs and interests, liberating in its form, and useful in its content. It shares with all undergraduate liberal arts institutions the goals of introducing students to bodies of knowledge, increasing their ability to communicate clearly, heightening their interest in intellectual, cultural, aesthetic and social matters, developing analytical and critical faculties and enhancing their ability to identify and integrate values. In addition, the School attempts to create the circumstances in which its students may reflect on and explore the meaning of their experiences and apply their learning to their lives. Further, it seeks to stimulate an on-going interest and need to find out what it is they need and want to know. They are encouraged to

relate experience and learning throughout their lives.

The School, one of four of the College of New Rochelle, was founded in 1972; sixty-eight years after the Sisters of the Order of St. Ursula founded the College of New Rochelle as a liberal arts college for young women. The School of New Resources (SNR) shares in the original commitment and mission of the College of New Rochelle (CNR) but delivers its education to a male and female clientele and in a way particularly meaningful to adult learners.

As does John Dewey, the SNR believes that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of experience and education. The focus on the liberal arts, at times seemingly incongruous for adults with career mobility as an objective, is consistent with the SNR philosophy of taking adults seriously and expecting adults to take their educational process as seriously. All components of the program reflect the inherent responsibility of the student to perceive each experience within the academic process as a learning experience. Designing a program of study is in itself an academic learning experience.

The SNR is, then, formed around the belief that, within the inclusion of adults as co-determinants of their educational process, within the counsel, consent, cooperation and creative initiative of the mature student, no real long range success is possible in the art of androgogy.

The New Resources model is based on several non-traditional assumptions about the education of adults. First, it presupposes that the educational structures appropriate to the preparation of younger adults for participation in the life of the community are not suited to those persons who have for some time engaged in that process. Thus the SNR adapts its resources to the

strengths and needs of the adult learner. Put otherwise, the school defines its educational resources in terms of the specific possibilities of the communities which surround it. Within the general framework, each campus of the School of New Resources can be thought of as an extension of a specific community.

THE APPROACH:

Curriculum Development Process:

It is the belief of the SNR that the Curriculum Development process is the essence of the program. It is curriculum development that most clearly distinguishes the SNR from traditional institutions of higher education serving the adult population. Adjusting traditional education to adults is one way to serve their education needs but this approach still leaves the student somewhat passive as the recipient of an education which others design. Our primary goal is to assist the student in becoming an independent adult learner; to involve him/her in the experience of education beyond the classroom. To support self-actualized learning, a great degree of the responsibility of the learning design is placed in the hands of the students in a way that assists the student not only in gaining the skills and knowledge of a liberal arts education but which also helps the student to acquire the skill of planning and implementing his or her own learning process. Thus course titled and descriptions can and should change from one semester to the next depending on the interests expressed. In order to accomodate this vitality and flexibility, the SNR employs an "open" faculty to teach its seminars. Faculty are chosen for their expertise in their fields, for their interest and ability to teach adults, and for their willingness and understanding of the seminar format. The policy

of an open (or adjunct) faculty has made it possible to recruit first rate faculty from the New York Metropolitan area.

Independent Study:

Integral to the flexibility of the curriculum development process is the Independent Study opportunity. Those students concerned with a specific area, whether it be research-oriented or skills-oriented, may contract for Independent Study. Working with an expert-mentor, students are then able to involve themselves in a project that might not be of interest to a group of fifteen students.

Life Experience Portfolio:

The SNR is recognizing that significant learning takes place outside of the classroom allows credit to be granted for life experience. The student is encouraged to write a self-reflective autobiography which documents the various learning experiences which have been gained prior to entering the academic environment. This Life Experience Portfolio presupposes the credit value of life-long learning, so long as that learning can be translated into a critical and reflective level of self and social awareness. The academic credits within the program are awarded on the basis of the portfolio in which the student not only described but analyzes the formative experiences and the skills, values and insight generated by these experiences. In a sense, the Life Experience Portfolio is the result of an academic exercise which assists the adult student in the liberal arts to answer the three questions put to our generation by T.S. Eliot:

Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

Open Admissions:

The School of New Resources seeks to offer its educational opportunities to the adults who have been bypassed or never had the chance to involve themselves in higher education. By extending or increasing the accessibility of the program, the SNR is fulfilling its mission and the mission of the College of New Rochelle.

In order to provide the environment necessary for adult learners to both enter and succeed in higher education, the SNR has developed an open-admissions policy that attempts to eliminate some of the problems inherent in open-admissions.

Structural Model:

The School of New Resources operates five distinct campuses (all authorized by the Board of Regents of the State of New York to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree). In addition, there are two extension centers which feed into these campuses and which will become, eventually, full campuses. These campuses and extensions are in the heart of the distinct communities they serve. The New Rochelle campus on the College of New Rochelle Campus serves a suburban community; the Co-op City Campus, located in a neighborhood center, is in the largest apartment complex (pop. 60,000) in the United States; the South Bronx Campus is situated in the heart of the South Bronx in New York City (the site of much controversy and interest); the District Council 37 Campus is located at the headquarters of District Council 37, AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) and is restricted to members of that Union (primarily composed of New York City employees); a fifth campus is located at the New York

Theological Seminary for church related students; and two extensions are in Brooklyn and Harlem. All operations are chosen carefully to enable students of, or in, a community (be it geographical, psychological, social or economic) to feel comfortable in their surroundings, comfortable with their co-learners and to be within reasonable distance from their homes.

Once secure in their academic environment, accessibility is increased by virtue of scheduling (evenings or days) and the six credit seminar. All seminars meet once a week for four hours for an eighteen week semester and grant six credits. The majority of students take two courses and therefore carry twelve credits per semester. The twelve credits or full-time status serve the student in two ways: it allows him or her to be eligible for financial assistance (Federal, State and College based financial aid) and, more importantly, the one hundred and twenty credits required for the B.A. is possible within the traditional time framework of four years.

Language Arts:

Strong counseling support and services are offered. Every student seeking admission to the School of New Resources is required to have a personal interview with a professional staff member. This interview assures that the student is cognizant of the inherent responsibilities of attending college; its time constraints, its rigors, the effect it will have on their family and social life, the possibilities, the limitations, the amount of work involved, the kind of program it is. The student is then, with the help of the counselor, able to make an intelligent and knowledgeable decision about whether or not it is the right time and place for higher education. We seek to prevent the student from failing or becoming intimidated or disenchanted with formal

education. This effort is reinforced by a variety of language arts programs and services. A new addition to the program is a telecourse series on local cable TV and on PBS. In addition to credit bearing courses, the SNR offers non-credit course workshops in reading, writing and library skills. To further serve the need frequently found in adult open admissions programs, the language arts departments provide individual tutoring, special seminars, and peer tutoring for the entire time that the student is enrolled in the SNR. Armed with growing confidence and new found skills, the student may then proceed to enjoy the pleasures and rewards of academic life secure in the knowledge that the chances of succeeding are not limited by a lack of information or an incomplete education. It should be noted that not all adult students require this assistance, some are able to assume a full load of credit bearing courses immediately. Placement testing is administered to assist staff and students in deciding the appropriate course of action. Through all of this, the adult student develops an increased motivation and commitment to completing their undergraduate program at the School of New Resources.

Core Courses:

It should be noted that while entrance requirements are minimized, exit requirements are maximized. The majority of students who then move into the full liberal arts program, pursue a series of Core Seminars along with their co-designed courses. The Core courses introduce the student to the benefits of interdisciplinary studies (these Core courses introduce the students to sociology, science, literature, history, philosophy, etc.). The first Core course is called, Experience, Learning and Identity. This seminar attempts to help the adult student to get into the practice

of analytical reading and thinking, group discussion and critical reading. It has a leit motif directed at raising the learners awareness of his/her role in the educational process based on a recognition of the potential value of "real world" experience.

In the whole process of developing the SNR model, the needs of the institution, the community and the learner are all kept in careful balance. The basic needs assessment of the institution is expressed in an Aims and Mission statement supported by a List of Objectives. Community needs, e.g., the needs of the social community in an apartment complex, the economic and political needs of the union community, the very particular needs of a retiree group, the cultural and social needs of an ethnic group, and the value awareness needs of a religious community, are all carefully assessed and reflected in the SNR program. Learner needs are drawn from the student on a continual basis from the orientation sessions, through formal and informal counseling, by working with the student on developing functional goals, by reviewing his/her Learning Journal and, finally, by offering a full semester course entitled, Designing the Future.

The Administration:

To administer the diverse programs of the School of New Resources, the School has developed a structure somewhat similar to the organizational structure of the College of New Rochelle as a whole; the College of New Rochelle is organized in a university structure; each school functions autonomously with an Academic Dean responsible for all academic and fiscal matters and reporting to the Provost. The School of New Resources employs staff at all its campuses and extensions. Generally, Language Arts Director, Administrative Assistant, and clerical support. When necessary,

additional professional staff are also hired to perform specific functions (i.e., Coordinator of English as a Second Language Program). All staff possess proper academic credentials (usually an advanced degree and significant experience in adult higher education), and teach one seminar per semester. In this way, administrative staff are kept in constant touch with the academic and student-centered dimensions of the program. Since the SNR employs few fulltime faculty, it is crucial that the administrators be academically oriented and credentialed professionals who are able to evaluate the program from both the administrative and academic perspectives. They must oversee over 400 (total) adjunct faculty each semester and work with the students in evaluating the success of each seminar.

Evaluation Procedures:

Ongoing self-assessment, evaluation and program refinement have become an intergal part of this non-traditional program. Administratively, the reporting system functions as an on-going evaluation of tasks. Academically, students, faculty and staff develop evaluation systems and procedures to evaluate student performance and progress, faculty performance, curriculum effectiveness, counseling effectiveness, language arts effectiveness, and the School's responsiveness to students, the community and the school's mission, goals and objectives.

Since traditional evaluation procedures are sometimes not applicable to non-traditional education, particularly non-traditional adult higher education, the SNR has developed evaluation procedures suitable to its program and student body. These evaluation procedures have been accepted by the appropriate state agencies and by a team of outside consultants from the

academic arena who were asked to help the School through its self-evaluation process. Such mechanisms as an on-going student evaluation by faculty, anecdotal evaluation from graduates, statistical data on graduate school acceptance and success, attrition statistics, faculty training and sharing seminars, etc., are part of the continual evaluation system.

CONCLUSION:

The open admissions policy, special language arts support, student/staff designed curriculum, small seminar mode of instruction, life experience recognition, the availability of independent study, peer counseling and tutoring, schedules, hours and locations convenient to the adult, the six-credit model are all tested and proved components essential to the program.

By recognizing that the adult learner is significantly different from the younger adult, the SNR develops better means to increase access to higher education, encourages the student to join staff and faculty as partners in the learning process and develops the interest and attitude needed for life-long learning. The SNR is ready for the cultural and educational shock of futurism.

If andragogy implies a philosophy or theory of learning, the School of New Resources program has developed an efficacious approach. The success of the graduates, the continued growth of the School and the consistent evidence of attaining our mutually developed objectives attest to the success of the School. Findings demonstrate that a program specifically designed for the strengths and needs of the adult - exclusively for the adult - is the most effective manner in which to deliver education services to that population.