Lifelong Learning in Institutions of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined the provision and development of lifelong learning within institutions of higher education in British Columbia and explored some of the institutional characteristics that enable or discourage it. The results suggest that most lifelong learning opportunities are directed toward enhancing employment and career opportunities rather than citizenship development. Yet, as the demand for higher education and the number of adult learners enrolling in programs continue to increase, these institutions are well-positioned to develop new forms of education that acknowledge, accommodate, and respect the concerns and interests of lifelong learners.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cette étude, nous avons examiné la fourniture et le développement de l'apprentissage continu à l'intérieur des institutions études supérieures en Colombie-Britannique, et avons exploré quelques-unes des caractéristiques institutionnelles l'encourageant ou le décourageant. Nos résultats suggèrent que la plupart des occasions d'apprentissage continu visent la promotion des opportunités d'emploi et de carrière plutôt que le développement de la citoyenneté. Cependant, lorsque la demande pour les études supérieures et le nombre d'apprenants adultes s'inscrivant aux programmes continuent à s'accroître, ces institutions sont bien placées pour développer de nouvelles formes d'éducation qui reconnaissent, facilitent, et respectent les questions et les intérêts de l'apprenant continu.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid socio-economic and technological changes have exerted a strong influence on education and training systems in Canada and in other industrialized countries. Concepts and terms such as "information society," "knowledge-based economy," and "learning societies" now feature prominently in mainstream educational and governmental policy discourses, and the importance and relevance of learning at every stage of human development is widely recognized. Moreover, it is commonly understood that K-12 education can only lay the groundwork for the learning and relearning that must take place throughout people's lifetimes. Thus, the notion of lifelong learning is not only becoming a social and institutional reality but also beginning to figure prominently in the concerns and problems of organizations well beyond the domains of traditional education systems (Tuijnman & Schuller, 1999). In particular, educational sectors and institutions that have previously tended to marginalize adult and so-called non-traditional learners are increasingly expected to provide a range of opportunities for lifelong learners.

Such concerns have begun to attract the interest of higher education researchers and administrators. A body of work is now emerging on how lifelong learning can be developed in universities and other institutions of higher and post-secondary education (e.g., Duke, 2001; Jones, 2001; Mauch, 2005). In this article, we explore this institutional development in one Canadian province, reporting on a recent study conducted in British Columbia that examined both what provincial institutions of higher education *say* they are doing and what they *are* doing in practice to develop lifelong learning. After briefly reviewing some concepts of lifelong learning, we provide some methodological background to our study, outline its findings, and then discuss several key themes. Finally, we suggest several directions for higher educational institutions to consider when developing lifelong learning programs and opportunities.

WHAT IS LIFELONG LEARNING?

Although often regarded as an ambiguous and contested concept, lifelong learning is generally used to refer to the broad set of beliefs, aims, and strategies centred on the tenet that learning opportunities should be accessible to all, regardless of age and status. Lifelong approaches to learning are generally promoted on two grounds. The first is principally focused on economic interest: countries, communities, businesses, and individuals increasingly require flexibility in their responses to the changing forces and factors of production that have been brought about by a shift from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy. In this approach, knowledge and skills are

singled out as crucial, particularly among those who lack the necessary employment competencies, either due to their lack of formal schooling or the depreciation of their formerly acquired knowledge (OECD, 1996). The implementation of lifelong learning in society, particularly in educational settings, is therefore considered a means of raising the skills of working people. This approach is intended to ensure that already well-trained people can become even more flexible and productive, as well as to upgrade the skills of those less-prosperous people who might otherwise face unstable work, low wages, or unemployment.

The second ground on which lifelong learning is promoted is the notion that education forms the basis for citizenship in rational, enlightened, and democratic societies. The relationships between education and civic responsibility have been recognized for some time; for example, they were discussed by Francis Bacon in the 17th century and more recently by John Dewey. The concepts of lifelong learning and citizenship were further linked by Coombs (1968) and Lengrand (1975) and then firmly established in the UNESCO reports *Learning to Be* (Fauré et al, 1972) and *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors, 1996). According to both Fauré and Delors, learning throughout life is an imperative for democratic societies; education should not end with schooling, but rather adults should have access to education throughout their lives. Such a notion also links with the concept of a learning society, founded on the acquisition, renewal, and use of knowledge. Learning throughout life means not only that individuals must take advantage of the opportunities created by society but also that societies must plan for giving their members new opportunities. In this view, society should be founded on the notion of "learning to live together," which includes developing an understanding of others—their histories, their traditions, and the social, cultural, and spiritual values that underpin them—together with an appreciation of how to manage conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way. Upon this foundation sit three pillars:

1) Learning to know (combining a fairly broad general education with in-depth work on a specific number of subjects)

2) Learning to do (developing competencies to deal with different, often unforeseeable situations and the ability to work together in teams)

3) Learning to be (personal independence and judgment combined with a sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals)

The understanding that a key goal of modern society is the availability and accessibility of learning opportunities for all people throughout their lives is predicated on the belief that everyone is able, and can be motivated, to learn. It is imperative to encourage such motivation throughout people's lifespan, whether in formal institutions of education and training or informally at home, at work, or in the wider community (Cropley, 1980; OECD,

1996). Such a belief, in turn, requires that lifelong learning become a true institutional and social reality, with all levels of formal education developing flexible learning systems that are adapted to the needs and cultures of learners, regardless of age (Jones, 2001; Singh, 1999).

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities and other institutions of higher education are now regarded as key venues for the development of lifelong learning. Indeed, in many countries, there are pressures on such institutions to expand and broaden their intakes and transform their curricula and pedagogies in order to prepare more people for an increasingly knowledge-based society (Osborne & Thomas, 2003). And, there is some evidence that these institutions are being repositioned to assume such a role (Jones, McCarney, & Skolnik, 2005; Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Mauch, 2005). Several studies of lifelong learning in different countries have examined how systems of higher education are changing to meet learners' needs and, in doing so, are impacting various aspects of university governance, funding, resources, planning, and community relations (Bourgeois, Duke, Guyot, & Merrill, 1999; Dearing, 1997; Dunkin & Lindsay, 2001; Kreber & Mhina, 2005; Maehl, 2000; Mark, Pouget, & Thomas, 2004; Schuetze & Slowey, 2000). Consistently, these studies indicate the extent to which the environment of higher education is changing and how such changes are redefining the character and role of institutions of higher education.

Such institutional changes are partly a response to changes in public policy. As Field (2001) has suggested, the concepts and approaches of lifelong learning are increasingly a tool for the reform and modernization of education and training systems. Particularly, governments are encouraging institutions of higher education to develop lifelong learning to address three fundamental objectives of education: personal development, social cohesion, and economic growth. For governments, what is taught, investigated, and promoted by these institutions influences knowledge, attitudes, and values in many areas of society, especially as such institutions educate the people who will be influential in later shaping the development of society (Knapper & Cropley, 2000; UNESCO, 1998). The opportunities for lifelong learning in institutions of higher education also stem from their nature and purpose as educational institutions, in addition to any governmental, business, and community partnerships they may develop. Thus, extending lifelong learning provides great opportunities to reassess the academic and professional beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that have traditionally been embodied in institutions of higher education. Lifelong learning offers such institutions the opportunity to widen participation in higher education, diversify their

curriculum, instill a critical-questioning element into educational processes, re-evaluate systems of teaching, assessment, and recognition of learning, and, not least, empower learners.

In contrast to the United States and Europe, such concerns have yet to take firm hold in Canada. Here, the gap between government rhetoric and institutional practices is far more pronounced (MacNeil, 2002; Rollins-Magnusson, 2001). Certainly, the concern for developing lifelong learning is acknowledged by Canadian governments. For example, the January 2001 Speech from the Throne recognized that building a skilled workforce required a national effort:

> Countries that succeed in the 21st Century will be those with citizens who are creative, adaptable, and skilled. By providing opportunities for all Canadians to learn and to develop their skills and abilities, we can achieve our commitment to economic growth and prosperity and demonstrate our social values of inclusion and equality. (p. xx)

Recent government reports (Advisory Committee for Online Learning, 2001; Human Resources Development Canada, 2002; Industry Canada, 2002) detailed the skills and learning challenges that Canada faces while simultaneously reinforcing the call for all qualified Canadians to have access to high-quality post-secondary education. These reports not only acknowledged the broad needs of adult learners but also linked those needs to a concern for a continuous system of learning development to support Canada's economic growth and sustainable quality of life. Repeatedly, the reports identified the positive contribution that the provision of lifelong learning by institutions of higher education can make to the development of an educated citizenry and workforce that will benefit individuals, their communities, and Canada's national interests. Yet, despite such rhetoric, the institutional practices of Canadian institutions of higher education appear to lag behind. For example, recent searches for references to lifelong learning on the websites of the ACCC and AUCC—Canada's national associations of universities, colleges, and institutes—yielded few results. Nor do the two associations detail any institutional approaches to meeting the challenges laid down by successive government reports.

Why does such a gap between rhetoric and practice exist? And, given that Canadian institutions of higher education are increasingly required to become institutions of lifelong education, how might they go about it? In their study of the mission statements of Canadian universities, Kreber and Mhina (2005) suggested that, when considering lifelong learning, two aspects of institutions of higher education predominate: as providers of lifelong learning opportunities and as preparers of lifelong learners. These researchers also underscored that if institutions of higher education want to have a

stronger impact on the delivery of higher education, then they must reflect on the extent to which they support and enact lifelong learning.

Considering such issues inevitably leads to more questions about institutions of higher education. For example: What are their possible roles and responsibilities in developing lifelong learning in a learning society? What opportunities might they have to extend lifelong learning within their existing mandates? What barriers and constraints do they find? What are their limits to growth? How do they integrate the different research, teaching, and service functions to better provide lifelong learning opportunities? How might they respond better to the individual learning needs of heterogeneous student bodies, including older workers and other "nontraditional" adult learners? Institutionally, the latter questions coalesce around one central issue: Which characteristics of institutions of higher education encourage or discourage lifelong learning?

As Kreber and Mhina (2005) indicated, educational institutions are complex organizations and it is important to untangle the practice from the rhetoric, because what they do is not always explicitly related to what they say. Additionally, strategic plans do not always lead to effective organizational behaviour. Two studies are particularly relevant to a more holistic analysis of institutions of higher education and the practices they adopt. The first, conducted by a group of international adult and higher education researchers, identified the characteristic elements of a "lifelong-learning higher education institution" (Volbrecht & Walters, 2000). To date, this work has produced *The Capetown Statement*—a set of principles of lifelong learning, active citizenship, and higher education reform—and sparked the development of an analytic tool that institutions of higher education could use to develop these principles throughout their organizational practices (UNESCO, 2001). The second study, by the U.S.–based Council for Adults and Experiential Learning (Flint & Associates, 1999), examined institutional practices that were seen as most effective for adult learners in American universities and colleges. The findings identified one overarching theme and several key aspects, each organized around the operational and structural elements of an "adult learning focused institution of higher education."

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND DATA SOURCES

The UNESCO (2001) and the Flint and Associates (1999) studies proposed that a lacuna existed between the macro-level systemic and policy-oriented analyses and the micro-level analyses of teacher-student classroom interactions—meso-level institutional-based analyses. Both studies suggested protocols to use as a basis to explore how institutions of higher education approach the development of lifelong learning. The UNESCO study identi-

fied six sets of characteristic elements that are crucial for the development of a lifelong learning institution of higher education:

1) overarching regulatory, financial, and cultural/social frameworks
2) strategic partnerships and linkages
3) research
4) teaching and learning processes
5) administrative policies and mechanisms
6) student support systems and services (see Appendix 1).

In contrast, the Flint and Associates' study identified several other institutional markers: mission, decision-making processes, admissions, educational assessment and planning, the roles of faculty, teaching and learning, curriculum and instructional delivery, student services, adjunct faculty roles, the use of information technology, and affordability (see Appendix 2).

Although the categories developed in these studies are useful, they need further clarification to (a) determine the extent to which they are appropriate for a specifically Canadian context and (b) explore the possible generation of specific indicators for each category. Thus, we combined the two frameworks into one survey instrument (Appendix 3) and used it as a basis for a pilot study to examine the development of lifelong learning in institutions of higher education throughout the province of British Columbia. British Columbia lends itself well to such a study. The province has long adopted a comparatively dynamic approach to higher education, enjoys a rich array of institutions of higher education, and has witnessed several recent provincial government initiatives concerning higher education, often with the goal of expanding accessibility and choice (Dennison & Schuetze (2004).

There were three stages of data collection:

1) document collection, online survey, and identification of key informants at all 28 provincial institutions of higher education (6 universities, 5 university-colleges, 11 colleges, and 6 institutes/agencies)
2) semi-structured telephone and in-person interviews with a sample (7) of key informants (at the dean/director level) from different institutions (institutions were chosen to reflect university/college and urban/rural differences)
3) discussion of interim results with several focus groups of senior adult and continuing educators and institution of higher education administrators

After some prompting, a 46% return rate on the survey, with responses from each institutional type, was achieved. One of the survey questions inquired if participants would be available for further interview; subsequent interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The tran-

scripts were initially read by all three researchers to identify common themes and then subjected to more analysis to identify further concepts and linkages. We then prepared a draft paper and presented aspects of it at several conferences and gatherings (Dunlop & Nesbit, 2004; Nesbit, 2005; Nesbit & Dunlop, 2006), where we discussed our findings and some of the reasons for their existence.

RESULTS

The responses to the survey and the interviews revealed a wide range of interpretations of, and experiences with the development of lifelong learning. Answers to one set of questions often overlapped into another area. So, for clarity, we have grouped our findings into four areas: definitional issues, organizational infrastructures, specific programs, and institutional barriers.

Definitional Issues

Although the survey responses and the interviews revealed a plethora of definitions of "lifelong learning," little consensus on their meaning was achieved. Two examples indicate the range:

> We define it as – continuous learning – on-going education – the act of intentional learning – in all ages and stages of life (ages 0 - 90).

> While this term is used in [our] strategic plan and increasingly as an objective in programmatic planning, it is not defined in a consistent manner. Generally it is taken to mean that the University will provide opportunities for its graduates, for the community, and for professionals, to continue to access the campus and to learn in non-credit and credit courses, certificates and diplomas.

It is important to note that the interviews indicated not only official institutional terminology, but also more individual and casual usage. Of the 28 institutions of higher education analyzed, only 11 (40%) referred to "lifelong learning" or "lifelong learners" explicitly in their published mission statements or descriptions of strategic objectives. Although such a proportion might be less than expected, it does not necessarily mean that lifelong learning is being neglected; the term was often used synonymously with others, principally "adult and continuing education." Indeed, most institutions preferred either to use related terms or to describe their provision of lifelong learning in terms of "community access" or "providing opportunities for a wide range of students" in their documentation. The interviews also revealed a much broader appreciation and acceptance of lifelong learning concepts. Several respondents claimed that what was published in their institutional calendars and on their websites often lagged behind institu-

tional practices and approaches, and they gave specific examples of more targeted efforts to attract lifelong learners. It was clear that lifelong learning tended not to be promoted as a separate concept but rather embedded within an institution's broader provision and that the extent of the term's use was not an indication of institutional commitment to the concept. Finally, respondents preferred to draw on what might be thought of as "folk" understandings of lifelong learning rather than more standard definitions of the term. "Once you get into too-specific definitions, you get into trouble" was a typical response.

Organizational Infrastructures

Most institutions of higher education house one or more special academic units, departments, or programs of study ("adult programs") that are primarily directed toward providing education for lifelong learners. Generally, these units and programs are part of the institution's continuing education provision, although other academic units may also offer more tailored provision. Such an approach, although widespread, was not always well regarded. For example, as one respondent described it:

> While there is an increasingly positive attitude toward life-long learning, actual centres of interest remain localized in the Faculty of Education and the Division of Continuing Studies. There are many missed opportunities as traditional faculties are so focused on under-graduate and graduate programs without considering how their expertise/resources can be extended to adult learners in the community and in professions.

An organizationally central location certainly helps support a range of lifelong learning initiatives, such as the development of criteria for selecting and evaluating appropriate faculty and staff—issues repeatedly identified as essential for maintaining lifelong learning programs. All respondents stressed the importance of having staff who possess the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to assist adult learners and appreciate their specific concerns. Further, most institutions provided professional development for faculty and staff to enhance adult-oriented teaching and/or support services. Interestingly, several institutions indicated they had formed or joined national and international partnerships and linkages for the exchange of knowledge and experience about lifelong learning provision. These included faculty and student exchanges with universities, study abroad and intercultural communication programs that inform teaching in a multicultural context, and involvement with local learning networks and initiatives through professional organizations.

Specific Programs

Perhaps the most significant advance of lifelong learning in provincial institutions of higher education is supra-institutional. British Columbia has a system of course articulation and credit transfer whereby students can complete their first two years of an undergraduate degree at a local college and then transfer into their third year at a traditional university. Such arrangements certainly allow for greater student mobility and, as Jones (2001) suggested, increased interest in improving the level of coordination in other policy areas (such as resource utilization, enrolment planning, and accountability). In addition, most institutional respondents in the study indicated an attempt to provide targeted education for specific groups of adult learners, particularly First Nations (Aboriginal), seniors, and the unemployed, and, to a lesser extent, women, mid-career professionals, labour union members, and military personnel. Several institutions have also developed specific cohort-based programs that draw on and extend adult learners' collective experiences and resources. What marks these programs as separate from the normal educational provision is their focus on individual learners, rather than on academic disciplines, a focus that evinces an awareness of the practical as well as the intellectual aspects of formal education for lifelong learners. For example, a concern of many lifelong learners is how to finance their learning. Of the institutions surveyed, several claimed to have set up special bursaries for adults under financial stress and about half claimed to have made arrangements with local employers for discounted tuition rates or other special financing for employee groups. Interestingly, however, only half of these indicated they had special application procedures or criteria for adult learners.

Another aspect of specific lifelong learning programs concerns learners' prior educational experiences and qualifications. Many lifelong learners have negative experiences of their K-12 schooling and often carry a mediocre academic record. Prior learning assessments, or some other form of achievement portfolios, are thus considered more useful criteria for making admission decisions for adult learners than a record based solely upon grade point average. Also, several institutions referred to innovative programs that they had developed either in conjunction with, or as a result of pressure from, local community groups. These provide creative "laddering" opportunities whereby adult learners, often initially doubting their own abilities or reluctant to engage in further education, are introduced to successively more complex educational activities. Not surprisingly, the more rural institutions of higher education (often with multiple sub-campuses) indicated greater responsiveness to local issues. Said one:

> We have a community advisory group who keep us in touch with
> what's going on locally and help us build educational programming

around local concerns. They see us as one of the more stable agencies in the area [and] expect us to play an active part in keeping the community healthy and sustainable.

Institutional Barriers

Interviewees were asked about policies or practices that might hinder or discourage lifelong learning at their institution. About half of the respondents indicated the presence of several barriers: cumbersome enrolment procedures, restrictions on entrance qualifications, inadequate guidance and support systems, a requirement that programs must offer a diploma or certificate, rigid scheduling, the rise of online registration systems, the slow acceptance of alternative prior learning assessment policies, lack of access to a welcoming space appropriate to adult learners' lives and learning styles, narrow and unimaginative approaches to teaching, course content that ignores learners' experiences, unsympathetic faculty and staff, and fiscal requirements that limit the freedom to experiment. Two quotes sum up several respondents' views about the intransigence of educational institutions:

> As in most institutions, change happens slowly – and in a collegial environment, the consultative process takes time. Also, in a unionized environment, entrepreneurial approaches and ideas can create a bit of angst and resistance. From a continuing education perspective, I see the opportunities for alliances and partnerships and community and industry liaison and training, but the internal approach to this is cautious. I'd like to see more outreach.

> The unique enterprise of lifelong learning is frequently at odds with rules of conformity and the predictability of the rest of the institution. A lot of wasted resources are consumed in working with, around, and in spite of systems.

For many, this situation is a product of the often parlous financial state of many institutions of higher education, brought about by the ambivalence of successive governments toward adequate funding. One college administrator put it this way:

> We used to have a [provincial] government that supported things like Adult Basic Education and continuing education. They also froze student tuition fees for several years. So, we had lots of students demanding lots more education. Now, this bunch [the current government] did away with all that and all courses have to be much more cost-recovery. That really limits our abilities to innovate. And, we've seen a big drop-off in student numbers.

DISCUSSION

As one seasoned higher education scholar claimed, "The cost and complexity of higher education and its importance for building a competitive knowledge society come together around the notion of lifelong learning" (Duke, n.d., p. 29). Yet, exploring the gap between institutional rhetoric and practice about lifelong learning in institutions of higher education seems to raise as many questions as it answers. What is a comprehensive yet practical definition of lifelong learning? What are its purposes and roles in higher education? To what extent do institutions of higher education acknowledge and balance the different notions of lifelong learning? How can they amend their approaches and structures to become more lifelong learning-centred without jeopardizing academic quality? How can they foster lifelong learning without increased public funding? Clearly, as an essential sector of formal education systems, higher education is key to helping develop and implement lifelong education and to providing a necessary organizational framework for it. However, most institutional approaches to lifelong learning in British Columbia currently regard it rather passively as a remedial activity, peripheral to their main goal of educating younger students and the already advantaged. Moreover, those lifelong learning opportunities that do exist in institutions of higher education appear to focus on enhancing employment and career opportunities over citizenship development.

Although most institutions of higher education are responding to an increased demand for lifelong learning, they reported that their implementation of policies and programs faced several organizational barriers. As other studies have shown, capacity building for lifelong learning means dealing with an encompassing, elusive, and contested concept (Grace, Cruikshank, Gouthro, Mojab, Nesbit, & Rubenson, 2004; Marks, 2002). A comprehensive analysis of the factors that variously enable or limit the development of lifelong learning in institutions of higher education requires attention not only to conceptual definitions but also to the environments in which such institutions are situated, their organizational and structural contexts, and the cognitive and affective learning interactions they foster.

The first factor is the question of the balance between fulfilling provincial expectations for the delivery of post-secondary education (often with limited budgets) and responding to national imperatives. Most institutions of higher education have to regularly face the questions of who are their students and clients and to whom are they most accountable. Responding to the differing demands of learners, employers, local communities, and the state is a complicated matter, and their responses are compounded by the diverse and complex nature of the higher-education sector within Canada. Essentially, there is no single federal system, but rather 13 different provincial and terri-

torial systems. British Columbia is not unique with its constellation of universities, university-colleges, community colleges, technical institutes, and other public and private degree-granting institutions. Nevertheless, we found that its institutions of higher education have tended to develop features that reflect the particular historical, socio-cultural, and economic characteristics of the regions in which they are located. All institutions of higher education are facing similar pressures: the changing role of higher education within society; changes in funding and legislative structures; technological developments; the demand to form stronger linkages with corporations and other non-educational institutions; the commodification of knowledge and culture; and revisions to the organization of academic work (Buchbinder & Newsom, 1994).

Yet, the opportunities to respond proactively to such challenges are often circumscribed by financial exigencies and the expectation to constantly do more with less. Clearly, additional resources are required to develop lifelong learning, but there is some uncertainty about who will provide these. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that the pressures to provide for "new" groups of learners—such as adult and lifelong learners—are not given as much weight as the institutions' core clientele. Thus, a second factor is that the economic imperatives of lifelong learning tend to be promoted over its citizenship aspects. As Fisher and Rubenson (1998) argued, programs are now evincing a trend toward greater vocationalism or labour-market relevance.

Since such issues clearly affect institutional capacity to develop lifelong learning by also limiting responsive flexibility, a third factor in the development of lifelong learning involves an institution's distinct administrative, governance, funding, and accountability structures. These affect an institution's overall operations, the educational opportunities it provides, and its capacity to change. Even though institutions of higher education are remarkably stable and resilient organizations—their internal systems and structures change only slowly (Clark, 1998)—they are also less comfortable dealing with informal modes of education and tend to marginalize educational activities that fall outside their conventional and traditional systems of delivery (Fryer, 1997; Jones, 2001). Thus, despite the presence in most institutions of an administrative unit or personnel charged (at least nominally) with developing lifelong learning, such functions are usually added on to existing responsibilities and expected to be provided with few, if any, additional resources. Also, the expenses of development usually have to be met on a cost-recovery basis or supported by existing student fees. In other words, lifelong learning has yet to change much of the institutions of higher education' organizational architecture. However, institutions of higher education are more than ever permeated by the forces that surround them and may need to modify their structures if they wish to ensure lifelong learning means more than

providing a range of adult education courses or marketing existing courses to older learners. The institutional implications of lifelong learning highlight the need to widen access to, and improve services for, disadvantaged groups, both through a more cohesive organizational structure and through partnering and collaborating with other like-minded organizations. As Duke (2001) claimed, it is indispensable for a lifelong learning university to play an active part in various communities of learning.

A fourth factor concerns the traditional concept of an institution of higher education. Although attitudes toward higher education are changing, institutions are still regarded as overly formal and traditional and largely designed to provide courses for young people pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees full-time. Here, the definitions of lifelong learning used by institutions of higher education have implications beyond the merely semantic. How an institution defines a lifelong learner influences its overall approach to, and provision for, such learners. Also, institutions of higher education are relatively autonomous. Although operating in broadly similar economic and social contexts, they can develop their own programmatic and administrative structures as they think fit. Further, compared to some other provinces, British Columbia has little public coordination of adult and continuing education or approaches to lifelong learning. These elements tend to enhance (at least implicitly) a sense of competition between institutions and discourage co-operative research or joint attempts to deal with shared problems. When the purpose of this study was first broached at a provincial meeting of continuing education deans and directors of institutions of higher education, the topic was seized upon enthusiastically. "It's the first time we've had the opportunity to debate this issue in many years," said one participant.

This latter point draws attention to the marginality of continuing education activities within most Canadian institutions of higher education and the paucity of research into lifelong learning in most academic institutions, topics that have been discussed more fully elsewhere (Coffield, 1999; Percival & Kops, 1999). Since providing access (especially for adults and other under-represented groups) is a fundamental aspect of lifelong learning initiatives, one way to foster discussion of such issues might be for institutions of higher education to reposition themselves as "learning organizations" (Faris, 2003; Tinto, 1997). Such an approach would go some way toward reasserting the citizenship aspects of lifelong learning discussed earlier and requiring institutions of higher education to recognize and develop their capacity as sources of learning, resources, and partnerships. In addition to providing a range of educational opportunities, institutions of higher education might collaborate in, and foster, networks of relationships with local groups and communities to generate debate and promote learning as a guiding principle to organizational and community change.

CONCLUSION

Lifelong learning can represent a set of guiding principles for development rather than an additional problem for institutions of higher education. Within British Columbia, most institutions of higher education are already organizationally and administratively equipped to provide education and create powerful learning environments for learners of whatever age. Many of their senior administrators are at least aware of the institutional changes needed to address the specific problems of adult and other non-traditional learners. However, concrete actions are required. For a start, many institutions of higher education might better define lifelong learning policies within their mission statements and academic and organizational plans. Also, transforming intentions into reality requires more than just goodwill. To create and develop lifelong learning throughout higher education, institutions need to develop a closer systemic awareness and analysis of the interconnections between various levels of their organization, specifically, the environments in which institutions of higher education operate, their organizational and structural contexts, and how these factors interrelate with affective and cognitive learning interactions. The frameworks outlined in the appendices appear to serve effectively as analytic devices for reviewing the institutional provision of lifelong learning. They also offer the possibility of becoming a self-reflective tool for individual institutions. Without wishing to promote the development of yet more institutional performance indicators, closer concentration on, and discussion of, the categories identified earlier can only help institutions of higher education become more self-reflective and responsive to the needs of lifelong learners. As the demand for access to higher education and the number of adult learners enrolling in programs continue to increase, institutions of higher education will have to continue to find ways of enhancing the learning environment and promoting forms of education that acknowledge, accommodate, and respect lifelong learners' needs and interests.

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APPENDIX 1

Characteristic Elements Necessary to Support a Lifelong Learning Higher Education Institution

Characteristic Elements	Description
1. Overarching Frameworks	Three overarching frameworks provide the contexts that facilitate an institution of higher education to operate as a lifelong learning institution: regulatory; financial; and cultural/social.
2. Strategic Partnerships and Linkages	Partnerships and linkages include forming relationships: internationally; with other institutions; within institutions; and with other groups in society.
3. Research	Research is understood in a broad sense and includes working across disciplines and/or across institutions. Lifelong learning is regarded as an important and legitimate research area.
4. Teaching and Learning Processes	Educators encourage self-directed learning, engage with the knowledge, interests, and life situations that learners bring to their education, and use open and resource-based learning approaches.
5. Administrative Policies and Mechanisms	Service to learners is the top priority of the administration.
6. Student Support Systems and Services	Students are supported to become independent learners in various ways.

APPENDIX 2

Institutional Findings, Principles, and
Descriptors of Adult Learning

Category	Benchmarking Practices for Enhancing Adult Learning
1. Mission	The institution has a clearly articulated mission that permeates the institution and inspires and directs practice.
2. Decision Making	Institutional decision making is a shared responsibility that uses collaborative processes, inclusive of faculty, staff, and students, to create rapid, flexible responses to learners' and community needs.
3. Admissions	An inclusive, non-competitive admissions process is used to determine the best educational match for adult learners.
4. Educational Assessment and Planning	Adult learners are engaged in an ongoing dialogue designed to help them make informed educational planning decisions.
5. Faculty Roles	Faculty function as managers and facilitators of the learning process, not merely as dispensers of information.
6. Teaching-Learning Process	Students are actively involved in collaborative learning experiences, typically centred on their lives and work.
7. Curriculum and Instructional Delivery	The curriculum and instructional delivery are designed to help adult learners meet their learning goals.
8. Student Services	Student services are easily accessible and convenient to adult learners through a variety of access points.

9. Adjunct Faculty	Part-time and adjunct faculty are valued for their connections to workplaces and communities, as well as for providing an accessible and flexible curriculum.
10. Information Technology	Information technology is focused on enriching one-to-one communication and used to provide flexible and timely education and administrative services that meet the needs of students.
11. Affordability	Continuous and deliberate efforts are made to simultaneously ensure the affordability, accessibility, and quality of educational degrees and programs.

APPENDIX 3

Survey Protocol

[Introductory page]

Welcome to the Lifelong Learning and Higher Education Survey, distributed by the Research and Evaluation Unit at Simon Fraser University. This survey is intended for representatives of higher education institutions in British Columbia. The survey will take approximately 20–25 minutes to complete.

   Your responses will be handled anonymously and will be summarized in a research report. Thank you for taking the time to participate! Please click on "Next" to get started.

[Survey Body]

1. What is the name of your institution? _____
    _____

2. How do you define "adult learner" at your institution? _____
    _____

3. Does your institution have special academic units, colleges, schools, departments, or programs of study ("adult programs") which are primarily directed toward adult learners?

    ❑ Yes
    ❑ No
    ❑ Don't know

4. If yes, please provide a brief description.
    Program description:_____
    Program mission statement:_____
    Program enrolment:_____
    Delivery modes and locations:_____
    Instructional technique(s):_____
    Program evaluation process:_____
    Date founded:_____
    URL (if available):_____

5. Does your institution attempt to recruit any special groups of potential adult learners? (Please check all that apply)

- ❑ First Nations
- ❑ Military
- ❑ Women
- ❑ Labour Union Members
- ❑ Unemployed
- ❑ Middle Management
- ❑ Degree Completers
- ❑ Other, please specify:_____

6. Are there any special application procedures or criteria for adult learners?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

7. If yes, please provide a brief description. _____

_____

8. Please rank the importance of the following criteria at your institution for making admission decisions for adult learners.
(1 = least important and 5 = most important)

 ____ Minimum class standing (high school or beyond)

 ____ Minimum grade point average

 ____ Letters of recommendation

 ____ Standardized test scores

 ____ Personal statement of goals

 ____ Portfolio of achievements

 ____ Recognition of recent employment and/or work related achievements

 ____ Recognition of civic achievements

 ____ Autobiographies or personal interviews

9. How are your programs for adult or non-traditional learners planned and designed? Please briefly describe the involvement of various stakeholders in the decision-making process. _____

_____

10. Do the criteria for selecting and evaluating faculty/staff for the adult learner program(s) at your institution include possessing the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed for assisting adult learners?

❑ Yes
❑ No
❑ Don't know

11. Does your institution provide professional development for faculty and staff to enhance adult-centered teaching and/or support services?

❑ Yes
❑ No
❑ Don't know

12. Does your institution have arrangements with local employers for discounted tuition rates or other special financing for employee groups?

❑ Yes
❑ No
❑ Don't know

13. Are there any activities in place that facilitate the social integration of adult learners into your institution?

❑ Yes
❑ No
❑ Don't know

14. If yes, please provide a brief description. _____
_____

15. Lifelong learning has a variety of meanings and applications. How do you define "lifelong learning"? Is your definition widespread at your institution? _____
_____

16. Is "lifelong learning" regarded as a research and teaching area in your institution?

❑ Yes
❑ No
❑ Don't know

17. If yes, what are some examples of teaching and research being done in this area? _____

    _____

18. Do you consider your institution to be at the leading edge with respect to lifelong learning programs and policies?

    ❑ Yes
    ❑ No
    ❑ Don't know

19. Please explain your response to the question above. _____

    _____

20. Has your institution formed international partnerships and linkages for the exchange of knowledge and know-how concerning lifelong learning?

    ❑ Yes
    ❑ No
    ❑ Don't know

21. If yes, please provide a brief description of these partnerships and linkages. _____

    _____

22. Does your institution actively encourage lifelong learning?

    ❑ Yes
    ❑ No
    ❑ Don't know

23. Please explain your response to the question above and provide examples, if possible. _____

    _____

24. Would you or a colleague be willing to participate in an interview to discuss the development of lifelong learning? If yes, please provide contact information below. _____

    _____

25. Any additional comments? _____

    _____

BIOGRAPHIES

Tom Nesbit is director of the Centre for Integrated and Credit Studies and associate dean of Continuing Studies at Simon Fraser University. His research interests include social class and its influence on adult education, worker and workplace education, and the institutional development of life-long learning.

Tom Nesbit est le directeur du Centre des Études intégrées et accrédités ainsi que le doyen des Études permanentes à l'Université de Simon Fraser. Ses intérêts de recherche comprennent la classe sociale et l'influence de celle-ci sur l'éducation aux adultes, sur l'éducation des ouvriers et en milieu de travail, et le développement institutionnel de l'apprentissage continu.

Catherine Dunlop is director of the Research and Evaluation Unit at Simon Fraser University. She has conducted a variety of research activities that explore how universities can better respond to and serve the demands of wider society.

Catherine Dunlop est directrice de l'Unité de recherche et d'évaluation à l'Université de Simon Fraser. Elle a entrepris une variété d'activités de recherche qui explorent les moyens par lesquels les universités peuvent mieux servir et répondre aux demandes d'une société plus large.

Lorraine Gibson is a geographer from Vancouver, British Columbia. She is interested in how local, regional, national, and international geographies can influence access to education throughout life. She currently works at the Human Early Learning Partnership at the University of British Columbia.

Lorraine Gibson est géographe à Vancouver en Colombie-Britannique. Elle s'intéresse aux moyens par lesquels les géographies locales, régionales, nationales et internationales peuvent influencer l'accès à l'éducation la vie durant. Elle travaille présentement à Human Early Learning Partnership à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique.