

Four Members of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame Reflect on Their Careers

Lorilee R. Sandmann and Gary E. Miller

Abstract

Drawing on collective experience of over 200 years, four members of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame were panelists in a session at the 2010 National Outreach Scholarship Conference. As the panelists reflected on careers in the field of adult and continuing education, four sustaining themes emerged: commitment, pragmatism and political astuteness, ability to adapt, and inquisitiveness.

Introduction

What does it take to sustain a career in adult and continuing education? At the 2010 National Outreach Scholarship Conference, four members of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame explored how they have led university-community engagement in four spheres: institutional engagement, engagement around a social issue, engagement with a specific population, and the scholarship of engagement. Drawing upon more than 200 combined years of experience, they reflected on how they sustained their own engagement over their careers, as well as creating and sustaining impact on the community.

The International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame

The International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame was founded in 1995 at the University of Oklahoma. Today, the Hall of Fame includes more than 250 adult and continuing education professionals, including scholars, practitioners, policy makers, and executive leaders from more than 20 countries. The careers of these professionals span a generation of transition in the field of adult and continuing education, as educational institutions have adapted to the dramatic transformation of society from the industrial age to the information age. This National Outreach Scholarship Conference session was designed as an opportunity for these “seasoned sustainers” to share their experiences and ideas with emerging university leaders.

The Four Panelists

Session panelists included Daniel Godfrey, Carol Kasworm, Steve Kime, and Mortimer Neufville. Daniel Godfrey began his career as an assistant county agricultural agent in North Carolina. He was later dean and administrator of the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at North Carolina State University. Over his career Godfrey led the development of workforce education programs to serve people in the Midwest's declining industrial communities and in the Appalachian region, and served as a consultant to institutions in Africa.

Carol Kasworm is the W. Dallas Herring professor of Adult and Community Education at North Carolina State University. Her research focuses on adult undergraduate students in higher education. A member of the editorial boards of several journals, she has been principal investigator or director/co-director for 18 foundation, state, and federal grants.

Steve Kime is recognized as an advocate of military personnel education. He is the former president of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, a consortium of 15 national higher education associations and more than 1,730 colleges and universities dedicated to providing higher education access to American service members, their families, and others. He has also served as vice president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

Mortimer Neufville is a retired executive vice president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). He is internationally recognized as an advocate for Cooperative Extension, distance education, and other forms of engaging adult learners. Throughout his career, he has also worked to improve agriculture in Africa and the Caribbean.

Each of these professionals has had a long career in the field of adult and continuing education and, in the process, has witnessed—and helped to shape—significant advances in the field during a period of technological, political, and social change. The four panelists were asked to reflect on what had allowed them to sustain their personal and professional engagement over their careers.

Panelists' Reflections

This essay summarizes the cross-cutting themes that panelists reported sustained them throughout their careers: a passionate commitment to the field of adult and continuing education,

political astuteness and a pragmatic view of leadership, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and the ability to remain inquisitive about the field of adult and continuing education and its impact on the world.

Commitment

These veteran adult and continuing education leaders advocated for and personified being passionate about, and committed to, a critical social cause. Although their foci varied from engagement with minority small farmers to disciplined inquiry to working through professional associations for national and international reach, their commitment fueled their continued involvement and leadership over time.

“Although their foci varied. . . , their commitment fueled their continued involvement and leadership over time.”

During the session Kasworm (*personal communication, 2010*) reported on responses from seven scholars from a variety of institutions that she had surveyed: “Although they offered much guidance to emerging professionals in the scholarship of engagement, I will share their top three suggestions: Follow your passion. Be purposeful and intentional. Seek mentors and allies.”

Neufville recalled that his passion for adult education began early in his career. “My early career began on a research station in Jamaica, and was pivotal to my appreciation for and commitment to university-community engagement, partnership, and continuing education,” he said.

After graduating from Tuskegee and the University of Florida, I made a commitment to help the 1890 land-grant universities (named for the year legislation creating them was enacted are historically black) in their efforts to alleviate poverty and develop programs for underserved people and communities. Critical to achieving this goal was the development of partnerships and building relationships (*personal communication, 2010*).

Godfrey also developed an early passion for his work, noting, “It was an engaging experience to be a new professional

agricultural agent assigned to work with small minority farmers.” That passion continued, even when the social context changed over a half century of work, shifting from the needs of minority farmers to a broader community of small farmers.

To engage these small farmers in educational endeavors, we would spend many hours training paraprofessionals in extensive, specially designed training programs. They in turn would work directly with the small farmer sharing new knowledge, establishing on-farm demonstrations and imparting up-to-date research findings pertaining to new discoveries. Thus, from the social as well as a community perspective, the entire family would get involved. This would subsequently have an impact throughout the farming community (*personal communication, 2010*).

Kime summarized the importance of passion in sustaining engagement over a decades-long career. “You must really care,” Kime advised. “It would be folly to pursue a leading edge idea if not committed to it and derive satisfaction from its success because the material rewards in education will never suffice or even be fair.”

Pragmatism and Political Astuteness

The panelists acknowledged that being passionate about an important cause is not enough. As an underpinning for sustained commitment, each noted the need to be pragmatic and politically astute.

“As an underpinning for sustained commitment, each noted the need to be pragmatic and politically astute.”

Godfrey called this “taking a practical and policy standpoint” in engaging with external clients. For example, he noted that small farmers often need practical skills (e.g., computer competency) that they do not

personally value. Godfrey reflected that for engagement with a learner to be successful, there “must be a convergence of knowledge between the adult educator and the student learner, whether it is a small farmer in an informal educational setting or an adult family member returning to participate in a more formal educational setting.”

Kime addressed pragmatism and political astuteness related to advocating for specific programs.

To build and sustain a program, no matter how justifiable it is, you must navigate the rocks and shoals of a culture that is far from perfect. The “sacred cows” cannot be disturbed if a new idea, or practice or policy is to survive. You cannot ignore fiscal facts, inertia, and even obviously stupid administrators (*personal communication, 2010*).

The institutional context can also demand that a leader work beyond her or his immediate organization. Neufville noted, “Small and limited-resource institutions must forge partnerships to sustain their programs.” In the case of historically Black land-grant universities, Neufville reported that the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Education, 1,882 land-grant universities, nongovernmental agencies, and consortia (e.g., the American Distance Education Consortium) “have been key partners for our institutions to develop programs and sustain their agenda. Partnerships, relationships, and funding are the key ingredients in sustaining programs.”

Ability to Adapt

Being passionate but also pragmatic, these professionals were intentionally and purposefully adaptive to internal and external forces. Further, each persisted and provided continuity of leadership throughout her or his career. Kime again used sharks as a metaphor: “programs and people likewise must keep moving or die.”

By taking a developmental approach over time, these Hall of Fame members sustained themselves and developed effective adult and continuing education endeavors. For example, Godfrey evolved programs for minority small farmers to include computer-based management tools. Kasworm has considered the changes in language and conceptualizations that outreach and extension have contributed to the scholarship of engagement.

Kime advised, “A new idea can best be sold as a way of adjusting to new social, technological, and political realities while preserving what cannot or should not be changed. Understanding this is necessary to survival and growth.” Once initiated, a successful program must adapt to new circumstances. He noted:

Successful programs are living organisms. They change and they grow. Like sharks, they must move or die. Since dynamic new programs are penetrating, and changing, an existing culture, they cannot rest. These dynamics are critical to sustaining support, encouraging creative workers, and sustaining the “juices” in the leadership. Again, the process can be exhilarating. This is vital to sustaining the program and, very important, people devoted to it (*personal communication, 2010*).

This is not to say that a program leader should not have a stable vision for the program. “The program,” Kime noted, “as well as your own satisfaction from it, will benefit from maintaining, setting, and achieving benchmarks and guideposts. This generates enthusiasm and helps to ‘sell’ the program. Set reasonable shorter-term goals with ambitious horizons.”

Inquisitiveness

Rather than being fatigued, these panelists have remained enthusiastically inquisitive. They continue to pursue such questions as, What is the university’s role if it is to be truly engaged with the communities it serves? What is the optimal structure to maximize a university’s adult and continuing education efforts?

Discussion

The reflections of these four adult and continuing education leaders are aligned with the findings in two studies of individuals who evidenced sustained commitment to serving society. Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) reported from 100 interviews that those committed to the public good developed critical reflective habits of mind that maintained their conviction to community and the public sphere, had compassion and commitment beyond their “tribe” (p. 55), and exhibited courageous “responsible imagination” (p. 125). These characteristics appeared all the more striking when contrasted to traits of a comparison group that Daloz et al. (1996) examined, which evidenced less systematic awareness and critical perspective. Those in the comparison group were often on the “edge of burnout, their loyalties were limited to their immediate constituency, they were locked into a single answer for complex problems, or they simply felt too overwhelmed in grappling with larger issues” (p. 16).

Service-learning pioneers in postsecondary education that were investigated by Stanton, Giles, and Cruz (1999) were found to have developed a sense of agency and activism early in their lives, were guided by philosophical and spiritual values, and shared a “deep commitment to connecting the academy (especially students) with issues, people and suffering in off-campus communities” (p. 241). Additionally, Stanton et al. (1999) extracted characteristics of practitioners in emerging fields. One of these characteristics was being conscious of being part of a movement or something larger than one’s self and one’s own work. Being highly independent and self-directed in times of complexity, ambiguity, and challenge was another characteristic.

Conclusion: Tacit Suggestions for Leaders

Throughout their careers as educational entrepreneurs, these Hall of Fame members have been interdisciplinary thinkers accomplished in more than one discipline, leaders yet good team players and team builders, and ethically and passionately committed to the social issues that are central to the work of engagement.

Their reflections illuminated four dispositions that are critical to all leaders. First, a leader must demonstrate a commitment not only to her or his own role, but to the institution’s mission and, most important, to the social purpose that drives the institution’s mission and vision. In the process, the leader becomes an advocate, helping to create a community committed to the vision.

Second, a leader must be willing to engage others, both inside and outside her or his organization, when creating a strategy to implement a vision. This requires both political astuteness and a pragmatic approach that values good results more than simply good intentions.

Third, a leader must recognize, as panelist Kime noted, that “successful programs are living organisms” that change as they grow. A leader must be willing to adapt to changing circumstances and to engage the institution in adapting to changing needs. Finally, a leader must maintain enthusiasm and an inquisitive nature throughout an engaged career.

In summary, these veteran leaders of university-community engagement provide us a legacy of the sustaining power of agency and hope.

References

- Daloz, L. A. P., Keen, C. H., Keen, J. P., & Parks, S. D. (1996). *Common fire: Leading lives of commitment in a complex world*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Stanton, T. K., Giles, D. E., & Cruz, N. I. (1999). *Service-learning: A movement's pioneers reflect on its origins, practice, and future*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

About the Authors

Lorilee R. Sandmann is professor and program chair of adult education at the University of Georgia. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Minnesota, and her Ph.D. in adult education and business management from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 1999 and continues to teach and research in the areas of leadership and community-university engagement.

Gary E. Miller is executive director emeritus of the Penn State World Campus. He earned a bachelor's and master's degree in English, and D.Ed. in Higher Education from The Pennsylvania State University. He was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2004 and served as its president in 2010. He continues to consult and write about online learning, and distance education policy and quality.