Chapter 16

Investing in the Future: Developing Education Lifelong Learning Tracks

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ABSTRACT

Over the last five years, the education program at the University of Central Florida (UCF) has been redesigned to respond to two distinct but important challenges: (a) crafting program tracks that meet the needs of students desiring a professional career in a nontraditional setting, and (b) responding to 21st-century aspirations of lifelong learners. Within the context of a broader redesign effort, program faculty designed Education Lifelong Learning (LLL) tracks grounded in integrative learning, a place-based education component embedded in experiential-learning internships, and a subject specialism. These LLL tracks enable students to meet community needs by bringing their understanding of learning processes and subject specialism to organizations delivering informal learning. The account provided in this chapter advances existing literature by making visible many of the important granular details associated with LLL, as well as considerations associated with track design and implementation within an elementary-education program.

INTRODUCTION

Today's current budget constraints, global competition, changing demographics, new technologies, and demands for transparency and accountability are some of the forces of change that may be viewed either as a threat to higher education or as an opportunity for reinvention (Goldstein, 2006). These trends and forces for change are directing institutions of higher education to adopt nontraditional approaches in search of improvement (Janson & Bielak, 2008). One such innovation is the development of Education Lifelong Learning (LLL) tracks in a College of Education specifically designed to meet student and community
needs. Graduates from Education LLL tracks have knowledge of learning theory, pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, and curriculum development as well as knowledge and skills from domains outside the College of Education such as hospitality, and business. These attributes are in high demand by education programs in environmental centers, museums, galleries, libraries, and other informal learning situations.

We begin this chapter by examining the development of LLL terminology, moving to a discussion of key actions that were taken to support the design of Education LLL tracks for future educators as well as institutional challenges that have been encountered. Finally, we close with conclusions and implications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Lifelong Learning (LLL)

The concept of Lifelong Learning (LLL) re-emerged in the United States during the 1960s due to university students’ demand for new forms of education that promoted diversity, pluralism, and individual freedom (Field, 2001). In 1976, Congress passed the Lifelong Learning Act, but no funds were appropriated to implement it. Education remained an age finite rather than an infinite lifelong process. Except to maintain certification, most people did not have a conscious attitude about being lifelong learners (Collins, 2009).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) actively promoted global discussions of LLL during the 1970s, strongly advocating for universal education across the lifespan, and not only for a privileged few (Faure et al., 1972).

The European Parliament proclaimed 1996 to be the European Year of Lifelong Learning. The adoption of the Strategy for Lifelong Learning (Council of Europe, 1996) gave rise to specific LLL objectives, including (a) encouraging the acquisition of new knowledge; (b) bringing the education and business sectors closer together; (c) combatting exclusion; (d) developing proficiency in three European languages; and (e) treating capital investment and investment in training on an equal basis.

In late 1997, the Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners, made up of leaders in business, labor, education, government, and philanthropy, presented its recommendations in “A Nation Learning: Vision for the 21st Century”. The Commission defined LLL as “a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals... to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes... and to apply them with confidence, creativity, and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments” (Duyff, 1999, p. 20).

In its Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the European Commission (2001) raised concern over the need for a broader definition of LLL that was not limited to learning just for adults and that encompassed the whole spectrum of formal, nonformal, and informal learning—that is, all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competencies within a personal, civic, social, or employment-related perspective.

There have been other attempts to define LLL at the policy level: Woodrow (2001) defined LLL as

- A paradigm, which, linked to the vision of a learning society, has been widely accepted in theory and political declaration
- A principle that, when followed, ensures broadly based and continuous learning throughout society