Prior Learning Assessment: History and New Directions in Scholarship

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PLA Early Years in the US

1930
College Entrance Examination Board
  - CLEP
  - AP

1945
American Council on Education
  - Credit for Military Experience

1945
The Educational Testing Service
PLA Early Years in the US

1970's
13 Adult-focused colleges began

1971
Commission on Non-Traditional Study

1974
Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL)
Earliest Research

  - Interviewed students, faculty, administration at 50 institutions on adult learner practices and prior learning assessment
  - Pilot projects and assessor training initiatives were launched via mini-grants to various institutions.
  - Results were written up as a series of working papers and piloted in more than 80 institutional projects.
  - CAEL organized meetings twice a year to disseminate research findings and gather further feedback
  - **Ten CAEL Standards are born**
Early Focused Efforts on Research

- National Institute on the Assessment of Adult Learning: Thomas Edison State College of NJ
- National Center on Adult Learning (NCAL): SUNY Empire State College.
- Institute for Research and Assessment in Higher Education (IRAHE) at the University of Maryland University College
Research in the U.S.

- **Limited research studies sources**
  - Dissertations – 36
  - CAEL – 10
  - Institutional research – 7
  - Reviewed Journals – 6

- **Three major themes**
  - PLA Program Practices
  - Institutional Outcomes (Persistence, Graduation Rates, GPA, etc.)
  - Student Outcomes

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PLA Program Practices

- **PLA Policies**
  - State
  - Regional Accreditation
  - Institution

- **Program Structures**
  - Barriers
  - Enablers
  - Best Practices

- **Assessment Practices**
  - Credit application
  - Assessment Processes

- **Faculty Development**

- **Program Review**

- Program practices vary
- Lack of institutional understanding overall
- Faculty concerns about integrity
- Lack of faculty awareness
- Lack of professional development for faculty and assessors
- Almost no programs had formal review
Institutional Measures (single institutional studies)
- Retention, Persistence, Graduation Rates,
- GPA
- Career Opportunities, Salary Increases

CAEL study (2010)
- Examined student data from 48 institutions, across US and Canada
- Significant increases based on PLA participation
  - PLA Students had higher graduations rates, persisted longer and took more credits at institution than non-PLA counterparts
Student Outcomes

Participation in PLA increases:

- Reflection
- Problem-solving and tacit knowledge
- Self-regulation/self-awareness/self-direction
- Study Skills
- Understanding of the role of faculty/mentors
Significant areas for PLA Program Improvements

- Clear alignment with mission, philosophy, policies of institution
- Faculty and evaluator training
  - Assessment practices
  - College-level learning
- Learning documentation
  - ePortfolios
- Program Evaluation
Special Issues on PLA Research

- The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Education
  www.irrodl.org

- Journal for Workplace Learning
  http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=1366-5626&volume=24&issue=2&PHPSESSID=oc8as1aatrgmci5f9o3v1ct2v2
Changing Landscape for Higher Education

- Learning is tethered and untethered – anytime, anywhere, any way
  - OERs
  - MOOCS
- PLA can play a significant role
  - Students self-author their learning
  - Interrelationships among knowledge is critical to assess
A Journal on Theory, Research and Practice in Prior Learning Assessment

Let’s take a look!

www.plaio.org

Phone: (518) 587-2100 x2803
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What additional features would you like to see?
What additional themes would you like to see?
Next Steps

Ways you can contribute

- Research articles
- Practice articles
- Reviews of literature
- What's Happening
- Ask a question

- Be a Peer-reviewer
- Spread the word!!! – www.plaio.org
- Other Ideas?
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