

University Extension and Public Service in the Age of Economic Globalization: A Response to Thompson and Lamble

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ABSTRACT

The *Journal* invited Allan Lauzon to comment on the preceding article by Gordon Thompson and Wayne Lamble. In his response Lauzon examines the larger shifts in Canadian society, making the case that this represents a fundamental shift in dominant values; examines how this value shift is impacting upon the university; examines the implications of value changes in the university for university extension units; and examines and comments on some of the ideas put forth by Thompson and Lamble. The *Journal* will provide an opportunity for Thompson and Lamble to respond to Lauzon's comments in the next issue of the *Journal* (fall 2000).

RÉSUMÉ

La *Revue* a invité Allan Lauzon à commenter l'article de Gordon Thompson et de Wayne Lamble. Dans sa réponse Lauzon: (1) examine les grands changements dans la société canadienne en faisant le cas que ceci représente un changement fondamental dans les valeurs dominantes; (2) examine comment ce changement de valeurs a ses répercussions sur l'université; (3) examine les implications de ces changements de valeurs dans l'université pour les unités d'enseignement postsecondaire; et (4) examine et commente quelques-unes des idées soumises par Thompson et Lamble. La *Revue* offrira une occasion à Thompson et Lamble pour répondre aux commentaires de Lauzon dans son prochain numéro (automne 2000).

INTRODUCTION

When I was first asked to review and respond to “Reconceptualizing University Extension and Public Service,” I was intrigued by the title and the possibility of looking at university extension through a fresh conceptual lens. However, I must confess that I was disappointed. The article does not provide a reconceptualization of university extension; in fact, there is very little that is new in the article. If I had to describe it, I would say it was naive, and it failed to look critically at the changing context of university extension and how this impacts on extension programs and practices.

The philosophy and practice of university extension is shaped by social, political, and economic forces (Lauzon, 1995). Thompson and Lamble make this point in their article when they discuss the origin and emergence of university extension. They also allude to this when they argue that university extension and our understandings of it change over time. Although not stated explicitly by Thompson and Lamble, the article suggests that as the social, political, and economic context changes, so does university extension. Thus, university extension does not exist in a vacuum and is not immune to changes in the larger environment. Of course, university extension is embedded within the context of an institution known as the university, which, like all organizations and institutions, is embedded in a larger context called society. The university is also responsive to this larger environment, and changes in its role, function, or values are a result of the social, political, and economic forces that impinge upon it.

The last decade or two have seen fundamental changes taking place globally. Increased economic globalization and advances in computer and communication technology are radically altering relationships among all people and institutions, including universities and extension units. For example, it has been argued that the coalition of big business, big government, and higher education now actively works to ensure that university extension education is, and continues to be, the handmaiden to those who benefit from economic globalization (Lauzon, 1998). This position is made explicit by U.S. Xerox Chairperson David Kearns when he states that “business will have to set the agenda . . . a complete restructure [*sic*] driven by competition and market discipline, unfamiliar ground for educators (quoted in McMurtry, 1998, p. 180).”

That the mandarins of the new global order view university extension

and adult education as their handmaiden is apparent in that lifelong learning is increasingly cast within the context of human capital formation and the development of a disposable labour force in order to ensure that the privileged maintain their market advantage. This is embodied in an ideology of economic globalization characterized by an emergent value system that values money over life. And this is the force that is moulding, shaping, and where necessary coercing the university and university extension to meet its needs. If we are to clarify the role of university extension or, more importantly, reconceptualize university extension, we must understand the larger environment of the university, and how changes in it are impinging on university extension units, in terms of how the university is being influenced by the larger social, political, and economic environment. Because Thompson and Lamble offer no such analysis, their clarification or reconceptualization of university extension remains naive.

In my response to their article, I look at four issues. First, I examine the larger shifts in Canadian society, making the case that this represents a fundamental shift in dominant values. Second, I examine how this value shift impacts upon the university, as this sets the context for university extension. Third, I examine the implications of value changes in the university for university extension units. Fourth, in light of these changes, I examine some of the ideas put forth by Thompson and Lamble. Specifically, I deal with university extension and public/community service, the understanding and valuing of extension by others, and faculty rewards as they relate to university extension scholarship.

THE MONEY CODE OF VALUE

Over the last decade, the impending fiscal crisis and the need for all governments to get their economic house in order through reducing services, cutting transfer payments, and downloading responsibilities to lower levels of government have dominated the news. The mantra of efficiency and the business model have become the guiding principles for the delivery of so-called public goods and services, including university extension. These changes are significant as they indicate both a shift in policy and programming, and a fundamental shift in values. This shift in values not only has economic consequences, but also consequences for the quality and health of our collective well-being.

The philosopher John McMurtry (1998) suggested this shift in values

constitutes a shift from the *life code of value* to the *money code of value*. The life code of value can be expressed in the following way:

Life ⇒ *Means of Life* ⇒ *More Life*

Within this context, McMurtry (1998) defined life as “organic movement, sentience and feeling, and thought,” and means of life as “whatever enables life to be preserved or to extend its vital range on these three planes of being alive” (p. 298). The money code of value, on the other hand, is expressed in this way:

Money ⇒ *Commodity for Sale* ⇒ *More Money*

From this value code, money is the beginning of the sequence because it is money rather than life that is the “regulating objective of thought and action” (p. 299). Historically, money has been a means to enhance life, whereas in the money code of value, the relationship is inversed so that life becomes the price paid for more money.

The essence of the money code of value was captured in more concrete terms by Turner (1995) when he wrote:

Where there is an abundant supply of labour, the owner of capital does not have to take responsibility for the health of the worker. Where the supply of human capital is highly flexible and elastic, the capitalist employers can readily replace the exhausted workforce with fresh supplies of labour. Although the requirement for continuous and regular production with a submissive and healthy workforce is a basic feature of capitalist production, the capitalist does not want to bear the burden of financing the health, education and welfare of the workforce. (p. 167)

McQuaig (1998) argued that it is the wealthy who benefit from the money code of value; Turner (1995, p. 169) argued that the upper class and professionals are complicit, either intentionally or unintentionally, in supporting the sectional interests of the few over the interests of the many. The result is a trend towards the privatization of public services whereby the bottom line and profits take precedent over altruistic policies that are denigrated as being neither practical nor affordable (McMurtry, 1998; Teeple, 1995). This is the context that is currently giving shape and form to both the university and to the practice of university extension.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE UNIVERSITY

The changes in values noted above have not left the university unscathed. The decline of funding for education that began in the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s has left the university in a precarious funding position. Many have argued that the university needs to look elsewhere than the “public trough” for funding, and that elsewhere is the private sector (e.g., see Buchbinder & Newsom, 1994). Furthermore, both federal and provincial governments are beginning to view the university as an essential element in improving Canada’s economic competitiveness. This view is captured in the first report of the Corporate-Higher Education Forum, founded in 1983, wherein corporate executives and university presidents concluded that

. . . universities in Canada have a crucial role in facilitating economic recovery and assisting in the transition into the high tech era. Vigorous international competition and the need for corporations to be in the forefront of the latest technological innovations are aspects of new economic forces that are drawing universities and corporations together. (quoted in Buchbinder & Newsom, 1994, p. 478)

University research is thus increasingly tied to corporate agendas, while curriculum is reconstructed to meet the training needs of the economy. Vocationalism is now the dominant discourse within the university and continues to gain momentum in higher education as the federal government increasingly allocates training responsibilities to the provinces. Hence, two policy fields that have historically been separate are now beginning to converge (Fischer & Rubenson, 1998), resulting in education and training becoming synonymous concepts. Higher education, once the bastion of intellectual inquiry, is becoming an expensive vocational institute made in the image of the corporation, while university researchers and research infrastructure are increasingly integrated into private-sector research and development. These changes impact upon the university in very real and tangible ways and are worth further exploration, as they make clear the fundamental shift in core values within the university.

To begin, the research process has been radically reconfigured in the university. Once a place where the mysteries of the universe could be contemplated, the university research enterprise has degenerated into a process that focuses on short-term gains for application and profit. There now seems to be little place for the type of foundational research that often

laid the necessary theoretical groundwork for innovation. Perhaps more alarming, the concept of research for the public good has disappeared, and the only research that is valued, for the most part, is research that leads to someone, somewhere, turning a profit. This change has resulted in numerous corporate-university partnerships, which are often presented as corporations engaged in altruistic corporate citizenship, benevolently bequeathing their resources to support the public enterprise of higher education. These partnerships are rarely looked at from the perspective of the taxpayer, that is, as corporations accessing publically provided funds to support corporate profit making. As Maxwell and Currie (1984) argued, corporations are using “Canada’s limited human, financial, and physical resources in research and education while tuning the research effort and the university curriculum more closely to the needs of the marketplace” (p. 2).

Corporations increasingly control the research agenda, and they own the research findings to do with as they please. This limits the time-honoured tradition of peer review, whereby the community of scholars ensures that research is sound and open to public scrutiny. Even though it is a mechanism for accountability that helps protect the general public interest, for all intents and purposes, it no longer exists. Corporations, as the owners of the research, can choose to be selective about what is made public and what is not.

From an educational perspective, corporations also unduly influence curriculum, and the integrity of education is undermined when curriculum is developed in response to an analysis of market needs. Furthermore, teaching suffers under this arrangement of corporate-university partnerships. In a climate of scarce resources, the institution must make the best use of its human resources, and is a more effective and efficient use of time for outstanding faculty members to pursue research contracts and forge partnerships than to teach. Hence, we see increasing numbers of contract faculty members teaching, while full-time faculty pursue research programs. This situation is reflected by Johnstone (1998) who argued that faculty must develop an entrepreneurial spirit, and the essence of this spirit is premised on maximizing the return on investment.

Another significant change is the radical alteration of decision-making processes within the university. For example, Buchbinder and Newsom (1994) wrote

that “. . . all decisions which may have once been based on academic criteria alone are now considered in terms of detailed cost-revenue

calculations and assessment of whether they represent good business decisions” (p. 485).

Johnstone (1998) suggested that in a market-driven environment, decisions are made by the client, who in this case is business and industry. Pannu, Schugurensky, and Plumb (1994) argued that government policies are increasingly driving universities into the marketplace; once there, they must play by market rules, becoming an active participant in the market (Buchbinder & Newsom, 1994). Hence, what was once a social and public institution is transformed into a profit-making center.

This, then, highlights the next significant change in values: education—historically considered a social good—has become a private good and those who benefit from a private good should pay for that good. Thus, students are expected to pay for a larger and larger share of their education (Fisher and Rubenson, 1998; Johnstone, 1998). Korsgaard (1997) argued that education is increasingly governed by labour market policies, and this has resulted in a changing language of education that has rendered it a prisoner of the language and goals of the marketplace. As Amutabi, Jackson, Korsgaard, Murphy, Martin, and Walters (1997) have stated, this results in the world of money dominating all, whereby the “possibilities of people to understand their everyday lives and act as free human beings—a precondition for a free and democratic society”—is lost (p. 10). Finance, commerce, and competitiveness become the driving force in education policy and reform (Edwards, 1997).

Nowhere is this domination clearer than in the proclamations of the World Bank at a recent World Conference on Higher Education. The key concepts, according to the World Bank, for educational reform are privatization, deregulation, and market orientation (quoted in Burgan & Graham, 1998). This means that education

is a private—not a public—good whose problems are amenable to market solutions. That is, it is in limited supply, not demanded by all, and is available for a price. Also, the consumers (business and industry) are “reasonably well informed” while providers (administrators and faculty) are “often ill informed—conditions which are ideal for market forces to operate.” Financing on the demand side means, in practice, (i) increasing tuition fees; (ii) charging full cost fees for room and board; (iii) means testing for all student loans; (iv) charging full market rates of interest on all loans; (v) improving collection of loans through private companies, and the introduction of

a graduate tax; (vi) training faculty in entrepreneurship; (vii) selling research and courses; (viii) increasing the number of private educational institutions with full cost tuition. The goal is to make higher education completely self-financing. (Burgan & Graham, 1998, pp. 4,6).

This is a manifestation of the money code value system that McMurtry spoke of, a value system that continues not only to fragment and isolate people and communities, but also to play individuals and communities off against other individuals and communities, all in the name of efficiency and profit. McMurtry (1998) talked about the global market as sovereign, showing how it enslaves us in the dogma of a closed value program to which no alternative exists. This is clearly evident in the educational agenda of the World Bank. Furthermore, this new value system ignores the grounds of life, which are essential to the enhancement of human life. Governments are reduced to ensuring that property rights and free exchanges and profit opportunities of the market remain secure and protected. What appears to be a limitation on the absolute rule of the market turns out, on more careful examination, to be only a delegated requirement to the state to maintain it (McMurtry) and this includes the so-called reforms of higher education. We end up with money that squelches life to make more money, leaving us with a system that proclaims all that increases the corporate bottom line to be good, and all that detracts from it to be bad.

Education and knowledge have become commodified, available to those who can pay the price. This perspective, based upon neo-liberal values and dominated by the discourse of economic globalization (i.e., hyper-competitiveness, human capital formation) has not only infiltrated universities, it is the dominant discourse for those who lead, manage, and administer these institutions. Clearly, Haughey (1998) pointed to this when he wrote that the

Canadian university is more reflective of the conservative political and social mood of the day than it is of a radical perspective supportive of moderate, progressive, and consensual social reform . . . Rather than being an active critic of the prevailing political and economic elites, the university appears to be a large part of the problem. If the prevailing campus ideology is one of uncertainty, fiscal conservatism and entrenchment, then with few exceptions this mood is reflected in the kinds of programs we see university extension

personnel devising, which tend to be safe, conservative and revenue driven (pp. 204–205)

Although this brief discussion does not do justice to the enormity of changes in higher education, it does illustrate that the university is changing. These are not just changes in policy and structure, however; they represent a fundamental shift in core values. And this institutional shift in values will impact, as Haughey notes above, on how we conceptualize and define the role of university extension.

THE CHANGING WORLD OF UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

The emergence of the global economy and the money code of value is also transforming the field of university extension. Edwards and Usher (1996) argued that although there are increasing opportunities for adults to participate in learning, there is more and more emphasis on work-related certificated education. This is because university extension is now viewed as a significant dimension of a training panacea for effective participation in an increasingly competitive economic environment. As Edwards and Usher argued, trends in the economy, the organization of work, and the need for a flexible workforce are being linked to learning opportunities for adults.

Briton (1996), in looking at the effect of these trends on university extension, captured its essence when he stated that those who influence the organization and practice of university extension are preoccupied with

the proposed solution: “free” the market of social obligations, “liberate” individuals of their collective responsibility, subjugate social justice to “individual free will,” sanction “open competition,” “rationalize” the lifeworld, and jettison all notions of equity in favour of an all-encompassing commitment to “efficiency.” (p. 29)

Briton continued:

“Freedom” becomes merely an absence of economic constraint, “equality” an opportunity to “compete,” “liberty” the abrogation of social responsibility. “Efficiency,” the master signifier of the New Right, is elevated from a means to enhance productivity—itself a means to improve general welfare—to an end-in-itself. (p. 35)

Lifelong learning is thus reduced, not to the development of the citizen or civil society, but to preparation for the workplace. In effect, lifelong learning is actually lifelong training, and education is a product for sale to

consumers who have a need to buy.

University extension presently plays a dominant role in the educational market, and is characterized by a number of emerging trends. For example, Haughey (1998) and Einsiedel (1998) have argued that university extension units are shunning their historical role in terms of community education in order to narrow their scope and focus on the lucrative field of continuing professional education and career development. Cruikshank (1997), in her analysis of the changing nature of university extension, argued that it is increasingly dominated by the market model, operates under cost-recovery mandates, serves as a revenue generator and profit centre for the university, and, hence, increasingly targets business and industry as its primary markets and potential partners.

Haughey (1998) argued that university extension education has lost its prominence as a leader in education for social change. Rather, it seems to be content to acquiesce to the demands placed upon it by the “system”—those administrators and managers, who are all too willing to surrender their moral responsibility and obligation to further the public good in order to “grow the business.” Haughey went on to argue that this represents the internalization by extension personnel of the norms and values imposed from outside, by those with power, influence, and a vested interest in perpetuating an inequitable system, and often under the guise of financial necessity or, worse yet, common sense. But as Cruikshank (1995) noted, these changes in the organization and practice of university extension are not socially neutral; they serve some while actively excluding others. The essence of this was captured by Grosjean (1998):

In a world characterized by continuous, unsettling, and accelerating change, educational institutions are central to the processes by which states maintain hegemony, legitimate themselves, and foster capital accumulation. Educational institutions enable these processes by preparing the human capital which sustains the economy while claiming opportunity for all. (p. 1)

The result, as Einsiedel (1998) notes, is movement away from university extension as part of the service university towards a “professionally oriented and commercial function” (p. 19).

RECONCEPTUALIZING UNIVERSITY EXTENSION: A RESPONSE TO THOMPSON AND LAMBLE

Thompson and Lamble, I believe, fail to adequately account for the changing context of university extension and, as a result, romanticize contemporary university extension. This section will look at three of the general issues they raise in their article: university extension and public service; administrator awareness and valuing of extension; rewards for faculty participation in extension activities.

Thompson and Lamble emphasize the university's mandate for public service and parade a variety of statements from various university documents to illustrate the importance of this function. They further argue that the university extension unit is central in fulfilling this part of the university mandate.

Although I applaud the sentiment in this position, it is incongruent with the operational reality of either the university or the university extension unit. Yes, it is true that many universities have grand mission statements about public service and serving the public good, which are trotted out from time to time for review. However, public service is often a facade, and it is none other than the World Bank that is stripping away this facade and exposing higher education for what it is becoming—an intricate element of the educational marketplace and the money code of value. It redefines the role of the university from that of a public institution designed to serve the public good to one of many service providers operating in a competitive market. This new role is acknowledged by Thompson and Lamble when they emphasize the growth of university extension in both the public and private spheres, even though they fail to see the meaning of this development relative to their argument.

This redefinition of the role of the university is accompanied by a redefinition of education. The meaning of education has changed from being a *right* that is an inherent part of a civilized and democratic society to being a *product* or *service* to be purchased by a consumer. University extension is not immune from this shift; in fact, it is leading the way in the promotion of marketplace values in the university and the public arena, as documented in a previous section of this article. Although these operational shifts are important to document and understand, it is even more critical to recognize these changes as a fundamental shift in core values. For example, language is often indicative of changes in values, and these changes can be

seen in university extension, where service language (i.e., meeting community needs) is being replaced by marketplace language (i.e., carving out niche markets). To paraphrase the philosopher John McMurtry (1998), this represents the emergence and dominance of money over life.

Ironically, this shift in values and in operations is, I would argue, forcing university administrators to look at university extension units through new “eyes” and to appreciate them from a fresh perspective. I suspect the reason that Thompson and Lamble believe that university extension is not understood is because there is so little appreciation for the historical and traditional community focus of university extension programming, as evidenced by the elimination of a good deal of community programming over the last decade. What administrators see, however, and appreciate is the potential of university extension units. Not only can they operate on a cost-recovery basis, they can also serve as profit-making centres and institutional revenue generators, all firmly grounded in the values of the marketplace. Thus, university extension, in conjunction with research, provides opportunities for the university to make money. University extension is, in fact, understood and valued, but not for its historical role of public and community service.

In terms of the reconceptualization of university extension, it is unfolding before our very eyes. University administrators, in response to changing social, political, and economic forces, create conditions whereby extension units either reconceptualize themselves as centres of entrepreneurial activity or preside over their own demise. They have been handed a new mandate that is a manifestation of a value code that is the antithesis of everything they have historically represented. This, however, is simply part of the larger shift from “public bad” to “private good,” and is representative of the continuing demise of the welfare state (Teeple, 1995).

Failing to understand the changes noted above also leads to what some might consider to be naive recommendations. For example, Thompson and Lamble cite Boyer as stating that colleges and universities have rejected service as part of serious scholarship because it is separate from serious intellectual work. This, I would argue, is not an issue of serious scholarship, but rather an issue of service activities being unable to generate sufficient revenue. Evidence to support this position does exist, if we consider that even some lines of serious intellectual work are not valued in the academy. For example, Clark (1999), in examining the issue of proprietary research in agriculture, concluded that there is a serious decline in government commitment to research in areas without commercial potential (e.g.,

integrated pest management), even when those developments may be in our collective interest. She argued that more research dollars are invested in streams of research (e.g., genetic engineering) that are likely to yield profits for industry and the university. Simply stated, any support for serious intellectual inquiry is in decline if that line of inquiry cannot deliver a profit to the university or private sector.

Thus, university extension as community service simply will not be allowed to survive in the new entrepreneurial university if it refuses to or cannot deliver profits. The move from a service mandate to an entrepreneurial mandate results in management allocating its human resources and developing programming in order to maximize the return on its investment. This is a sound decision if administrators base their decision-making on economic rationality, as that allows the university enterprise to deliver the three *Ps*: products, patents, and profits. Furthermore, there will be more concerted efforts in pursuing the three *Ps* as universities adjust their policy to encourage both profit sharing between the institution and the individual faculty members engaged in the research, and the growing of businesses within the university.

Given these policy changes, would faculty be interested in, or willing to be involved in, extension activity, even if it was recognized as serious intellectual work and they received “credit” for it? I suspect that the accolades for such activity from their peers and the public, and even the potential for small merit increases, could not compete with the profit motive that dominates the marketplace. Economic rationality dictates that one invests one’s time and knowledge in those activities that are the most lucrative; in this case, it is advancing and building one’s research program. Once again, we can see the money code of value moving in to displace and replace the life code of value.

CONCLUSIONS

Thompson and Lamble attempt to provide a very detailed conceptualization of university extension. However, it is unclear whether they are to clarifying what extension is (as stated in their thesis), or whether they are trying to reconceptualize extension (as they later state needs to be done), or both. In the end, it doesn’t matter, because they miss the mark regardless of the target. Their failure to provide a meaningful socio-political analysis of the changing environment of both the university and extension renders their suggestions naive at best, and possibly dangerous. The closest

they come is to note increasing budgetary pressures. This is dangerous because it deludes us into believing that saying something makes it true (that university extension is service oriented), and because it creates a situation where we may unconsciously comply with the agenda of others.

The university extension described by Thompson and Lamble seems more attuned to the socio-political environment of the 1960s and 1970s than to the 1990s and beyond. Although I recognize there may be occasional pockets of university extension that still subscribe to the vision presented by Thompson and Lamble, I believe that the operational reality of most extension units does not reflect that vision. University extension in Canada is not just moving into the marketplace; it is firmly embedded and, despite its espoused value system, its actions and operations are directed by the money code of value. We only need to look at the changes in university extension over the last decade for evidence of this.

Acknowledging the present situation is the first step in trying to clarify the difference between the role that university extension *is playing* and the role that it *should be playing*. In order to change to the role of university extension, we must begin by assessing where it is now, who are its masters, and what are the values that guide its vision and its practice. During the 1990s, university extension was transformed: it is now a business first and foremost and subscribes to the money code of value. That, for me, is the bottom line.

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