Refereed Article

Toward Developing A Universal Code Of Ethics For Adult Educators

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Abstract

An area which has generated considerable debate in recent years has involved the need for or desirability of developing a universal code of ethics for adult educators. The diversity of issues raised reflects the diversity of the field of adult education. This study addresses the "threshold" philosophic issue of the need for a code of ethics, attempting to reconcile conflicting viewpoints. It then proposes objectives and suggested principles to be included in a universal code of ethics and presents a model for its adoption and implementation.

Introduction

The term "adult education" does not lend itself easily to definition or to determination of scope. Its practice runs the gamut from workplace training to Sunday school to knitting circles to formalized university settings. Its practitioners have graduated as often from the "school of hard knocks" as from our colleges and universities. One must not allow the amorphous nature of the concept to discolor the result: Across the centuries, in whatever format, adult education has not only afforded an educational alternative, but it has often been *the* educational delivery system for adult learners.

Within its loose, amorphous setting, the world of adult education, from an ethical perspective, appears to have been dependent largely upon the ethics of the individual adult educator. A number of writers within the past two decades have decried the fact: "Little has appeared in the adult education literature which addresses ethical issues, [sic] and, specifically[,] how ethical considerations relate to the adult education prac-

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titioner" (Singarella & Sork, 1983, p. 244). Would a code of ethics for adult educators be desirable? Can a code of ethics be drafted which is applicable *universally* to, for example, basic literacy educators, English as a Second Language educators, continuing higher education educators, Sunday school teachers, and vocational training professionals, just to touch the surface of adult education?

This article will review the arguments for and against the need for a code of ethics for adult educators, what the author terms a "threshold" issue. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the need exists, a suggested format and objectives of a universal code of ethics are presented. A model code of ethics, based in part upon the *Code of Ethics* adopted recently by the Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE, 1998), modified to be made more universally applicable to the broad spectrum of adult educators, not just those engaged in continuing higher education, is suggested. Finally, a model is provided suggesting a method of adoption and implementation, two additional "threshold" issues which have, in the past, served to discourage implementation of a code of ethics applicable to adult educators. For the purposes of this article, "adult education" is defined as a "systematic, planned instructional program for adults" (Verner & Booth, 1964, p. 2).

Definition/Theoretical Concept Of "Code Of Ethics"

Dewey (1889) defined the business of ethics to be "to detect the element of obligation in conduct, to examine conduct to see what gives it its worth" (p. 241). He stated,

> The moral endeavor of man thus takes the form not of isolated fancies about right and wrong, not of attempts to frame a morality for himself, not of efforts to bring into being some praiseworthy ideal never realized; [sic] but the form of sustaining and furthering the moral world of which he is a member." (p. 347)

Singarella and Sork (1983) provide a more specific definition: "Ethics is the branch of philosophy which investigates that which is good, bad, wrong, morally approved or disapproved within groups or cultures" (p. 244). Lest the reader assume that the concept is strictly theoretical, Brockett (1988b) cites no less than Aristotle for the proposition that "ethics involves the pursuit of practical knowledge" (p. 3). The link to adult

education occurs in determining the mission of adult education and the specific delivery system resulting from that mission. Although Brockett (1988b) suggests that "it has only been recently that authors have begun directly to confront specific ethical dilemmas that can emerge in the education of adults" (p. 4), the literature is surprisingly abundant with articles and books discussing ethical issues, particularly within the formal/continuing higher education domain. Many of the issues raised within those sources will be discussed below.

Lawler and Fielder (1991) provide us with a context for ethical issues, albeit within the forum of continuing higher education:

> Ethical problems arise on different levels. Policies and practices can be challenged on ethical grounds, such as questioning whether a particular policy is fair to all it will affect. In continuing higher education, practitioners challenge policies they believe to be unfairly discriminating against adult students. Similarly, actions of individuals are often the subject of ethical judgment, as when one claims that a person did not keep a promise. For many higher education administrators, this distinction is sharply defined when the time comes for an individual to carry out a policy which he or she believes is ethically wrong or questionable. (p. 20)

The existence of these issues results in the need for them to be addressed within multiple contexts by adult education practitioners who may be unaware that they are addressing an ethical issue and who may be woefully unprepared to do so. If the pronouncement by Singarella and Sork (1983) that "education in general, and adult education in particular, gives little attention to ethical issues" (p. 245) is no longer accurate, to this date no universal code of ethics, encompassing the wide spectrum of adult education, has been developed and instituted. One reason is that the basic threshold issue of the need for a code of ethics needs to be addressed, and a resolution of sorts must be devised between the strong arguments for and against development and implementation of such a code of ethics, which, for purposes of this article, is defined as "a set of basic principles or values and related rules of right conduct to which members of a profession generally subscribe" (Connelly & Light, 1991, p. 234). The ramifications of the term "profession," which have resulted in a stumbling-block long advanced by opponents of a code of ethics, are discussed below.

Need For A Universal Code Of Ethics For Adult Educators

Purpose of a Code of Ethics for Adult Educators
Lawler (1996a) has summarized appropriately the purpose of a code
of ethics for adult educators:

> A code of ethics represents a consensus among practitioners con-
> cerning the standards of conduct that apply to professional activities.
> These standards must address the most important ethical issues that
> arise in practice and set out guidelines for professional conduct. . . .
> While codes cannot guarantee ethical behavior, they can make clear
> what is expected of ethical practitioners and create peer pressure for
> conformity to ethical ideals. (p. 2)

Freeman, Sheaffer, and Whitson (1993) concur: "While a code of ethics
in no way assures compliance with a set of standards, it can provide guide-
lines for practice and a public declaration of professional intentions and
aspirations" (p. 9). One would think that such seemingly beneficial pur-
poses would readily lead to universal agreement on the need for adoption
of such a code. Reality reflects the opposite: a philosophical battle has
raged over several generations concerning the need for a code of ethics
for adult education practitioners. A summary of the basic arguments
within this threshold issue follows below, after which the writer suggests
a method for resolving what appears to be the most contentious issue.

Arguments Advanced in Favor of Adopting a Code of Ethics. Ac-
cording to Dewey (1889), "A moral institution sets before [its members]
the common end or ideal and insist[s] upon this as the real end of indi-
vidual conduct" (p. 348). An early argument for implementing ethical
standards in teaching was made by Wilson (1982), who recognized and
defined "abuses" of educators, which he colorfully nicknamed "power,
pretense and piggybacking": "abuse of teachers' authority; publishing
students' work as our own; using others' ideas as our own; loading the
evidence in favor of our views through selective use of data; propagan-
dizing; breaching the confidentiality of data supplied by students" (p.
269; semi-colons in the original). Schurr (1982) concurs, calling for a
code of conduct for academicians "whether they like it or not" (p. 322).
Connelly and Light (1991) are often cited as early proponents of a code
of ethics for adult educators: "We believe adult education should make a
strong statement of social responsibility through developing a code of

ethics. . . . The very first statement of principle in the adult education
code should emphasize responsibility and accountability to society" (p.
234). Rather than Wilson's (1982) sole focus on the conduct of educa-
tors within the academy, Connelly and Light (1991) recommend focus-
ing on broad areas of inclusive philosophy: pluralism, respect for learn-
ers, and respect for educators. Griffith (1991) also used his influential
voice to call for a code of ethics for adult educators, particularly address-
ing concerns for (a) avoiding harmful actions; (b) addressing the general
welfare of the community, nation and world; and (c) "serving the legiti-
mate learning needs of the public and the legitimate economic needs of
those who are employed to carry out such programs" (p. 4). McDonald
and Wood (1993) concluded from their empirical study (one of the few
in this area): "If there were doubts before this study about whether sig-
nificant numbers of adult educators support the idea of a professional
code of ethics for themselves and their colleagues, those doubts seem to
have been put to rest" (p. 256).

Of significance is the apparent perspective transformation undergone
by Sork who, joined by Singarella in 1983, issued the often quoted admoni-
tion that "we do not advocate the development of an ethical code. . . . We
doubt that the field of adult education is mature enough to reach agree-
ment on a code of ethics which would apply to all practitioners. Further,
we are not convinced that such a code would be desirable" (pp. 246,
250). This reasoning was cited widely for a decade until Sork, joined by
Welock, quietly rescinded it almost ten years later: "Although some might
argue that adult education is an emerging field and lacks the maturity
necessary to develop a useful code of ethics, . . . this argument was much
more convincing thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago than it is today"
(Sork & Welock, 1992, p. 120).

Of importance recently within the field of continuing higher educa-
tion has been the work of Lawler (1996a), particularly on behalf of the
Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE). Her work fo-
cuses on content issues, apparently presupposing that the need for such a
code for ACHE members was a foregone conclusion. However, a num-
ber of the arguments opposing the need for a code of ethics for adult
educators are of substance and are not easily dismissed, particularly those
arguments having a structural basis.

Arguments Advanced Opposing Development of a Code of Ethics.
Although the Singarella and Sork (1983) admonition about the lack of
maturity of the field of adult education as a primary reason for opposing

development of a code of ethics appears to have been rescinded by one of its proponents, strong arguments against a code have been advanced by others and need to be addressed, again as a threshold issue. One such argument in opposition, advanced by Carlson (1988), raises the specter of "professionalization" as a consequence of the adoption of a code of ethics for adult educators: "The slippery path of professionalization leads to the monopoly by an elite over an area of practice" (p. 166). This argument is consistent with Carlson's dismissal of codes of ethics as "rhetorical facades of public service erected to preserve and enhance a profession's independent and monopolistic control over an area of social interaction" (p. 165). An unpublished doctoral dissertation by Wright is cited by Carlson (1988) for the following concepts, which he believes appear often in formal codes of ethics: (a) belief in authority based on expertise, (b) belief in a professional monopoly based on that authority, and (c) maintenance of the monopoly of authority by admonition against transfer of professional skills to clients (pp. 168-169). Carlson's oft-cited piece assails the Council on the Continuing Education Unit's *Principles of Good Practice in Continuing Education* (1984) and codes of ethics in general as "clearly based on a positivist philosophy and behaviorist psychology, the rock of the mechanistic dogma of schooling" (p. 171). Decrying the "loss to the individual" (p. 172) and the fact that "freedom to learn would be dramatically diminished" (p. 172), Carlson concludes: "Instead of trying to institutionalize adult education with a professional code of ethics, practitioners would be better absorbed in developing their own personal values and in gaining an understanding of the historical and philosophical foundations of their work" (pp. 174-175).

The basis of Carlson's objection is substantive and relates to the issues of power and perception: Who would have the power, or who would be perceived to have the power to determine what type of conduct is ethical? Cunningham's (1988) influential words on this issue, again written in opposition to development of a code of ethics, have resounded over the past decade: "I argue that ethics is being socially defined in the political arena of practice. Our personal values, our social roles are socially constructed and defined by our socially constructed reality. The reality . . . is defined and controlled by the groups that are dominant" (p. 139). Forced adoption of a code of ethics for adult educators which fails to account for the issues of power and perception results in Carlson's and Cunningham's objections becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

Before addressing the third argument of significance, context, another potential power issue, that of certification should be noted. The

argument, basically, is that adoption of a code of ethics will result in "professionalization" of adult education, thereby opening the doors to certification requirements similar to those in other professions, i.e., public education, law, medicine, etc. James (1981) argues against certification of adult educators as "unfeasible and unnecessary" (p. 85). Freeman, Sheaffer, and Whitson (1983) caution that "the dichotomy between the 'authority' theory of professionalization, [sic] and the inclusive nature of adult and continuing education is a further indicator of the potential inconsistencies of a professional code of ethics for adult and continuing education" (p. 10). Questions arise: Is certification synonymous with or an automatic byproduct of "professionalization," and why are either or both determined to be automatic byproducts of a code of ethics?

Decontextualization represents an objection to codes of ethics in general. Carlson (1988), in opposition to development of a code of ethics for adult educators, states, "The question is whether you, the adult educator, have a perspective and a personal value system that enable you to see the underlying assumptions and that alert you to the fact that you are faced with an ethical issue requiring choice" (p. 175). Cunningham (1992) completes the framing of the issue: "Codes of ethics freeze the oughts in time and space, tend to decontextualize normative behavior, privilege those in power positions, and inhibit the ability of individuals or groups to reconstruct social reality" (pp. 107-108). Cunningham is arguing not that ethics are relative but that the contexts of ethical dilemmas will vary; consequently, we adult educators should not be locked into applying rigid rules regardless of the particular context of the dilemma in question.

These criticisms are significant and should not be dismissed summarily. A universal code of ethics for adult educators must include mechanisms for addressing the issues of power, perspective and context. Perhaps the model presented below, revised from the original provided by Brockett (1988b), will represent such a mechanism.

Model to Address Issues of Power, Perspective and Context In Ethical Decision-Making. Brockett (1988b) developed a model he termed "Dimensions of Ethical Practice in Adult Education." The basis for his model was his perception that "formal codes of ethics . . . are only concerned with outcomes and do not take into consideration the process individuals go through in ethical decision making" (p. 9). The "dimensions of ethical practice" model suggested by Brockett was intended as "an attempt to describe a process through which adult educators can draw

from their own basic values in making decisions related to their practice as educators of adults" (p. 9). The components of Brockett's original model, which was subjected to criticism (Cunningham, 1988), is reviewed, after which a revision is suggested. This revision should result in a workable model that addresses the threshold issues of power, perception, and context, thus permitting exploration of format, content, and implementation issues for a universal code of ethics for adult educators.

Brockett's (1998b) model consists of three layers. At its heart is the "personal value system" (p. 10), which is consistent with Carlson's (1988) requirement set forth above. The next layer is termed "consideration of multiple responsibilities" (p. 11) which is analogous to *role*. The outside layer is called "operationalization of values" (p. 12), which is, basically, *application*. Brockett suggests that our own personal sets of values shape our *perspectives*. Each of us as adult educators acts within the context of, and, therefore, must be cognizant of, our roles as educators. Application of ethical principles involves sensitivity to the context that is unique to the particular situation. Although Brockett (1990) later developed "principles" to explain this aspect, he was not as specific as he could have been as far as the application of personal values and role to context; indeed, he appears to have been too restrictive within the "personal values" component of his model, a limitation resulting in the criticism described below. Brockett suggests that the interaction of personal values, role, and application would frame ethical decision making, with the "operationalization" or context component being broad enough to "involve the development of a formal code of ethics or standards" (Brockett, 1988b, p. 12).

Unfortunately, Brockett's model as presented is not broad enough to address the issues of power and perspective, issues raised pointedly by Cunningham (1988) in the same volume.

> In actual practice, our choices are made by some decision-making model optimizing one set of values as against another; thus the practice of making ethical decisions is seen as a rational activity. But it is inappropriate to apply rational discourse to a political activity. I argue that ethics is being socially defined in the political arena of practice. (p. 139)

What Cunningham (1998) challenges in particular is the limitation caused by Brockett's model failing to address political structures: "The structural hegemony that controls our interpretation of our personal values

and our social roles does not provide an adequate basis for making ethical decisions" (p. 139). Brockett (1988a) acknowledges the legitimacy of this criticism: "Cunningham points out quite correctly that the model views ethical decision making as a rational process. . . . The point Cunningham makes is a crucial one" (p. 196).

Cunningham (1988) does suggest a solution:

> It is informed emancipatory practice that helps adult educators and their partners, adult learners, to forge new understandings of social roles and relationships through dialogue and to bring to life and to practice the personal values that are congruent with a democratic society. (p. 139)

The initial layer of Brockett's model should be modified to include not just personal values but also critical reflection and dialogue with possible stakeholders. This modification provides a blend of perspective and context which, when added to the components of appreciation of role and operational factors, such as existence of a code of ethics, would present largely a practical approach for the application of a code of ethics that takes into account the issues of power, perspective, and context that need to be addressed. This article urges the application of the suggested provisions of a code of ethics within the lens of the modified Brockett model described above. This modified model, while admittedly not perfect, does provide increased sensitivity to context issues. The author believes that the method of adoption suggested below for a universal code of ethics for adult educators will address the power issue in a satisfactory manner. How many of the numerous codes of ethics now in existence, including within education, provide such a framework for addressing these threshold issues, or how many organizations adopting codes of ethics have even considered those issues prior to implementation?

Summary of Brockett/Siegel Model forAddressing Ethical Issues. Rather than the layers presented in the Brockett (1988b) "Dimensions" model, the Brockett/Siegel model for addressing ethical issues by adult educators would resemble the following:

- **Addressing Perspective Issues**
  Personal value system
  Critical reflection

- **Addressing Context Issues**
  Role of adult educator
  Relative power determination
  Dialogue as appropriate
- **Application Issues**
  Existence and application of provision of a code of ethics
  Application of other ethical norms (in absence of code
      provisions)

Implicit in the presentation of the suggested provisions of the universal
code of ethics for adult educators set forth below is the author's determi-
nation that, within the context of application of the model described above,
the benefits of such a code outweigh its drawbacks.

Objectives Of A Universal Code Of Ethics

The framework of a code of ethics based upon general principles has
been supported in the literature. Connelly and Light (1991) were early
proponents of an "interdisciplinary" code of ethics within a structure
whereby "a common code should be seen as complementing and rein-
forcing more specific codes, not as an alternative" (p. 239). Wood (1996)
frames the issue as follows: "Is it possible to put together a code that
would be broad enough in scope on the one hand and specific enough in
application on the other to be both appropriate and worth having in all of
the many arenas of adult education activity?" (p. 13). (Interestingly, his
recollection [Wood, 1996] that the study he conducted with McDonald
[McDonald & Wood, 1993] *advocated* such a universal code is a bit strong,
as their article actually states: "Some professions are too diverse to be
confined to a single code. Such may be the case for adult education"
[p. 255]). A universal code, defined as a code of ethics applicable to all
adult educators, in the form of *general principles* supplemented as de-
sired by various organizations or institutions with more specific guide-
lines, was suggested by this writer in an earlier study (Siegel, 1998). This
framework is again recommended, applied within the context of the model
described above and the adoption/implementation model described be-
low.

Suggested Objectives
The Code of Ethics adopted by the Association for Continuing Higher
Education (ACHE) in 1998 provides a fine model from which to begin.

However, it contains a broad introductory paragraph, which does not include any objectives for the Code itself. It would be useful for any code of ethics to address the objectives for which it was adopted. Set forth below are some suggested objectives for a universal code of ethics for adult educators, along with the basis for each objective.

1. The Code of Ethics will provide guidance to adult educators concerning what constitutes appropriate practice.

This suggested objective is an adaptation of one proposed by McDonald and Wood (1993): "A code of ethics instructs the practitioner about what is good practice" (p. 250). "Provide guidance" is substituted for "instructs" since it is evident that the code may not "instruct" in every or any instance—and probably should not do so. In fact, Connelly and Light (1991) suggest that an objective should be "education," which they envision as "dialogue" (p. 239) and, presumably, not instruction.

This objective also addresses Sork and Welock's (1992) suggestion that a code of ethics "provide limited protection from unethical practice for adult learners" (p. 120), practices they term "ethically hazardous" (p. 120). The language is general enough to avoid the connotation of mandatory and rigid "rules," which might be objectionable to a portion of the adult education community.

2. The Code of Ethics will provide policy-making direction to organizations and agencies engaged in adult education.

Sork and Welock (1992) support this objective: "Codes of ethics and policies based on them do not guarantee ethical practice, but policies that are consistent with the core values reflected in a code will reinforce the idea that the provider stands for certain values and attempts to operate in a manner consistent with those values" (p.120). This objective is related to the idea of providing credibility or integrity to the profession (McDonald & Wood, 1993, p. 250), as well as providing "a public declaration of professional intentions and aspirations" (Freeman, Shaeffer, & Whitson, 1993, p. 9).

3. The Code of Ethics will provide a common reference for encouraging dialogue among adult educators.

This objective has been adapted from Wood (1996), although it has been expanded to be applicable to the universal code of ethics, as opposed to the limitation in his framework to "professional adult educators" (p. 14). Connelly and Light (1991) reflect a similar aspiration: "A

related objective would be to encourage more dialogue around funda-mental commonalities among adult educators" (p. 239).

4. The Code of Ethics will assist in communicating the shared values in the field of adult education.

Although the temptation existed to include this objective with Ob-jective 3 above, this writer has made it a separate objective. Sork and Welock (1992), from whom it emanates, state, "Spirited discussion and debate about these values should be a part of every program that purports to prepare reflective practitioners who understand the philosophical ba-sis of their work and who are guided in this work by a consistent set of values" (p. 120). This can be termed the "program planning" objective: Perhaps the code of ethics can serve as a catalyst for an ethical compo-nent to be addressed directly or indirectly in adult education programs to the benefit of adult educators, organizations and institutions, and, above all, adult learners.

With the objectives of the universal code of ethics in place, we can now turn to examining various aspects of the suggested content of the code itself.

Suggested Content Of A Universal Code Of Ethics

Standards and Methodology

The model that this writer has suggested previously be used in adopt-ing and implementing a universal code of ethics for adult educators is summarized as follows:

> The writer recommends that representatives from all of the major professional associations, reflecting the interests of all stakeholders, form a task force to study development of a universal code of ethics for adult education practitioners. Obviously, the principles set forth therein would be broad and universally applicable. (Siegel, 1998, p. 79)

Connelly and Light (1991), while recommending that a specific organi-zation take the lead, suggest, "There should be surveys of attitudes, be-liefs and values of adult educators in response to the draft code, studies of the histories of codes in adult education fields, and comparisons with related histories in other professions such as nursing" (p. 239).

This writer commends ACHE, and Patricia A. Lawler (1998) in particular, for the method ACHE employed in developing its *Code of Ethics* (1998). Using a 1991 ACHE grant, Lawler and Fielder (1993) surveyed ACHE members regarding their perceptions of ethical problems in their work. The major themes which emerged were (a) "concern . . . about the mistreatment of vulnerable groups in the organization, such as students, adjunct faculty and staff" and (b) concern about "organizational and program integrity" (p. 31). Lawler and Fielder (1993) called for "some kind of written statement or code that will set out the profession's considered judgment about the ethical obligations of its practitioners to the stakeholders revealed in the survey: superiors, clients, colleagues, staff, faculty, and the community" (p. 32).

A few years later Lawler (1996a) noted, "The leadership of ACHE is now ready to move forward in considering a code, [sic] but wants to do this in a way that builds consensus among its membership, . . . seek the views of members of the profession and provide an interactive process for discussion and consideration of the major provisions of the code" (pp. 2-3). A survey, with questions based upon what Lawler termed "representative case studies" (p. 3), was conducted. Six case studies were provided, with members requested to select among "principles" set forth after each case. Despite an anemic response rate (10% for the first survey and 21% for the second), the ACHE obviously used this survey in drafting the provisions of its *Code of Ethics* (1998), as six of the Code's eight provisions appear to be lifted from this study. Those provisions will be analyzed below; for now, their importance lies in the fact that they were the results of input from adult educators, a significant standard for their inclusion in a universal code of ethics. However, largely due to their inherent limitations, few provisions of the ACHE *Code of Ethics* will be recommended for adoption without modification.

The results of several other surveys will also be considered. (It is uncertain whether ACHE considered input other than its own survey; see Lawler, 1996a, p. 3.) Although empirical data is sparse in this area, a seminal early study was conducted by Clement, Pinto, and Walker (1978) of training and development professionals. An oft-cited article by McDonald and Wood (1993), based upon data contained in an unpublished dissertation by McDonald (1991), which, interestingly, is not referenced in the article, contains data from a survey of three agencies in Indiana containing adult education professionals. Results from these empirical studies have been blended with the ACHE model and other sources,

resulting in the following suggested principles to be contained in a universal code of ethics for adult educators.

Suggested Content of a Universal Code of Ethics for Adult Educators

Following are ten content areas that should be included in a universal code of ethics for adult educators.

1. Adult educators should utilize, to the extent possible, the best available professional knowledge and practices in serving all learners. (ACHE [1998]: "Deliver programs of measurable, high quality.")

This writer has amended the ACHE provision, which itself was amended from that originally proposed to ACHE members: "Continuing education practitioners have a responsibility to deliver quality programs to clients" (Lawler, 1996a, p. 8). The statement adopted by the writer emanates from Wood (1996, p. 14), but it reflects Connelly and Light's (1991) suggestion that "a code of ethics for adult education should explicitly state that the profession is committed to a synoptic or inclusive view that allows for the best of many educational philosophies" (p. 235). This suggested provision is neither overly restrictive nor dogmatic, yet it commits the educator to a minimal standard within a broader context than that afforded by the ACHE provision.

2. Adult educators should respect the ethno-socio-cultural heritage, special circumstances, and dignity as human beings of all adult learners. (ACHE [1998]: "Provide fair and equal services to all, regardless of race, color, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin or disability.")

The ACHE provision above was not included in the survey conducted by Lawler (1996a), but it was added to the ACHE *Code of Ethics*. The ACHE statement is based upon federal law and represents a *legal* perspective. McDonald (1991) lists "treatment of learner" as an *ethical* problem widely cited by those responding to her survey (p. 99). This writer suggests the above provision, again taken from Wood (1996, p. 14), as broader and more reflective of the *ethical* responsibility of adult educators. *Legal* requirements speak for themselves.

3. Adult educators should avoid conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflicts of interest, in all aspects of their work. (ACHE [1998]: identical provision.)

McDonald and Wood (1993) note that "conflicts of interest usually involved those individuals who had consulting businesses as a second

income" (p. 248) and thus were attempting to bolster their own busi-
nesses by engaging in adult education. Schurr (1982) states that a code
of ethics "must exclude possible conflicts of interest" (p. 325). Schurr's
code, geared toward academicians, would include this prohibition: "No
academician shall realize any direct economic benefit from the results of
his or her research or publication" (p. 326). The ACHE provision is
clearly drafted and was heavily supported in the survey (Lawler, 1996a,
p. 5). It also reflects a concern regarding conflicts of interest cited exten-
sively in McDonald's (1991) survey.

**4. Adult educators should respect and strive to ensure as appropri-
ate the need for confidentiality of each learner in interactions be-
tween learner and educator.** (ACHE [1998]: "Ensure the confidential-
ity of learners and clients in areas where privacy is expected or required.")

The seminal study of training and development professionals by
Clement, Pinto, and Walker (1978) noted "violation of confidences" as
the second most cited "category of behavior considered unethical"
(p. 96). Respondents to McDonald's (1991) study cite "client confiden-
tiality" most frequently as an "issue a code of ethics should address"
(p. 99).   This issue was not presented to the ACHE membership in
Lawler's (1996a) survey. Perhaps the language of this provision of the
ACHE *Code of Ethics* (1998) reflects a lack of input by others. To force
adult educators to "ensure" confidentiality results in a difficult and legal-
istic burden: Can one ever "ensure" confidentiality in every situation where
"privacy is expected or required"? "Expected or required" by whom?
The ACHE confidentiality provision, as drafted, may prove unnecessar-
ily restrictive, becoming a noose around the neck of unknowing viola-
tors. The provision drafted by the writer qualifies or ameliorates the harsh-
ness of the ACHE provision while retaining the original intent. Further,
while proscriptive, it is not punitive.

**5. Adult educators should respect the unique and diverse learning
needs of adult learners; should respect the need of each learner for
honesty, understanding, and fairness; should respect the real or per-
ceived disparity in position between educator and learner; and should
respect the right of learners to participate in any solutions designed
to meet their needs.** (ACHE [1998]: "Inform faculty and administrators
of the unique and diverse needs of adult learners, [sic] and the best prac-
tices available for their success in a course or program.")

The ACHE provision is derived from a case study which involves a

continuing higher education administrator who recognized that his faculty members did not utilize techniques other than traditional lecture with adult students (Lawler, 1996a, pp. 6-7). Consequently, the provision is somewhat narrowly drawn. The suggested provision includes input from the CCEU's *Principles of Good Practice in Continuing Education* (1984), the only use made here of that failed intervention. Section 1.1 of the *Principles* reads as follows:

> Sponsors or providers of continuing education programs/activities utilize appropriate processes to define and analyze the issue(s) or problem(s) of individuals, groups and organizations for the purpose of determining learning needs. (p. 1)

This section juxtaposes the "best available practices" provision set forth above (Content Area #1), but it addresses the *determination* of the "best available practices" and includes the components of *respect* for (a) the needs of adult learners (Brockett, 1988b) and (b) the "right of learners to participate in any solutions designed to meet their needs" (Connelly & Light, 1991, p. 237). As Cervero (1987) instructs us, "Learning needs should be viewed as adults' right to know" (p. 75).

Connelly and Light (1991) dilute this important principle somewhat by suggesting that it "could be covered by a general statement about the importance of collaboration between educators and learners and learners among themselves" (p. 237). However, the results of McDonald's (1991) study differentiate among issues of (a) the relationship between learner and adult educator (discussed below and addressed in the suggested provision); (b) the "needs of the learner," which are being addressed in this provision and which were the fourth most frequently cited "issue a code of ethics should address"; and (c) the "treatment of the learner," which is also addressed in this provision and which was the second most frequently cited "issue a code of ethics should address" (p. 99). This writer's suggested provision borrows from Wood (1996) regarding the section dealing with respecting "the need of each learner for honesty, understanding and fairness" (p. 14) and expands the ACHE provision to protect these "basic rights" of all adult learners. In doing so, the writer has elected not to include a proscription against abandoning the goal of self-directed learning in order to achieve a specific learning outcome (Singarella & Sork, 1983; Caffarella, 1988). Nor has this writer elected to address Rose's (1993) rhetorical question, "Do we give students only what they say they want or do we aim for some deeper transformation?" (p. 5). The sug-

gested provision does address Singarella and Sork's (1983) contention that "the adult educator is in a unique position to influence the minds and actions of clients and others with whom he or she interacts" (p. 246). More importantly, this provision addresses the concept of "hidden privilege" expounded by Lawler (1996b): "Those in positions of power hold a privilege accorded their status, one that they may not recognize, by simple virtue of having that privilege" (p. 19). Such privilege can create a real or perceived disparity in power between educator and learner, the third most frequently cited "issue a code of ethics should address" in McDonald's study (1991, p. 99).

6. Adult educators should be cognizant of, remain sensitive to, and communicate the real or perceived negative impact of institutional or organizational policies and procedures on the learners, the institution or organization, and the community as a whole. (ACHE [1998]: "Articulate to the institution any impact that policies and procedures will have on the institution, the community and the learner.")

    The ACHE principle is based upon a case provided by Lawler (1996a) involving a director of continuing education at a university, a case Lawler indicates "highlights an administrator's dilemma in executing organizational directives" (p. 9) that the administrator perceives as having a negative effect on the continuing education programs. Lawler's point appears to be that, "when . . . [continuing education programs] are viewed as outside the traditional mission of the institution or as a latecomer to the university's organization, they are more vulnerable to unethical demands and policies" (p. 9). Interestingly, the principle from the case that Lawler proposed to the ACHE membership, which she states "produced strong consensus among members (93%) who responded to the case" (p. 10), was actually, "Continuing higher education practitioners should advise their superiors of any negative impact that institutional policies will have on continuing education programs, students, faculty and staff" (p. 10). This latter statement is more specific than the provision eventually adopted by the ACHE and set forth above, especially in that the adopted ACHE provision eliminates the word "negative." The seventh most commonly cited "issue a code of ethics should address," according to MacDonald's study (1991), was the "relationship between organization/adult educator." (p. 99). The provision drafted by this writer suggests that the adult educator does have an ethical responsibility to communicate the real or perceived negative impact of institutional policies or procedures on adult learners.

7. Adult educators should present advertising information concerning services and programs that is clear, complete, accurate, and descriptive of the actual services and programs being offered. (ACHE [1998]: "Present advertising information that is clear, truthful and descriptive of the real services and programs.")

ACHE members surveyed preferred widely the ACHE provision cited above over a suggested alternative, "Continuing higher education practitioners have the obligation to meet community standards in advertising their programs" (Lawler, 1996a, p. 11). This provision is consistent with the findings of McDonald's (1991) study that "honesty in advertising" was the fifth most commonly cited "issue a code of ethics should address" (p. 99) and reflects a preference by ACHE members for a specific proscription versus a general, legalistic standard. The study of training and development professionals by Clement, Pinto, and Walker (1978) also presents, as a "behavior considered unethical," what was termed "dishonesty regarding program outcomes" (p. 96). This observation is certainly closely related to the concept of honesty in advertising. The redraft suggested by this writer simply "tightens up" the language employed in the ACHE provision without destroying the simplicity and directness of that provision.

8. Adult educators should present services and programs that are fiscally responsible to all stakeholders, with results based upon objective and honest assessment. (ACHE [1998]: "Provide programs that are fiscally responsible to the institution, the community and the participant.")

The ethical provision adopted by the ACHE and presented above does not reflect the issues in the case provided by Lawler (1996a) to elicit such response. The case utilized was designed primarily to demonstrate the ethical dilemma occurring where an educator is encouraged to retain marginal students in order to generate continued revenue for the institution. The ACHE principle is so vague as to provide an unsatisfactory and unhelpful statement in a vital area of concern to the adult education community. The seminal study by Clement, Pinto, and Walker (1978) reveals that the following responses by training and development professionals to this issue were perceived as "dishonesty":   (a) "concealing truth on program results," (b) giving the "the assurance that a training program produced results when in fact it was only a good show," and (c) "falsifying training records to make results look better than they are" (p. 96).

Respondents to McDonald's (1991) study noted the following:

> One instructor wrote: "I see students kept in the system and not re-
> ceive the appropriate help because they are a number which trans-
> lates into state and federal funding." Another ABE instructor stated
> he was ". . . aware of ghost signatures, after registration, to boost
> attendance records." This instructor also knew of Hooshier [sic]
> Lottery Ticket distributions to boost attendance records. (p. 81)

This writer believes that the suggested re-draft of the ACHE principle
more clearly addresses this very real issue that exists throughout much of
the adult education community.

**9. Adult educators should assist in empowering learners to partici-
pate actively and effectively to improve the general welfare of their
immediate and global communities and to promote the concepts of a
just and equitable society.** (ACHE [1998]: No comparable provision.)
    Certainly the suggestion of this provision can and will be termed
"political." Postmodernists will ask *who* constructs the "concepts of a
just and equitable society?" Nevertheless, this concept represents, in
this writer's mind, an extension of the philosophy of adult education es-
tablished early in the profession: a global concept of *why* adult educators
do what they do. Although the language suggested borrows heavily from
Wood (1996, p.14), it also relies on comments made by former AAACE
President William S. Griffith (1991) in an article long recognized as a
clarion call in this area: "Concern for the general welfare of the commu-
nity, nation, and world would be a . . . major focus of the adult educator's
code of ethics" (p. 4). Connelly and Light (1991) instruct us, "The very
first statement of principle in the adult education code should emphasize
responsibility and accountability to society" (p. 234). A code of ethics
for adult educators is incomplete without a provision similar to that pro-
posed above.

10. Adult educators should avoid doing any harm to learners. (ACHE
[1998]: No comparable provision.)
    Griffith (1991) states, "The first focus in a code of ethics is, com-
monly, a concern for avoiding doing any harm. As adult educators, we
would be concerned with avoiding any actions that will make our clients,
adult learners, worse off than they were before their educational experi-
ence" (p. 4). Wood (1996) concurs: An adult educator has "a responsi-

bility in all matters to resolve to do no harm to any person whose trust and welfare is accepted in adult education transactions and relationships" (p. 14). Brockett (1988b) uses the term beneficence" when referring to a principle emphasized by Sieber (as cited in Brockett, 1988b): the "avoidance of unnecessary harm and the maximization of good outcomes" (p. 12). Brockett (1988b) summarizes: "Adult educators need to be cognizant of the means utilized to reach certain ends and to weigh the potential consequences of such means against the positive outcome that may result" (p. 12). McKnight's (1995) postmodern lament against the tide of professionalization, particularly in the field of medicine, reminds us of the oath of Hippocrates: "a mandate to recognize that, 'above all,' medicine's highest value is to 'do no harm'" (p. 77). That mandate is certainly applicable to adult educators as well.

Suggested Method For Adoption
Of A Universal Code Of Ethics

Although the primary threshold issues are those relating to the need, format, and critical issues of power, perspective, and context inherent in a code of ethics, the related power question of *who* should develop a code of ethics has been a subject of heated discussion often resulting, understandably, in the ominous charges of "professionalization." It is not a difficult reach to assume that the preponderance of adult educators are not interested in being licensed or regulated by the state; therefore, a state-mandated code of ethics, such as that adopted by Texas for its educators, may not be desirable. Connelly and Light (1991) suggest that the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) assume the task of drafting a "common code" (p. 239). The empirical study by McDonald and Wood (1993) sampled adult educators who belonged to the state association in Indiana, plus members of other state associations. At least a portion of Lawler's (1996a) research was funded by ACHE. Many adult education practitioners belong to the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA), which may be developing its own code of ethics, as did ACHE. Is the optimum solution autonomous development by various adult education organizations of individual codes of ethics for their members? What if members belong to a number of different organizations?

The model depicted in Figure 1 presents a better approach, one which addresses the issue of *power*, an issue that may not be addressed adequately by the unilateral adoption of a particular code of ethics by a particular

organization. This writer recommends that representatives from all of the major professional associations that reflect the interests of, hopefully, a representative majority of adult education stakeholders form a task force to study development of a universal code of ethics for adult education practitioners. Obviously, the principles set forth therein would be broad and universally applicable, perhaps mirroring those presented in this article. The principles could even be entitled "guidelines" (Freeman, Sheaffer, & Whitson, 1983, p. 10). Each association would be responsible for securing the feedback of its membership as to the specific content of the code of ethics which, when developed, would be voted upon by the membership of each association. The functions of the task force would be ongoing, as it would provide research and recommend standards to upgrade continually the code of ethics.

The adoption model proposed above, while admittedly not perfect, addresses the power issue via a "bottom-up" approach to adoption. This approach would build consensus among most of the members of the professional associations; consequently, a "buy-in" would be more likely.

> If adult educators are to have a system for recognizing high quality performance and for producing reform where unprofessional behavior is demonstrated, adult educators themselves will need to devise such a system, for it is unlikely that any other group or government agency will assume that responsibility. (Griffith, 1991, p. 4)

Nor would it be desirable to the field of adult education for a code of ethics to be designed and forced upon us by persons other than adult educators.

Suggested Method For Implementation Of A Universal Code Of Ethics For Adult Educators

Schurr (1982) has pointed out that, within the higher education context, "a code is but a pious fraud if it is unenforceable" (p. 332). Assuming that a code of ethics is developed and adopted, using the model provided in this article, who will be responsible for its implementation? Should sanctions be imposed for violations? If so, who will bear responsibility for such imposition? The associations themselves? That would prove to be unworkable, for obvious reasons. The state? Not unless practitioners are licensed "professionals," which does not appear to represent a desirable alternative. The most appropriate source for imple-
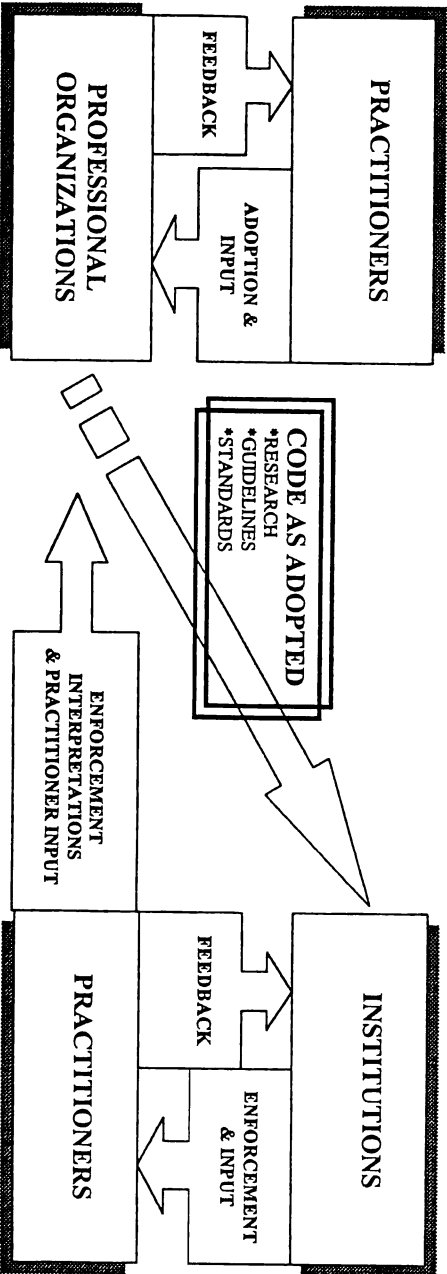
Figure 1: Model for Implementation and Adoption of Adult Educators' Code of Ethics

mentation, again depicted in the appended model, is the institution itself which employs or is responsible for supervision of the practitioner. The institution is the only true link in the chain, the only area where privity of contract exists, which would afford the legal basis for enforcement.

The model depicts the line of communication of the code of ethics, extending from the professional associations whose membership will have adopted the code, to the actual employing/supervising institutions/organizations ("institutions") who will bear responsibility for its implementation and enforcement. The institutions have the power to interpret and apply the code to practitioners under their employment or supervision. The institutions would be responsible for communicating the adopted code of ethics to their adult education practitioners. The institutions would also communicate interpretations (within the strict boundaries of confidentiality) to the associations for dissemination to task force members and other forms of appropriate dissemination. No separate bureaucracies would be created. This approach could result in relative uniformity of standards, yet it would maintain the desired decentralization of enforcement. Enforcement has been a divisive issue in the past. Connelly and Light (1991) summarize it best: "If it is difficult to enforce a code, that is not the fault of the code. The fault lies in a lack of resolve on the part of the profession for spelling out the consequences of unethical practice" (p. 238).

Conclusion

The last few years of this century have provided ample notice of the importance of ethics in our lives, especially within the lives of adult educators, who touch the lives of so many others. McDonald (1991), in her empirical study in this area, concludes "that a code to address all adult educators' needs and concerns would be virtually impossible to create. Therefore, the creation and implementation of an acceptable universal code will not be an easy task" (p. 123). This article has addressed the need for a code, particularly the issues concerning power, perspective, and context which have led to vociferous objections to the adoption of a code; proposed a model (modifying an earlier model proposed by Brockett, 1988b) for addressing those issues; suggested a format, objectives, and content of a code based on general principles; and provided a model for the adoption and implementation of a universal code of ethics for adult educators. In particular, the suggested provisions of the code of ethics

are broad statements, applicable to most, but probably not all, adult educators. The provisions provide guidance in addressing ethical issues within the broader contexts of the field, particularly when applied in conjunction with the remainder of the model and adopted and implemented in a manner consistent with the model also provided in this article. This writer hopes that these suggested provisions generate continued discussion and, perhaps eventually, a universal code of ethics, for which the writer believes that the field is now mature enough and ready. Brockett (1990) notes, "Sometimes the consequences of doing the ethical thing can cost dearly. But the costs of *not* dealing with ethics are even greater" (p. 11).

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