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Section IV

Meeting the Challenge of the Adult Learner

Those who till the fields of Academe know that while the basic topography may remain essentially the same over the years, there are always enough changes—in climate, in availability of resources, in supply and demand, in technology—to make the enterprise interesting. Indeed, each decade seems to bring with it a virtual cornucopia of challenges. Certainly the 1980's delivered its fair share of issues and concerns, including that of dealing with the emergence of the adult learner as one of the major forces in higher education.

Happily, the influence of this important cohort has been primarily positive: adult learners, for example, have boosted declining enrollments and have added spice to homogeneous classes of traditional-age college students. But adult learners, because of their pressure-cooker schedules, high expectations, and particular needs, also represent challenge—to both teachers and faculty developers. This Section contains two articles designed to help meet that challenge.

Operating from the premise that "adult development is not a separate discipline, but rather an area of study informed by several disciplines," Diane Morrison, in "The Place of Narrative in the Study of Adult Development," sets about answering the following questions: Is the concept of narrative helpful as we strive to understand boundaries within and between disciplines, individuals, and groups? Is narrative a tool that can help us work and live with other adults within a wide range of settings? For good measure, Morrison reviews much of the important literature on narrative and considers some of the emerging studies on the use of narrative methods in faculty development.

In "Adult Students as Catalysts to Faculty Development: Effective Approaches to Predictable Opportunities," Douglas L. Robertson first discusses several principles for identifying faculty who will need to learn about adult development, and then examines how faculty developers can help their colleagues "apply the material to their own professional lives." Through his article Robertson hopes not only to enhance our ability to teach adult students, but also to help returning adults "become more self-directed in their own development."

In brief, both articles aim at helping us better understand and better work with one of our most important new student populations.