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ADULTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS WITHIN THE FIELD OF ADULT EDUCATION

John A. Henschke, Ed.D.

The field of adult education in the United States had its beginnings in the Colonial Period and has continued its development to the present times (Knowles, 1977; Stubblefield and Keane, 1990). In the three centuries of its emergence in the United States of America, it has taken the shape of a multidimensional social system, tending to become organized into substructures with differentiated patterns of goals, needs, interests, status and power relationships, values, loyalties, channels of communication, and rates of maturation.

In contrast to the rather lengthy history of this adult education field, articulated and focused concern about adults with special learning needs began to materialize in the early 1980's (Klugerman, 1990) and culminated during October, 1987, in a "Declaration" adopted at the First National Congress on Adults with Special Learning Needs, jointly sponsored by Gallaudet University and the Adult Learners with Disabilities Unit of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education in Washington, DC.

Although "the field of adult education" and "adults with special learning needs" both include the word "adult" and one references "education" while the other "learning," one may wonder if their connection is any deeper. This paper presents a case for a deeper connection, identifying the dimensions of the adult education field, listing the principles which undergird the focusing of attention toward adults with special learning needs, and articulating how the two interact and mutually benefit the other.

DIMENSIONS OF THE ADULT EDUCATION FIELD

Five dimensions of the field of adult education have been clearly identified, (Knowles, 1964) including: The Institutional Dimension, the Content Dimension, the Geographic Dimension, the Personnel Dimension, and, the Morphological (form of activity) Dimension.

One characteristic of the field is its highly interactive nature (Knowles, 1977). Thus, any design of adult education is best understood as a complex of these interacting dimensions (or elements), not as a sequence of activities. The interaction of these dimensions (or elements) is usually dynamic, not static. (Henschke, 1972).

The Institutional Dimension has also been labeled as "Providers" of adult education (Apps, 1990; Courtney, 1990; Houle, 1992). The major typology relates adult education to the purpose of that institution, (Knowles, 1964). The first type is agencies initially created to educate children and youth, but later added the education of adults. These include public schools, as well as colleges and universities.

The second type is agencies initially created to educate adults. These include the cooperative extension service, free universities, alternative adult schools, independent and residential centers and proprietary schools such as truck driving schools, hairdresser schools, business schools, and travel industry schools.

The third type of institutional provider was created to educate people of all ages or the whole

community. Included here are libraries, museums and art institutes, and, health and welfare agencies.

The fourth type of provider is agencies concerned with other goals, but use adult education as a means to achieve those goals. These include: Business and industry; government agencies; labor unions; mass media of communications such as printed materials, audio-visual materials, broadcasting, on-line data based service, computer software; religious institutions such as Christian, Jewish, Moslem, Buddhist, etc.; voluntary organizations including youth organizations, women's organizations, professional associations, service clubs, parent education organizations, public affairs groups, etc.

Apps (1990) adds a framework which further divides these providers into categories of: Tax supported, nonprofit, for profit, and nonorganized.

Nevertheless, it is obvious from these lists and categories that adult education is provided by a broad array of institutions which reach into every sector of our society.

The Content Dimension of adult education typology is a mixture of general subject-matter and life concerns. These include: Academic education, community improvement, creative arts, religious education, basic literacy education, education for aging, health education, economic education, recreational education, science education, public affairs education, intergroup education, home and family life education, occupational education, liberal adult education, and, human relations and leadership education.

The Geographical Dimension of adult education includes five levels of organizations, associations and councils. These include the local

level, regional level, state level, national level, and international level.

The Personnel Dimension of the adult education focuses on the leadership group and consumers. Leadership includes professors, teachers, volunteers, program developers, recruiters, and administrators, both part and full time. Consumers are the varieties of participants which enroll in the myriad programs provided.

The Morphological Dimension or form of activity/program has three categories including format of learning, techniques for learning, and, materials and learning devices (Henschke, 1972). Formats could be labeled as methods which organize the participants for educative purposes. These include: Individual learning all the way from apprenticeship to self-directed learning; and, group learning across the spectrum from formal credit courses to informal action projects as well as trips and tours.

Techniques are the variety of ways in which the learning task is managed so as to facilitated the participants to actively engage in the learning process. A typology includes multiple techniques for: Climate setting, mutual planning need diagnosis, setting objectives, designing, presentation, audience-participation, discussion, simulation, skill-practice, experiential learning, self-directed learning, contracting, knowing, feeling, doing, and evaluation.

Devices and materials are all those particular things or conditions which are used to augment the techniques and make learning more certain (Henschke, 1972). On a broad scale of sensory experience, it includes from the abstract verbal symbols such as books and programmed instruction to concrete, direct,

purposeful experiences with applications work sheets.

The vast array of formats, techniques and devices and the way they are used for engaging participants in active learning gives focus to adult education.

PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING ADULTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

Although the enactment of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, was focused on the education of "so-called special children" (Klugerman, 1990) it became the prelude to serving adults with special learning needs. In 1980, those adults older than twenty-one years with special learning needs were not being served. (Klugerman, 1990). However, by 1985, Hapern's modification of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, provided additional foundation (Loyd, 1992) to such principles as empowering adults with disabilities to fully transition into education and other activities in the community.

By October 20, 1987, a declaration was adopted by acclamation at the First National Congress on Adults with Special Learning Needs, sponsored by Gallaudet University and the unit on Adult Learners With Disabilities of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. This declaration emphasized the critical importance and absolute necessity of initiating, expanding and implementing lifelong learning for and with adults with special learning needs in every private and public sector and institution of society, including employment, perspectives on diversity, and accessibility.

In August of 1988, a second conference was held which emphasized building a consensus of understanding regarding lifelong learning for adults with special learning needs

(Klugerman, 1990). John (1992) underscored the importance and attainability of these principles, by proposing and piloting a collaborative learning mastery model in the college classroom dealing with the topic of adults with special learning needs in transition.

Further evidence of advancing these principles is provided by the organization of the National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs in approximately the year 1989, and the 1991 launching of the Journal of the National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs.

HOW THE ADULT EDUCATION FIELD AND ADULTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS INTERACT

It may seem strange, incongruous and puzzling that the field of adult education in the USA has been around for three centuries, and yet, our nation has just recently passed the Americans with Disabilities Act which requires service of these adults with disabilities educational needs if an institution expects to continue to operate educational programs. When the law was focused only on serving persons under twenty-one years of age, there was a minimum of lip service to the adults, but little action serving the adults. One may ask "why?"

Research in the adult education field appears to shed light on this. Knowles (1977) discovered certain genetic principles which guide the development of the adult education field, illumine its character as well as highlight some of the problems it faces as it continues to emerge and grow. Three of those principles seem to relate to this situation.

- (1) The institutions of adult education typically emerge in response to special needs, rather than as part of a general design for the

continuing education of adults.

- (2) The developmental process of adult education tends to be more episodic than consistent.
- (3) Adult educational programs tend to gain stability and permanence as they become increasingly differentiated in administration, finance, curriculum, and methodology.

In regard to genetic principle #1, all adult educators and other educators had some thoughts about servicing those adults with special learning needs. Even so, no general design was moved forward to meet those needs consistently. However, now that we have been made acutely aware of those special learning needs and the necessity of accommodating for them, every previously mentioned institution which provides adult education programs, will give concerted attention to adjusting their facilities and programs to serve those adults with special learning needs.

In regard to genetic principle #2, adult education is in the best position to service the needs of these adults. The format/methods, techniques, and devices dimension of the field takes into account that adults need to be actively involved in every part of the educational process, and each has the backlog of experience in life to support active involvement and independent thinking. These methods, techniques, and devices when used by adult educators or other educators who understand that adults (including adults with special learning needs) need to be treated like adults, and not like children, in the learning/educational episodes and settings, will help to exponentially buildup, encourage and speed the advancement of this special population. Obviously, though, the

adult teachers will need to continue their learning to be increasingly responsive to this population, and they will (Henschke, 1992).

Regarding genetic principle #3, the adult education field has the stability and permanence to devote administrative expertise, financial resources, specially focused curriculum, and methodology to this population, without having to divide their attention and energies to serving another population—children. In addition, those institutions and resources focused on children and youth have not up until now been very willing to "drain off" many, if any, resources to serve adults. There appears to be no reason that they will change their course of action in the future.

The intention of this paper was to identify the adult education field, list the principles of serving adults with special learning needs, and making a case for the programs for adults with special learning needs to be considered as being within the field of adult education. This author hopes he has at least provided food for thought, as well as opened an invitation for others to join in this discussion.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John A. Henschke, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor of Adult Education, School of Education, University of Missouri - St. Louis. He is AAACE Division Director (Theory Research and Evaluation), President Elect, Partners of the Americas - Missouri, USA/Paraguay, Brazil. Dr. Henschke has traveled extensively throughout the world working, teaching, and speaking on topical issues of adult education.

L E T T E R S P O L I C Y

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