

Introduction of Adult Education's laws, regulations and trends in U.S.A

---[U.S.A] John A. Henschke

1. Adult education's laws and regulations in U.S.A

American adult education is a re-education according to the adults' voluntary choices on the basis of their shortcomings, needs and characteristics. In the United States, many communities, schools can develop adult education, as well as holding some research and exploration about some themes of adults education in the light of needs. The adults who accept education need to pay all their cost. However, there are two kinds of exception, the government pay all the costs: First, the United States had previously been a predominantly agricultural country, the government allocated funds to the agricultural sector, and organized rural education (equivalent to the continuing education) to enhance farmers' quality, develop agricultural research actively, and promote agricultural development. The adult education started in 1914 was mainly about agriculture and was mainly intended for peasants and family workers (including national, states and private-run). The aim is to improve their knowledge and skills in agriculture and production, thereby increasing productivity. The second, the government also allocates funds for literacy.

In 1966, the United States adopted the "Adult Education Act," the bill stipulates: the adults without primary and secondary education or illiteracy should accept adult education. But after 1998, some people assailed the bill. Some people believed it was good, some people considered it was unacceptable. Nevertheless, the bill gets through finally and the article that the government bears the cost of adult education in agriculture was remained. In the United States, the cost for adult education is 260 million U.S. dollars every year.

Adult education should set up various adult education courses according to the adults' needs, objectives, targets and characteristics. At the same time the door is open for running adult education, government, institutions, enterprises can run, individuals or organizations, groups can run adult education too. Adults can choose adult education content to study freely according to their needs, objectives, characteristics, and they don't need any entrance examination. If one graduate student think that he or she has no solid foundation and would like to promote it, and they can attend 33 hours' improving study (eleven courses, three credit hours of each course); Doctoral students can accept 90 credit hours' improving study. There is no degree (academic) or the certificate after their study (because they had them before) after they finish the study. The aim of the study is to improve themselves constantly.

Now more than 60 universities have set up many majors of adult education for doctoral students and postgraduates and they will become the teachers of adult education through the study in the future. Therefore, adult education schools in universities are the major adult education sector in U.S.A. (As in Missouri State University, 80 doctoral students and 50 graduate students

participated in adult education classes.)

Adult education is mainly intended for adults or someone who have received education and skill training, so teachers often use such teaching methods as the deductive methods, group-discussion, debate, exploration and discussion etc. This is a form of mutual learning and interaction. It has a role of mutual learning and interaction between students and between teachers and students, and to promote teaching and find new ways of teaching and learning. At the same time, through these methods, adults should understand, digest and master the knowledge better and use them in practice constantly. Therefore, the most basic purpose of adult education is to help adults get the relevant expertise and skills etc. About teaching, the adults are guided to hold free, autonomous and discussing study, and not the traditional teaching methods.

2. Principles of adult education

First, according to the characteristics of adult learners, autonomous learning should be actively promoted.

Second, adult students should have a strong desire that "I want to study". At the same time teachers should also take better methods of teaching to attract students and help them grasp the knowledge that is good for their future work.

Third, teachers and adults have their own knowledge and experience, the two sides should exchange and share experiences to enhance mutual learning continuously. In response to this, teachers should pay more attention to mutual learning and mutual exchange between teachers and students.

Fourth, the operational capacity should be attached importance. Theory and practice are mutual promotion and mutual interaction. Discovering and solving problems continuously in practice is a very good learning method. In response to this, adult educators should consider whether the teaching methods and tools taken are advanced or good and should reflect on the next step after their practice of knowledge for the students.

Fifth, reformation and innovation. In the process of teaching, teachers should innovate, update teaching environment, and continually maintain a good, positive learning environment.

Sixth, adult students access to adult education openly.

Seventh, in the course of learning, teachers should pay attention to students' learning and their questions, and take a positive attitude to promote, guide and encourage the students to ask questions, discover and solve problems. In the process of teaching, based on the characteristics of adult learners, the suitable teaching methods should be designed for students, and teachers guide and promote students' continuous study, thus the characteristics of autonomic learning can be reflected.

Now, let's talk about the features of "autonomous learning":

Autonomous learning is an effective learning methods and processes. It has seven features:

First, the demands of adult students are respected and supported. The feeling of security is in the course of learning. Their views should be responded and be valued and esteemed by teachers.

Second, in the learning process, adult students should have sufficient freedom. (in learning, organizing activities rather than in the space.)

Third, teachers and students should change their roles frequently. They are colleagues. This relationship should be reflected on the following facets: if they have different views and opinions, they have a fair opportunity to present, and teachers should pay more attention to the questions, think and observe them seriously and affirm them with appreciative vision and attitude. The roles exchanging and colleague-relations can promote mutual learning.

Fourth, adult students should be responsible for their own autonomous learning. One can take part in adult education study based on his own needs and reality, but he should be responsible for their own learning.

Fifth, the participation of adult students needs a kind of challenge in study. Such challenge arises in the process of learning. Everyone should choose a considerable challenge people on the basis of their actual ability. (That is to carry out an incentive mechanism and establish the objective of "jumping to pick the apples".) Otherwise, if you choose one with the great disparities in capacity (his ability is higher than you or worse than you.) to challenges, you will lose confidence or complacent blindly when the disparity is big, and then you will lose interest and enthusiasm, and ultimately you will not seek to make progress.

Sixth, teachers should be a good listener.

Seventh, through listening, teachers should think deeply, give feedback in time to prepare for students' future learning. Furthermore, teachers should set a good example for students to follow all the time.

Third, the trend of adult education' development

Adult education extends and develops to lifelong education. It is attached more and more importance in the world. Lifelong education is the trend and direction of adult education. In 1999, I took part in a symposium on lifelong education in Beijing. The delegates came from China, the United States, Singapore, Macau and Hong Kong. The theme of the seminar was lifelong education. Before the meeting, President Jiang Zemin delivered a speech on television, emphasized the process and the importance of lifelong education. His speech has become a subject of the seminar. Two weeks ago, I went to South Africa to participate a seminar on lifelong education (delegates from 23 countries and regions attended). In both the seminar, delegates expressed their own opinions and discussed if adult education is an important part of lifelong education. The consensus is that adult education is an important part of lifelong education and a

system for lifelong education should be completed in 2010. I also agree with this view. Lifelong education should be the extension, continuous development and improvement of education. Lifelong education could change people's learning concepts and education awareness, change the backward status quo, improve the overall quality of the citizens constantly and use their own knowledge into practical work. This is also an important concept of adult education's development. Continuous development of adult education will play a positive role in promoting and facilitating the development of lifelong education (The importance of the development of adult education). Educational technology should also be grasped because science and technology is very important for the future development of education. High-technology plays an important catalytic and facilitating role in education and adult education. Currently, the rapid development of electronic information technology will greatly change the means of teaching and learning of adult education. As several universities in the United States provide adult education information through Internet, others set up adult education courses online open for the people to study, and people can communicate and discuss openly online. American adult education and continuing education committees have online information for people to communicate, discuss and ask questions. There are several online universities. Philadelphia network center also has adult education database and so on. In addition, E-mail is widely used. And it promotes the communication between people and nations and speed up the pace and frequency of information transmission. All of these will greatly affect the ways, means and methods of adult education and promote the constant development of the society. In addition, teachers should predict the future of students' learning in the process of lifelong education. The importance of lifelong education should be fully manifested in the practice. The aim is to become a lifelong learning society with the concept of "Everyone values study, study is emphasized everywhere".

(The article is the speech given by John.A.Henschke, the associate professor of University of Missouri-St.Louis and former director of Association of Adult Education and Continuous Education on 25th October,2000, and compiled by Peng Tieying, the director of Adult and Professional Education Department of Guangzhou Education Bureau according to the record of the speech.)