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The Organization and Planning of Adult Education

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Bob and Mary have just completed doctoral programs in adult education. They are having lunch together before departing from the campus to the world of work. Bob has accepted a position with a large urban school system as director of adult education. Mary will begin work for a manufacturing company specializing in home appliances. Her title is director of staff development. Both are excited about the challenges that lie ahead, and their luncheon conversation centers on the positions they soon will occupy and their educational experiences that prepared them for these positions. As they exchange information, both begin to understand just how different their work environments will be.

Bob will function in a public, service-oriented setting. What occurs in adult education in this organization is conditioned by a multitude of forces. Administrative style, political considerations, fiscal resources, educational priorities, and available facilities exemplify the factors which impact upon program planning and presentation in public school systems. Mary, by contrast, will work in private industry. The priorities, procedures for making decisions, and the nature of prevailing policies are likely to be different from those Bob will encounter. As they continue their discussion, Bob and Mary also analyze their graduate school experiences and the extent to which those experiences provide a springboard to the realities of being a practitioner. They consider the degree to which their shared formal education has prepared them to assume leadership responsibility in diverse organizational environments. In particular, they ponder the extent to which their academic studies prepared them to understand organizations and how they function.

This encounter serves to highlight one major challenge of adult education. Unlike specialized leadership programs in business and public administration, adult educators need to be prepared to work in a variety of organizations,
institutions, and agencies. Professors of adult education realize that they must give their students a balance of instruction, amalgamating knowledge about the adult learner with a variety of leadership studies. Currently, there is much discussion among professors and practitioners concerning the desired content of graduate studies.

On the one hand, there are contentions that the study of adult education is deeply rooted in educational foundations (such as history of education or philosophy of education). Accordingly, those who embrace this position believe that the preparation of adult educators should remain the exclusive domain of colleges of education (for example, Galbraith and Murk, 1986). Conversely, there are those who advocate a broadening of preparation, especially into areas of study commonly housed in departments of behavioral sciences or colleges of business. The effects of the latter position were verified in a recent study of doctoral programs in adult education in which slightly more than half of the professors surveyed agreed that the field was moving toward human resources development (Kowalski and Weaver, 1986). Regardless of philosophical inclinations, however, most graduate programs in adult education recognize the need to prepare students to encounter the challenges of program development.

THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING OF ADULT EDUCATION

As American society has been shifting from an industrial base to an informational foundation, there has been an immense increase in the attention given to the study of organizational leadership (Naisbitt, 1982). This is true in large measure because organizations now exhibit tremendous variance in purpose, philosophy, composition, administrative structure, and even culture. Unlike the first half of the century, when most were industrial, profit-seeking, manufacturing entities, the contemporary organization is just as likely to be nonprofit, human intensive, professionally dominated, and service oriented. Mental health clinics, medical clinics, educational institutions, YMCAs and YWCAs, and the like exemplify common service agencies exhibiting weighty differences in operations from private businesses.

Adult education has become one of the fastest growing areas of human services. Technology, leisure time, changing values, and changing job markets are but a few of the stimuli fueling the surging demand for programs. This expansion creates expected needs with regard to organizing, developing, and managing adult learning experiences. This book concentrates upon the programming aspects of adult education. The diversity of settings in which these programs occur, the relevance of organizational theory to the planning process, and the principles of program planning are the primary areas of emphasis.
Program planning is essentially an administrative responsibility. It entails aspects of leadership (knowing what should be done) and management (knowing how to do it). Thus, the practitioner requires some level of specialized education relating to organizational behavior and program planning within the realm of adult education. This notion is clarified by examining the whole arena of administration as it relates to adult education.

**ADULT EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION**

Some question why it is advantageous to specifically study the administration of adult education. After all, do not principles of leadership and management lend themselves to all situations? Would it not be more efficient for adult educators to simply enroll in educational administration classes with those graduate students preparing to be school principals and superintendents? Or would it not be more judicious for prospective administrators of adult education to complete degrees in business administration? Many are inclined to answer in the affirmative to these questions. As a result, it is not uncommon for administrators of adult programs to have little or no academic background in working with nontraditional students; for example, they might have a background teaching industrial and vocational education at the high school level (Roudebush and Fallon, 1984). In private industry, personnel specialists frequently are selected to design learning activities even though many lack formal training to do so.

With this historical pattern, it is little wonder that some challenge the necessity of specialized administrative study within the realm of adult education. The proliferation of programs and the gravity of changes in society suggest, however, that practitioners must be exposed to higher levels of specialization than was true in the past. Contemporary administrators ought to be able to provide a linkage between the theoretical aspects of teaching adult learners and the theoretical aspects of program development and administration—and they must be prepared to do so under conditions which may vary significantly. Most importantly, they must be able to build bridges between knowledge they acquire in formal studies and the world of work.

On the typical university campus, administrative study is conducted in a variety of academic departments. The most common include educational administration, public administration, business administration, hospital administration, and hotel and restaurant management. Even departments such as sociology, psychology, and communication sciences are establishing a foothold in declaring scholarly domains for aspects of leadership study and organizational
behavior. This diversification exists for three primary reasons. First, there is the belief that leaders must have a high level of technical knowledge related to the area being supervised. For adult education, this means understanding the psychology of the adult learner, teaching techniques with adults, and the like. Second, there is the belief that leadership study is most meaningful when it is applied directly to a specific field of practice. And finally, there is the belief that administration, per se, does not constitute a separate academic discipline, but rather involves the applications of knowledge to varying situations (Owens, 1981).

Although some aspects of leadership in adult education are not unique, others certainly are. This is true in large measure because of the diversity of settings in which adult education occurs; but it is also true because adults differ in many respects from children as students. So although the creation of budgets may entail the same skills required of managers in public schools or private industry, other responsibilities, such as program planning, necessitate specialized study. Gradually, the curricula of adult education have expanded, encompassing leadership courses and devoting more attention to human resources development. In most institutions, graduate study in adult education is a blend of courses focusing upon the teaching act, learning theory, behavioral sciences, and leadership.

A SPECIAL FOCUS

As noted previously, the focal points of this book are environmental diversity, the relevance of organizational theory, and elements of successful program planning. Each of these topics is invaluable to achieving the knowledge level required for effective program planning. Further, leadership is viewed as a situational activity—one largely dependent upon circumstances surrounding the practitioner. For this reason, leadership education is perceived as a process of preparing one to develop and use contingencies. This approach is most likely to produce practitioners capable of functioning effectively in diverse organizational settings. Unlike training programs that emphasize learning to cope with specific situations, education should provide critical thinking skills which are adaptable to all situations.

Every learning experience designed for adult clients is affected by a multitude of factors. For this reason, the administrator ought to be prepared to deal with contrasting values, including client aspirations of life-style, parent organization priorities, societal expectations, and personal beliefs (Knox, 1980). In recognition of these conditions, enlightened scholars are beginning to
advocate that practitioners stop relying upon simple, linear models to plan programs. Rather, they are encouraged to explore more complex, integrated models which recognize that adult education does not occur in a value-free vacuum (Simpson, 1982). In fact, the reliance upon simple, technical models of planning has been a major deficiency in adult education programming (Brookfield, 1986).

Research is given special prominence in this book. The practitioner who understands and has the ability to apply research and theory to everyday decisions has several distinct advantages as a leader. First, the salient features of a situation become more apparent in the first stage (the diagnostic stage) of decision making because the practitioner associates real situations with a theoretical knowledge base. Second, the practitioner is more likely to include and combine crucial ingredients in the early stages of decision making. Again, associations to research data allow a more detailed investigation of contingencies and alternatives. Finally, the practitioner who uses research is more likely to appreciate the influential dynamics at the implementation stage of decisions (Knox, 1980). In the absence of such a knowledge base, the administrator usually is guided by personal judgments, chance, or imitations of practices in other organizations. These alternatives are risky.

A recent research study examining planning efforts in adult education revealed that the vast majority of models advocated for adult education lack theoretical foundation (Sork and Buskey, 1986). Rather than providing the underlying assumptions and theoretical propositions, many of the popular planning models are "how to do it" formulas more appropriate for training than for graduate education. A more sophisticated approach to program planning in adult education is one which addresses the dynamics of organizational climate and its many ramifications. Such programming is more cumbersome and necessitates sacrifices, especially with regard to efficiency and simplicity.

ORGANIZED VERSUS UNORGANIZED ADULT EDUCATION

Definitions of adult education can vary significantly. Knowles (1982), for example, provides three different definitions based upon orientation. In a general orientation, he includes all experiences by which new knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, interests, or values are acquired as adult education. In a technical orientation, he restricts the definition to organized activities conducted by a variety of institutions toward the achievement of specific educational objectives. And in a professional orientation, Knowles views adult education as a social practice which includes all individuals, institutions, and
associations working toward the continued education of adults. These three definitions reflect the range of thinking as to what could be labeled "adult education."

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) create a definition largely on the assumption that schools and colleges are agencies of socialization whose principal purpose is to prepare children and young people for adult life. Their definition reads as follows:

Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills. (p. 9)

In this book, a division is made between those learning activities which are organized and those which are not. Self-directed learning is not disputed as a valid method of acquiring knowledge or skills; however, this portion of adult education is basically not discussed here. Congruent with the assumption of Darkenwald and Merriam, "regular" college and university academic programs also are not included as part of adult education. Although it could be argued that college students are indeed adults, only the continuing education and extension education aspects of colleges and universities are considered to be components of organized adult education.

The guiding definition used for adult education programs is as follows:

the organized, deliberate, and purposeful design of learning activities for mature persons occurring in organizations but excluding the regular programs of traditional educational institutions.

Organized means that there is a systematic structure, rational order, and unity to the process. The design is deliberate in that there is thorough consideration and awareness of consequences, and it is purposeful in that a desired result is to be attained (Fallon, 1985). Traditional educational programs include the normal curricula of elementary schools, secondary schools, and colleges and universities. Special schools, for example, proprietary schools, are excluded from the category of traditional educational institutions. That adult education occurs within organizations is central to this definition.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ADULT EDUCATION TO THE ORGANIZATION

Organized adult education does not occur in isolation: the process is planned and executed as a subsystem of a parent organization. This relationship
is referred to as the "institutional aspect" of adult education. Since the institutional setting pervades the vast majority of adult programs, the application of organizational knowledge is a critical factor for the adult education administrator. The variety of parent organizations for adult education will be discussed in greater detail later in the book; however, it is important to note what has already been stressed—that the organizations which sponsor adult programming vary markedly in structure and purpose.

Four key factors interact when organized adult education occurs. They include the general environment in which the organization exists, the parent organization, the adult program, and the learners. The relationship among these four is illustrated in figure 1-1. The environment refers to the elements

**Figure 1-1**

**INTERACTING FACTORS IN AN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM**
external to the parent organization. This would include the local community, the state, or even the nation in which the organization functions. The parent organization is the institution which chooses to engage in some form of organized learning program for adults. The program includes the specific nature of the offering (for example, a course in computer literacy). The learners are the clients who bring their own values and needs to the classroom. The reality surrounding this interaction illuminates the need for each occurrence of adult education to be addressed as a unique experience.

Any organization that attempts, in the long run, to employ a single organizational structure or procedure is apt to incur serious problems (Schmuck et al., 1977). This is true for the most part because the world and its societies (environment) are changing so rapidly. The organization, much like a person, adjusts to cope. Not surprisingly, adult education programs also will suffer if they choose to remain static. Since the environment is changing and since the organization is apt to be changing, inflexible approaches to program design will eventually become outdated and fail. For this very reason, a special emphasis is given to organizational theory as a prelude to discussing models and components of actual program planning. This discussion occurs in the second part of this book.

SUMMARY

Adult education is a growing enterprise in a changing world. The proliferation of adult programs has spawned the need for more persons to assume leadership roles in this field. Administrative study is typically conducted as a subpart of the specialization to which it is applied. This trend is holding true for adult education. As a result, graduate study (especially at the doctoral level) is expanding to include leadership courses.

Although adult education can be defined in many ways, this text views the process as an organized, deliberate, and purposeful activity. As such it does not include self-directed learning or educational experiences which occur in the regular offerings of elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities.

The effective use of research and existing knowledge by the practitioner is predicated upon the awareness of the interaction of the environment, the parent organization, the adult programs, and the learners. This interaction clarifies the contention that program development, as a critical aspect of administration, is a process which does not lend itself to single solutions. Rather, each program presents the practitioner with a novel challenge which necessitates
an understanding of the adult as a learner, the environment as a restricting variable, and the parent organization as a controlling variable.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. In what ways have the advancements of science and its application, technology, increased the demands for adult education?

2. What would be the problem(s) with employing persons with degrees in business administration to administer adult education programs?

3. What problems might an administrator encounter if he or she simply adopted a program format for an adult program that has been successful in another organization?

4. List several ways in which an environment could restrict the development of adult education programs.

5. List several ways in which the parent organization could control the nature of an adult program.

REFERENCES


