

GROWING GAPS AND MISSING LINKS

K. Patricia Cross
Distinguished Research Scientist
Educational Testing Service

Education for adults is as old as Aristotle and as new as tomorrow's workshop activities. But in industrialized nations throughout the world, there is a renaissance of lifelong learning, a rebirth of the notion that learning is a lifetime activity, as important for adults as for children. Centuries ago, Aristotle, Jesus, Socrates, and the other great teachers of ancient times taught adults, not children. Their methods would be considered formal education in today's jargon, consisting largely of lectures or sermons, teacher-student dialogues, and adult discussion groups. Their curriculum, too, was one that we would associate with formal education, emphasizing not so much how to do things as how to think about things. The lessons of the ancient teachers were heavy with the abstractions of ideas and values and the life of the mind.

For a relatively short span of history--actually only a couple hundred years--civilization advanced through concentrating on formal schooling for the young, and adults were pretty much forgotten by educators. And so I call our times the renaissance of education for adults because it represents a rebirth of attention to the life of the mind that is as significant to the 21st century as the original intellectual renaissance was to the 15th century.

Prepared for the National Conference on Statewide Educational Information and Counseling Services, Denver, Colorado, February 14, 1979.

Yet I'm afraid that those who spend much time reading about education these days are likely to conclude that we are experiencing something more akin to the dark ages than to the renaissance. Almost daily, we are treated to a one-sided picture of education in which test scores are declining, student enrollments are falling off, and school bond issues are failing with some regularity. Even the prestigious pro-education Carnegie Commission (1973) has added to the rhetoric of the coming dark ages by referring to the 1950s and 1960s as the Golden Age of higher education and contrasting those years with the 1970s and '80s which are labeled Time of Troubles.

It seems to me that whether one predicts a renaissance or the dark ages for education depends largely on whether one is talking about institutions of education or the broader issue of the role of learning in the society. Institutionalized education may well be headed for Time of Troubles, whether permanently or temporarily, no one knows for sure, but education and learning are vital and alive and are pervading society as never before.

The signs of the learning renaissance are all around us. Researchers estimate that between 80 and 90 percent of the adult population carry out at least one self-directed learning project each year and that the typical adult spends about 500 hours per year learning new things from a variety of sources (Tough, 1977). In city after city, record breaking crowds are standing in line to obtain tickets to the King Tut exhibits. Last month America's Number One magazine for the masses, The Reader's Digest (January, 1979) selected a book by the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for its book section. In the year just passed, millions remained glued to their television sets to try to understand human history as revealed in documentaries such as Roots

and Holocaust. An estimated one-third of the huge and ever-expanding paperback book industry is devoted to teaching people how to do everything from fixing the plumbing to fixing a marriage. Those signs of our times look more like the renaissance than the dark ages if one is looking at the pervasive impact of learning on the society.

Visions of a learning renaissance are equally encouraging when we look at official counts of the number of adults participating in group or organized educational activities of one sort and another. National surveys estimate that between 17 million (Boaz, 1978) and 32 million (Carp, Peterson and Roelfs, 1974) adults are currently participating in classes, workshops, job training, discussion groups, or some other form of organized instruction. My best guess is that one in every four American adults will join with others in some form of organized learning endeavor this year. That is a very substantial learning force with a head count two to three times as great as the total number of college students enrolled for degree credit.

All in all, the future looks bright for the emergence of the learning society. Yet just beneath the surface, there lurk some worries. One, not often given much attention by colleges enthusiastically looking for new markets of adult learners to fill the seats left vacant by the declining population of 18 year olds, is that the current adult boom may be nothing more than the baby boom generation creating the old familiar bulge as it pushes through the formal school system. Is it possible that 10 years from now colleges that have expanded their adult programs to accommodate this large baby boom generation will find themselves as overextended for adults as they now are for 18 year olds? Some analysts are taking a worried look at the not-very-well publicized statistics that show that participation in adult education

slowed to an 8 percent increase between 1972 and 1975 compared with a 20 percent increase for the previous three years (O'Keefe, 1977). Without question, the baby boom generation has something to do with the present surge of participation in adult learning activities, but it is also highly likely that the lifelong learning movement has a life expectancy far beyond the baby boom generation.

In the first place, there is the simple demographic fact that the United States is becoming a nation of adults. By the year 2000, says the National Center for Education Statistics (Golladay, 1976, page 12), "The United States population will be dominated by persons in their middle years." For most of the years of this century, the United States population has been numerically dominated by young people. With the exception of the World War II years, children under the age of 15 have always been the largest single age group in the nation. By 1980, however, numerical dominance will shift to those between the ages of 15 and 29. By the year 2000, the largest age group will be 30 to 44 year olds, with a rapidly rising curve for 45 to 64 year olds. In 1970 the United States was basically a "youth culture" with people under the age of 29 constituting a majority (52 percent) of the population; by the year 2000, the United States will become an "adult culture" with those over 30 years of age constituting 57 percent of the population (Bureau of the Census, 1977).

Most people are aware of the baby boom after World War II and the baby bust that followed, but few people realize how much the ebb and flow of the birthrate affect what we do and how we think as a society. In the 1960s, for example, most people assumed that the "youth culture" with its high visibility

and influence on college campuses as well as in the marketplace, was the wave of the future. In hindsight, it seems apparent that the great amount of attention given to youth and the "new values" of the 1960s was achieved largely from the force of the unprecedented number of post-adolescents in the population. In 1964, the year of the Free Speech Movement, 17 year olds became, almost suddenly, the single largest age group in the country. Peter Drucker (1971) maintains that anyone who took the trouble to look at the population figures could have predicted the youth revolution on college campuses in the 1960s. While he admits that the particular form of social revolution would have been hard to predict, it should have been anticipated that the sudden shift in age mix to a predominance of 17 year olds would have profound social implications.

From today's perspective, Drucker is probably right. Throughout their relatively brief history, the influence of the baby boom generation on American life has been pervasive, affecting schools, recreation, the type of products marketed, and perhaps even the crime rate. As the baby boom generation grew older, the pressures for educational expansion moved from elementary to secondary to postsecondary to adult education. Industry moved from marketing products such as baby foods to pop records to recreational vehicles to promoting baby shampoos for the personal use of 30 year olds. The high crime rate of the 1960s and 1970s is thought to reflect, in part at least, the high proportion of 14 to 24 year olds in the population--the age when most crimes are committed. Even the decline in college admissions test scores has been linked to demographics. University of Illinois sociologist Marcus Felson observed that the decline in college admissions test scores started in 1963 and began leveling off in 1975, the precise years in which those born in the

baby boom years of 1946 to 1958 turned 17. Felson's explanation is that because of their numbers, these children did not get the personal attention at home or at school that would have resulted in better learning (Education Summary, November 15, 1978). Even the so-called tax revolt can probably be linked to the fact that the predominant age group in the nation today consists of young adults trying to balance entry level job salaries with the high costs of establishing a family and first home.

Widespread social phenomena such as these are generally attributed by researchers to multiple factors. But without question, the birthrate and the changes of age mix in the population are important factors in social change. Thus, regardless of whether one would like to argue "for" or "against" increased attention to the education of adults, the political reality is that interests are shifting to serving the predominant group in society--which until the end of this century will be adults over the age of 25.

But the lifelong learning movement is more than mere demographics. Participation in adult learning activities has been increasing more than twice as fast as their numbers in the population (Boaz, 1978). This escalation is probably the reflection of social factors, changing life styles, and the speed of change itself. One of the important factors fueling adult education is the rising educational attainment of the populace.

Survey research is unanimous in concluding that the single most important predictor of whether an individual will participate in organized learning activities is past level of educational attainment (Cross, 1979a). Learning is addictive. The more education people have, the more they seem to want; and the populace is becoming better educated with each passing generation.

The average adult over the age of 25 now has 12.3 years of formal schooling, up from 9.3 just one generation ago (Golladay, 1977). Since high school graduates are almost four times as likely to participate in adult education as non-high school graduates, the rising educational attainment of the populace should result in an increased demand for learning activities.

A second social condition that has had, and will no doubt continue to have, a dramatic impact on educational interest and participation is the changing role of women. Between 1969 and 1975, the number of adult women learners increased 45 percent, compared to an 18 percent increase for men (Boaz, 1978). Right now, it is hard to imagine factors that would decrease the demand for education among women unless women become disenchanted with new career opportunities or "the family" does an about face and moves in directions quite contrary to today's trends.

A third factor that must be considered is the labor market. Although there is much controversy now over the market value of education, specifically a college degree, there is little doubt that competition for the more desirable jobs will increase as members of the large baby boom generation find themselves in fierce competition with one another for job promotion. The "promotion squeeze" will probably have a number of ramifications for education:

- First, people whose promotion is blocked in one career line may decide on a mid-life career change. A recent study estimated that there are forty million Americans in a state of transition regarding their jobs or careers; 60 percent of them plan to seek additional education (Arbiter, et al., 1978).

- A second option for people whose job promotion is blocked is to find satisfaction in other pursuits--perhaps through learning for its own sake or through leisure-time activities that require new learning. The greatest growth by subject area in adult education in recent years has been in social life and recreation, closely followed by personal and family living (Boaz, 1978).
- Third, the predicted job competition will probably encourage older people who are in the jobs and younger persons who want those jobs to gain a competitive edge through further education. This personal initiative, buttressed by the increasing tendency of states and occupational licensing agencies to mandate continuing education, will almost certainly heighten future demand for adult education.

For all these reasons, increased competition in the labor market is expected to increase participation in adult education. At the same time, competitive labor conditions may make people think twice about leaving their jobs for education. What in fact seems to be happening is that people are hanging onto their jobs and studying part-time--even younger students without families to support.

It looks as though American society is moving away from the "linear lifeplan" in which education is for the young, work for the middle aged, and enforced leisure for the elderly (Best and Stern, 1976), toward a blended lifeplan in which education, work and leisure go on concurrently throughout life (Cross, 1978b). We can see the emergence of the blended lifeplan in the tendency for formerly full-time college students to reduce course load to work part-time and to take time off for travel and other leisure time activities. The "good life" today is not likely to consist of all work or

all study for the average adult but rather of a blend of part-time work, part-time study, and part-time leisure.

Finally, the strong motivation that many colleges now have for attracting adult learners is driving participation rates up. There is ample research to show that making education more accessible increases participation, sometimes dramatically (Bashaw, 1965; Bishop and Van Dyk, 1977; Trent and Medsker, 1965; Willingham, 1970). And there is no doubt that many colleges are doing everything possible (within the constraints of money, location, and sometimes stubbornly entrenched faculty attitudes) to make college programs attractive and accessible to adult learners.

The number of colleges and universities offering noncredit courses has more than doubled in recent years, going from 1,102 institutions in 1968 to 2,225 in 1976 (Kemp, 1978). Furthermore, around the year 1970, even rather traditional colleges began to launch a variety of degree programs and services designed to attract older part-time students. A national survey conducted in 1972 (Ruyle and Geiselman, 1974) found that between a third and half of all American colleges and universities offer programs for nontraditional students.

It is probably a fairly safe guess that, for the next couple of decades at any rate, most degree-oriented adults will be accommodated in rather traditional college programs, largely through administrative arrangements such as more flexible schedules and more convenient locations. It is important to remember, however, that most adult learners are not currently degree oriented. Unless the new availability of degrees for adult learners raises degree aspirations (a real possibility in my opinion), noncredit opportunities sponsored by a variety of educational providers are likely to dominate the learning society of the future.

If there is a learning society in our future, what kind of a learning society will it be? Who will be the participants and who will be the providers?

It is difficult to discuss national trends in adult education with much confidence since the National Center for Education Statistics has been tracking participation systematically only since 1969. Published reports come out every three years, and we now have access to data collected in 1969, 1972, and 1975 (Okes, 1971; Okes, 1976; Boaz, 1978). The 1978 survey is not yet published, but that fourth anchor point will give us considerably more confidence in monitoring trends.

It is already quite clear, however, that adult education in the United States is elitist and getting more so. As a group today's adult learners are disproportionately young, white, well-educated, and making good salaries. Those who still think of night school as a poor man's college for lower class immigrants are clearly out-of-date. Today the following populations are significantly underrepresented in organized learning activities for adults: Blacks, people with less than a high school education, those with annual family incomes under \$8,000, people aged 45 and older, and those living in the central city or on the farm (Boaz, 1978).

Furthermore, the situation with respect to equal opportunity is becoming worse not better for all groups except women. The greatest increases in educational participation between 1969 and 1975 were made by white women with college degrees and family incomes of \$25,000 a year and over. The rate of growth for women was more than double that for men; adult learning activities for the college educated increased almost twice as fast as for high school

graduates; and the participation for whites increased eight times as fast as that for blacks. As a matter of fact, the proportion of black people participating in adult learning activities has been decreasing over the past six years, in the face of steadily rising participation for whites (Boaz, 1978). Thus not only are white, well-educated people with good jobs already overrepresented on the adult education scene, but they are making much faster progress than their less well-educated peers, and the educational gap between the "haves" and "have nots" is increasing.

It now appears that just as we were beginning to think that we had achieved some success in fighting the battle for equal educational opportunity for 18 year olds, here it is again, raising its ugly head for 30 to 80 year olds. There is probably more opportunity now for disadvantaged young people to gain access to college than for older disadvantaged adults to continue the kinds of education that would be useful to them.

My personal conviction, which I shared with federal policy makers in Washington last month (Cross, 1979b), is that brokering services and Education Information Centers constitute our greatest hope for shaping the learning society to serve the needs of a democratic society. They are, in fact, the missing link that will help close the gaps between potential learners and educational opportunities and between the educational "haves" and "have nots." (Cross, 1978a). The collection of information about adult learning opportunities and its effective dissemination through the counseling, referral, and advocacy programs of educational brokering services has the following advantages:

1) Appropriately located, educational brokering services benefit the less advantaged segments of society somewhat more than today's relatively advantaged adults, who obviously already know about existing opportunities. Thus brokering services begin to address the current inequities in adult education.

2) Information and referral centers help colleges and other educational providers utilize their resources more fully, while getting across the message that the learning society consists of a rich variety of learning options provided by schools and colleges, industry and unions, churches and YMCAs, the military and the media, and anyone else who has knowledge to share.

3) Well-managed comprehensive information systems of available educational opportunities help state and community planners provide for the needs of adult learners, while reducing overlap and waste.

It seems to me important for the collective society to make a strong public statement through its state and federal governments that lifelong learning and the full utilization of a wide variety of learning resources is legitimate, desirable, and a necessary goal of the learning society. If no broad social effort is made to acknowledge the desirability of lifelong learning, and adult education is left to the entrepreneurs, such providers, whether educational institutions or other agencies, will cater largely to the ready market of affluent, well-educated adults who will then become the determiners of the kind of education that is available--a distinct possibility that would almost certainly continue the widening of the gap between the educational "haves" and "have nots."

So far, I have made some basic assumptions about the learning society, none of which seem the least bit controversial to me. I have assumed--on the

basis, I might say, of some pretty good evidence--that there will continue to be an escalating interest in lifelong learning on the part of large numbers of adults in the society. I have further assumed that this is desirable and that we as a society wish to encourage such interest and to provide equal access to a wide variety of learning resources. Finally, I am assuming that adult information centers and educational brokering services provide the single most important link in addressing the joint concerns of equal opportunity and the effective utilization of learning resources.

The extent to which that last assumption proves valid depends in large measure on how you do your jobs. If you have good information about university extension classes and inadequate information about other community resources, then you nullify the assumption that the learning society will utilize fully a wide variety of learning resources. If your information dissemination program consists largely of printed lists of available courses for adults, then you are biasing participation in the learning society toward rather independent, self-directed adults. If your center is located on a suburban campus or in a storefront in the city center, you have already made a major decision about the nature of your clientele.

As I see it, the work of education and information services for adults consists of three sequential steps: 1) Collecting information about the educational resources available, 2) Reaching the intended audience, and 3) Assisting clients to identify and obtain the appropriate learning opportunities.

The fact that these are sequential steps has probably not been given sufficient attention. Some counseling centers for adults start with Step

Three, hanging out their shingle advertising their willingness to help those who come to them. Only after they have been in business awhile does it occur to them that the enterprise may topple because it has an inadequate base of information and it is reaching a small or biased group of clients. Other centers may start with Step Two. They identify, what is called in the jargon of the day, the "intended audience," establish their center in the low-cost housing development or at the local shopping center, and then discover that they lack both the information base and the counseling skills to help their clients. Then, of course, there are the centers that fail to move beyond Step One with their computerized banks of information that are useful only to the most sophisticated adult learners who know what they want and how to use the information to accomplish their educational goals.

At this stage of development of the lifelong learning movement, I don't think the lack of attention to sequential planning for education information centers is especially surprising. For one thing, the steps require different personalities for implementation. The individual who is interested and skillful in one-to-one counseling relationships is rarely interested in or knowledgeable about designing an information system that is orderly, complete, and maintained with patient attention to detail. It is probably equally true that Step Two people, who have personal access to the intended audience, may not know enough about educational opportunities and how to manipulate the system to serve as good counselors or advocates or disseminators of information.

My point is that the creation of a national network of effective education information centers depends, more heavily than we have acknowledged, on cooperation and coordination among different types of personalities, among the

multiple providers of educational services, and among those who need services and those who offer them. In short, there are missing links all over the place, and the chain of lifelong learning in America is only as strong as its weakest link. The strengthening of the chain of communication and cooperation is, of course, one of the functions of a conference like this one. I hope that Step One people will make it a point to talk not only to Step One people from other states, but also to Step Two and Three people. Similarly, it is important for Step Three people to make known to Step One people their needs regarding the form and type of information about educational opportunities for adults.

Although it is my conviction that interaction among the people in this audience is more important than any information I might provide, perhaps I can use my remaining few minutes to draw some inferences from the research that might help strengthen each successive step in the chain of collecting the information, reaching the targeted audience, and helping clients take advantage of the opportunities available.

For those of you concerned with Step One, there is the obvious need to create an accurate, complete, up-to-date information bank about the learning opportunities available to adults. Given the size and complexity of this task, I don't see how anything less than a continuously monitored computerized system can serve the needs over the long run. Printed lists are out-of-date before they are printed and distributed, and they are awkward to index so that counselors can access them using a combination of descriptors such as subject matter, cost, location, credit, and educational level. Furthermore, it is hard to see how anything with less memory than a computer can keep abreast of

the increasing numbers of nationwide services and programs. There are now more than 200 external degree programs, most of which are open to a national and regional audience; 95,000 people took the nationwide CLEP exams last year; and thousands of adults participated in television and newspaper courses that were offered nationwide. Such national services are bound to increase, and information systems designed to accommodate only local programs are bound to be inadequate. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of adult learners use local resources, and I know of no local community that has solved the problem of information systems at the local level.

It seems to me that Step One people need a coordinated national center for information collection that would design the procedures for the collection of data at state and local levels and that would assume responsibility for maintaining current information about programs and services available to the national audience. Admittedly, the task seems enormous, but if the airlines, telephone companies, and television networks can do it, it would appear that education can too. My local travel bureau, for example, is now bypassing the printed Official Airline Guide, going directly to computerized information, and I suspect that before long telephone directories and TV Guide may become outdated too.

For Step Two people, i.e., those concerned about making the connection between the counseling center and the intended audience, there is the common wisdom, supported by research findings, that suggests that the location of the center is a major determinant of clientele. Psychological as well as physical accessibility is important. I suspect that a man seated in a book-lined office in a three-piece suit is not going to reach the same people as a more casually dressed counselor who frequents the laundryroom, pool hall, or coffee shop.

Some experience in Sweden would suggest that we in the United States have not done nearly enough to cultivate and utilize peer group support for lifelong learning. On the hypothesis that the support and approval of fellow workers is important to educational participation, the Swedes established adult information centers in factories and plants where blue-collar workers form a powerful reference group. This location was found generally superior to housing group locations in generating interest in educational activities. Certainly before we in the United States organize lobbies for financial entitlement for adult learners, we should see what can be done to help United Auto Workers and other unionized workers utilize their quite generous educational benefits.

Finally, for Step Three people, i.e., those concerned about counseling, referral, and advocacy, there are the research findings that suggest that poorly educated adults want and need more personal assistance all along the route to educational opportunity. They need help assessing their own needs and interests; they need information about learning opportunities; and they generally express more desire than better educated groups for assistance in making the connection between their educational needs and appropriate opportunities. Whereas the needs of college educated learners can frequently be met with little more than up-to-date, accurate information, the less well-educated may need personalized help in interpreting and using the information and in talking with educational providers about possible options.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the success of the lifelong learning movement in the United States is heavily dependent on providing the services that link learners to opportunities. At present there are many weak and missing links. While each of us needs to be concerned about strengthening

our own link in the chain, we need to be equally concerned about strengthening the coordination and cooperation between the links that lead to the learning society. I hope that this conference will assist you in both of those tasks.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arbeiter, Solomon, Carol B. Aslanian, Frances A. Schmerbeck, and Henry M. Brickell. 40 million Americans in career transition: The need for information. Future Directions for a Learning Society. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1978.
- Bashaw, W. L. The effect of community junior colleges on the proportion of local population who seek higher education. Journal of Educational Research, 1965, 58(7), 327-329.
- Best, Fred, and Barry Stern. Lifetime distribution of education, work, and leisure. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership Postsecondary Convening Authority, 1976.
- Bishop, John and Jane Van Dyk. Can adults be hooked on college? Journal of Higher Education, 1977, 48(1), 39-62.
- Boaz, Ruth L. Participation in adult education final report 1975. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1978.
- Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Priorities for action: Final report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.
- Carp, Abraham, Richard Peterson, and Pamela Roelfs. Adult learning interests and experiences. In K. Patricia Cross and John R. Valley & Associates, Planning non-traditional programs. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.
- Cross, K. Patricia. The missing link: Connecting adult learners to learning resources. New York: The College Board, 1978. (a)
- Cross, K. Patricia. Museums in the learning society. Speech delivered to the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums, Kansas City, May 30, 1978. (b)
- Cross, K. Patricia. Adult learners: Characteristics, needs, and interests. In R. E. Peterson and Associates, Lifelong learning in America. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979. (a)
- Cross, K. Patricia. Changing students and the impact on colleges. Speech delivered to the Educational Staff Seminar, Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, D.C., January 11, 1979. (b)
- Drucker, Peter F. The surprising seventies. Harper's Magazine, July 1971, 35-39.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (CONT.)

- Golladay, Mary. The condition of education 1976. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1976.
- Golladay, Mary. The condition of education 1977. Volume Three, Part One. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1977.
- Kemp, Florence B. Noncredit activities in institutions of higher education for the year ending June 30, 1976. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1978.
- O'Keefe, Michael. The adult, education and public policy. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1977.
- Okes, Imogene E. Participation in adult education 1969, initial report. National Center for Educational Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1971.
- Okes, Imogene E. Participation in adult education final report, 1972. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1976.
- Ruyle, Janet, and Lucy Ann Geiselman. Non-traditional opportunities and programs. In K. Patricia Cross and John R. Valley & Associates, Planning non-traditional programs. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.
- Tough, Allen. Major learning efforts: Recent research and future directions. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1977.
- Trent, James W., and Leland L. Medsker. The influence of different types of public higher institutions on college attendance from varying socioeconomic and ability levels. Berkeley: Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, 1965.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census. Social indicators 1976. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1977.
- Willingham, Warren. Free-access higher education. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970.