

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ADULT AMERICANS

by

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Introduction

America faces a dilemma--an urgent need to make continuing education a reality for more adults and a lack of direction and support from the nation's leaders. Despite this paradox, adult education and training programs have expanded during the past two decades. This paper gives some reasons for the increase in adult education and training services, identifies the structures and mechanisms which provide them, and notes some of the most likely directions continuing education in America will take.

In America, adult education and training became important during World War II when many soldiers and war workers had to rapidly learn new information and skills. By the 1960s it was becoming apparent that technological change necessitated training and retraining for many working adults, and the demand for continuing education and training increased. The rise in the educational level of the population also contributed to the growth of adult education. In the U.S., in 1988 adult continuing education and training is a large, important, multifaceted enterprise which lacks a definite sense of direction, national guidelines, and rational funding arrangements.

Responding to the Education and Training Needs of Adults

Although numerous federal laws and programs deal with continuing education, vocational education, higher education, remedial employment and training, and apprenticeship, the U.S. does not have a comprehensive national human resource development policy. Federal legislation contains no specific guidelines, only general ones, even though the federal government passes the education and training laws. Most federal programs are implemented and administered by state and local agencies which operate independently of each other and serve particular categories of adults and youth. There are no integrated sets of programs or coherent policy.

Federal adult continuing education and training programs include: financial aid for veterans, agricultural and related educational services for farm families by the cooperative extension service, in-service training for government employees, funding for undereducated adult programs in local school districts, and remedial employment and training programs for the disadvantaged at local and regional levels within states through agencies financially supported by the 1982 Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

Although state and local continuing education and training programs parallel and supplement federal programs and primarily serve the needs of undereducated adults, state and local expenditures are considerably greater

than federal expenditures.

Historically, participation in continuing education and training has favored the educated and affluent. Beginning in the 1960s, however, the primary objectives of the federal education and training legislation, including that dealing with adults, have reflected a policy of equity--of seeking to provide equality of opportunity. Because states and local governments have widely varying financial abilities to provide education and training services due to their economic circumstances, federal education and training policies and program are designed to correct these imbalances.

The training of employed workers, or industrial training as it is called, is left to employers and workers with no governmental leadership or intervention. The United States has no industrial training "system" per se. Industrial training is strictly laissez faire with virtually no governmental involvement, organization, encouragement or control. Though some industries provide their own training, this is the exception rather than the rule. For the most part, education and training in industry, or the lack of it, is determined by individual employers based upon their needs, philosophy or resources.

Providers of Adult Education and Training

The major providers of continuing education and training include a wide variety of public and private agencies: local school districts, post secondary academic institutions, proprietary schools, public and private employers, and public manpower programs. Other educational providers include professional associations, churches and community organizations, the military and labor unions.

Targets for Continuing Education and Training

In the 1980s, efforts to provide continuing education and training for adults focus primarily upon five groups: the unemployed and disadvantaged, undereducated and/or illiterate adults, women entering or re-entering the labor force--especially displaced homemakers, employed workers needing new skills, and adults wanting new learning experiences.

The Unemployed/Disadvantaged. In the U.S. for the past twenty-five years the employment and training policy for the unemployed/disadvantaged has received the most attention. Beginning with the 1962 Manpower Development and Training Act, remedial employment and training efforts grew under successor legislation until 1978 when expenditures reached \$11 billion. Under the 1982 Job Training Partnership Act employers are provided remedial-trained entry-level workers from population segments that do not have easy access to the marketplace. Funds for remedial training have been reduced substantially over the past 10 years. In 1987 they shrunk to a level of about \$3.5 billion which provided sufficient resources to finance training and other services for about 2,230,000 persons, half of whom were youth.

The federal role in remedial employment and training programs is primarily one of funding and monitoring compliance with the law. States oversee local training programs. Program administration is carried out by

local governments within the context of geographic Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) which are intended to be coterminous with local labor markets.

Dislocated Workers. Beginning in the late 1970s, increasing foreign economic competition, a severe recession, and restructuring of the U.S. economy dislocated millions of mainstream blue-collar workers in basic manufacturing industries. The numbers of workers dislocated, as reported in subsequent surveys, were substantial. By defining displaced or dislocated workers as persons who lose their jobs due to plant closings, slack work, or abolished position or job or shift, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that during the five-year period from 1979 to 1984 11.5 million American workers were dislocated. Of these 11.5 million, 5.1 million had held their former position for at least three years. A second survey covering the five-year period from January 1981 to January 1986 again counted 5.1 million displaced workers.

In 1982 Congress responded to the dislocated worker problem by adding Title III to the JTPA. Funding was at a token \$200 million level, and the delivery of services was delegated to the states. States were to solve the dislocated worker problem with the JTPA delivery system which was designed to serve the disadvantaged. The resources made available under Title III were sufficient to serve only 5 percent of the increasing numbers of eligible dislocated workers in the mid-1980s.

Undereducated/Functionally Illiterate adults. In the U.S. there are substantial numbers of undereducated and functionally illiterate adults, including people age 16 and older who are not in school and who have not completed high school.

The primary program to help these people is called Adult Basic Education (ABE). Federal funds (roughly \$120 millions per year) are allocated by formula to states and local communities and are augmented with substantial state resources (over \$600 million). These funds are used to make grants to local school districts and other public or private nonprofit organizations which provide basic skills instruction and high school completion courses. The ABE program gives many adults, including about 800,000 high school dropouts each year, a second chance to complete high school and become functionally literate. The ABE's third purpose is to provide opportunities for "training that will enable [people] to become more employable, productive, and responsible citizens."

Women/Displaced Homemakers. The number of women in the American labor force in the 1970s was the greatest in the century. By the end of the decade, over 51 percent of all women 16 years old and older were in the workforce. By 1987 seven in ten women ages 25 to 54 were members of the labor force. This dramatic rise in adult women's labor force participation created problems and opportunities.

Federal programs to aid women entering or re-entering the labor force were targeted at two groups of women: women on welfare, and displaced homemakers. Various amendments to the 1970s federal welfare legislation have encouraged women to seek education and training that equips them for employment. Most of these programs have provided some resources to accomplish this objective. The number of displaced homemakers, women whose

principal occupation has been homemaking and who have lost their main source of financial support, has increased 28 percent, from 1.7 million in 1975 to 2.2 million in 1983.

Government programs serving displaced homemakers are relatively new; California adopted the first one in 1975. Unfortunately, as with dislocated workers, federal and state funds available for displaced homemaker education and training are small in relation to the number of displaced homemakers. In 1986 several hundred displaced homemaker projects served more than 100,000 women annually--about 5 percent of the eligible women.

Employed Workers. Notwithstanding the lack of coherence and direction in public policy, the training and continuing education occurring in the workplace under the auspices of employers, workers and their unions and professional organizations is considerable. Because of the elusive nature and pervasive sponsorship of industrial training by U.S. employers, very little is known about its extent and quality. There is general agreement that industrial training is the major source of skill training for the nation's work force, but there is considerable disagreement over the quality and quantity of training. Most industrial training appears to be carried out by large employers for supervisory and management personnel, not production workers, and much of it is informal.

Among the most extensive industrial training efforts are those by firms such as AT&T IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and Polaroid. In the 1980s several employers and unions have negotiated collective bargaining agreements which provide training funds for a wide range of educational programs for workers. The most comprehensive and innovative of these is the UAW-Ford Employee Development and Training Program which started in 1982.

Adults Seeking New Learning Experiences and Credentialing. Adult education, lifespan learning, lifelong learning, or non-traditional education, as it is sometimes called, has grown faster than any other segment of postsecondary education in the United States. It is a highly decentralized movement with a variety of activities but, but it has no federal funding or policies to support or direct it. By 1980 more than 40 percent of all college students were part-time and approximately one-third were more than 25 years old.

U.S. colleges and universities attract adults to degree and nondegree programs by making access easier, rearranging class schedules so working adults can attend, offering off-campus classes in convenient locations, and gearing subject matter to adult learners' interests. Noncredit programs are growing faster than degree programs.

Three nontraditional activities that are becoming popular at a number of colleges are joint college and industry courses, televised college courses, and Elderhostel. Some of these joint courses are taught by college or university instructors at the worksite in classrooms provided by the employer. Others are taught by professors on campus and are transmitted by one-way closed circuit television to participating firms. My own institution, Utah State University (USU), provides televised academic courses through a unique audio/video system called COM-NET to 1,200 adult learners at fifteen continuing education centers and learning sites in rural

Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. The high-tech delivery system features fax machines, electronic writing pads and blackboards, two-way audio/video reception, teaching assistants, well-equipped learning centers, and committed faculty. Elderhostel involves a loose coalition of colleges that provide special summer programs for adults 60 years of age or older. The students live on campus and attend classes taught by regular college staff.

Anticipating Future Trends in a Changing Economy

As the end of the twentieth century nears, a number of studies have been commissioned to consider the needs of the labor market in the next century. The future needs of the labor market will have a direct impact on American adult education and training. As outlined in the Labor Department's Project 2000 Report, **Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century**, new developments in technology, international competition, demographics, and other factors will alter the nation's economic and social landscape during the remaining years of this century.

The major human resource problems facing America in the years ahead are the entry-level training needs of entrants and re-entrants into the labor force, adult functional illiteracy, knowledge and skill obsolescence of existing workers, and a growing gap between the supply and demand for trained workers with good skills--all problems requiring greater emphasis on continuing education and training.

Recent Education and Training Initiatives and Future Prospects

The challenges presented by studies such as Workforce 2000 suggest that all the targets for adult continuing education and training identified previously should receive greater attention. Comparing future needs with present efforts suggests that considerably more resources will be needed to successfully accomplish the tasks which lie ahead. Finally, the magnitude of the problem requires greater leadership at all levels of government and industry and a more coherent and comprehensive national education and training policy.

Future trends suggest the need for national consensus on social goals for adult education and training and the assigning of appropriate roles to levels of government, employers, worker organizations and individuals. There must be greater coordination among agencies and levels of government involved in continuing education and training, closer articulation of programs and services, and careful use of scarce resources to accomplish the goals adopted. While little is being done at the national level to achieve consensus and improve coordination, a few states such as Hawaii are attempting to do it at the state and local level.

Quality readjustment and retraining services for dislocated workers are crucial to the U.S.'s future economic competitiveness. Fortunately, Congress passed legislation within the past few months that establishes a new Worker Readjustment Assistance Program (WRAP) to replace the inadequate Title III JTPA program. WRAP goes into effect in July 1989 and has a funding authorization of \$980 million a year to provide training and other services to workers dislocated by plant closings, layoffs or general

economic conditions who are unlikely to return to their previous occupations.

Greater resources and innovative programming are needed to provide education and training for women entering or re-entering the workforce. The recent willingness of Congress to consider child care is a welcome change, but there is an equal need to expand the resources and educational programs available for displaced homemakers, welfare mothers and other women.

The rise in functional illiteracy and lack of English language proficiency among adults and immigrants requires a substantial expansion of ABE programs and literacy efforts throughout America. The involvement of business and government in these efforts is vital to their success as well as beneficial to them as employers. Congress, acknowledging the need for more resources and effort in the battle against functional illiteracy, has recently authorized funding of a demonstration program of matching grants for basic educational skills, including workplace literacy, grants to help adults improve their English proficiency, and a literacy corps that will enable college students to receive academic credit for voluntary literacy tutoring.

The changing world of the twenty-first century will require much greater involvement of employers in continuing education and training. Employers must be encouraged (or required) to be concerned about their workers' education and training. New initiatives are needed: expanded business tax credits for human resource development including training--such as providing a 25-percent credit for training expenses over and above a firm's three-year average for R&D; more tuition-aid programs for workers and restoration of the tuition tax break, and serious consideration of the possibility of an extended training leave analogous to the recently legislated maternity leave; more negotiated employee development programs with training trust funds such as those developed by the UAW and the auto industry; and perhaps a national system of employee-employer jointly financed individual training accounts to provide funds to cover workers' training expenses in case of job dislocation or technological change.

The educational needs of nontraditional learners, particularly the elderly and adults living in rural areas, deserve greater attention, especially in light of the graying of America and the wide disparities between rural and urban continuing education opportunities. One innovative attempt to deal with the needs of rural citizens is the Kellogg Foundation funded Intermountain Community Library and Information Services Program (ICLIS), which uses libraries in rural communities as bases to provide continuing education and information services, using computer and communications technology, for rural citizens in a four-state region.

The future strength of the U.S.'s approach to continuing education and training depends on the quality of its programs, the reliability and effectiveness of the delivery systems, and the adequacy of resources. The failure to reach consensus on common social goals, a lack of national leadership and direction, and fragmented financial support are serious weaknesses which must be addressed if the U.S. is to achieve the levels of output and performance needed to establish and maintain a quality continuing education and training system.