Participation -- thoroughly studied areas in adult education

- We have a sense of
  - who participates
  - what is studied
  - what motivates some adults and not others to enroll in a course or undertake an independent learning project.

The Adult Profile - Remarkably Consistent:

- white
- middle-class
- employed
- younger
- better educated than the nonparticipant.
- Employment-related reasons account for the majority of participant interest in continuing education.
Motivation for Participation

Many complex and subject to change

- Improvement of verbal and written skills
- Social contact
- Educational preparation
- Redemption of past educational deficiencies
- Professional advancement
- Family togetherness
- Social stimulation (escape boredom)
- Cognitive interest (knowledge for own sake)

Barriers to Participation

One of the field's biggest mysteries:

Why more adults, especially those who might benefit the most, are not involved in adult education?

The Two Most Often Cited Reasons

- Lack of time
- Lack of money.
  - Family responsibilities was cited as the next most salient barrier
- These are socially acceptable reasons.
- Probably very legitimate reasons.
- For adults who are busy people trying to become or stay economically solvent and take care of their families and themselves.
Valentine and Darkenwald (1990) derived a typology of adult nonparticipants.

- Adult nonparticipants in the general public cluster fall into five distinct groups.
- People are deterred from participating by:
  - personal problems
  - lack of confidence
  - educational costs
  - lack of interest in organized education generally
  - lack of interest in available courses.

Adding a sociological lens

- Social structure rather than individual needs and interests reveals some very different explanations as to why adults do or do not participate in adult learning activities.
- This has implications for marketing and recruitment:
  - “Rather than blanket publicity, a more effective approach might be to advertise through social groups and organizations. Adult education does not choose its students, they choose (or do not choose) adult education.”

Why women without a high school diploma chose not to participate

- Preadult factors (parents’ education, early pregnancies, and economic status)
- Lack of a support system
- Conventional barriers such as lack of time, information, and child care were also operative.
- Lack of voice: The way a woman feels about herself, her self-esteem and self-confidence, and the way she can express herself — significant elements in the decision about whether to participate.
Boudard and Rubenson (2003) predicted that literacy skills would determine participation in adult education and training. They found educational attainment to be “the most important single factor predicting participation in adult education and training.” Further analyses revealed that “readiness to learn is formed early in life and further developed through educational and work experiences... the long arm of the family and the long arm of the job.

Jarvis (1985) makes the case for a class analysis. The middle-class bias found in all studies can be explained by the idea that adult education is organized by the middle class, and the presentation of knowledge is middle class in both language and content. Furthermore, previous school experiences select out “those who were labeled as successful in education”, and those who will be labeled successful is pretty much predetermined by one’s class, age, sex, and educational background.

Two other studies found

- The amount of educational resources (as measured by the community’s level of educational attainment) was the most efficient predictor of adult education activity on a regional level.
- The two best predictors of adult participation in a state’s higher education system:
  - The availability of undergraduate education (number of seats available, public and private)
  - Educational attainment of the state’s adult population (percentage of adults with high school or higher).
So far learners are abstract, not socialized

- The discourse so far fails to take into account the sociocultural context of adult learners and the structural characteristics of the adult education enterprise itself.

- Those adults who have been socialized into valuing and acquiring the attitudes and skills of the middle class will be the ones to take advantage of learning opportunities.

Other reasons why folks do not participate

- Where one happens to live
- What one's primary language is
- What color, age, or sex one happens to be
- What one does for a living

These factors are "framework conditions"

- They are largely a function of the circumstances in which people live, especially of factors such as:
  - the values, attitudes, habits, priorities and the like of the social groups to which they belong
  - the economic structure of their society
  - even features of the education system itself.
Participation is a GOOD THING

Studies of participation assume that everyone should want to engage in adult education because it is a good thing to do.

Underlying many of the stated purposes of adult education in America is the assumption that the ideal of a democratic society must be maintained, and that education is one way to do this.

The actual provision of adult education in America is framed by

– Individualism
– Independence
– A Protestant-capitalist work ethic

Proof

Societies use education to preserve the status quo rather than to bring about change or address inequities.

It maintains the social system and existing social relations because the education of adults transmits the dominant culture which reproduces the cultural system which then is a force for the retention of the status quo rather than social change.

We talk about “development and liberation” as goals of adult education, but be aware that such development and liberation may actually be designed to enable people to fit more easily into the existing social system.
Participation equals formal learning

- All the evidence from studies presented here are for "formal education".
- There are many providers of formal learning opportunities, including government at all levels, employers, educational institutions, and community institutions such as libraries.

Assignment . . .

- Read Chapters 4 and 5
- Do the Annotations for both chapters
- Begin Learning Activity 3

See you next week!

I’m headed for a late lunch!