

Findings from one of the few major studies on noncollege-bound young adults suggest guidelines for more responsive continuing education programs.

Serving the Noncollege Bound

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Out-of-school youth and young people who never attended college full time constitute the majority of young adults. Unfortunately, they are least well served by continuing education. Most providers mainly serve the young people who are most like college students. Annual participation rates increase with the level of formal education, from 5 percent for those who complete only a few years or less of school, to 25 percent of high school graduates to 50 percent of those with the equivalent of a master's degree or more (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965).

As a result, continuing education participation serves to widen the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots." One solution to this problem is for continuing education practitioners to gain a better understanding of non-college-bound young adults in order to create responsive programs for this group.

Late adolescence and early young adulthood are associated in the public mind with education (Bocknek, 1980). These are typically the college years, in which young people are full-time students in higher education institutions following high school graduation. The extent of formal education achieved is the characteristic most closely related to the extent of part-time and short-term continuing education that is sought throughout adulthood. The completion of high school and of each year of full-time postsecondary education is associated with higher participation rates in continuing education (Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979; Johnstone and Rivera, 1965).

Continuing education participation rates tend to be lower for adults during their late teens and early twenties (when the college bound are in school full time) than they are for the late twenties and early thirties, when participation associated with adaptation to new adult roles, along with higher participation rates by college graduates, combine to produce peak rates. The rates prior to age thirty would be even higher if it were not for the depressed participation of mothers who stay at home to care for their young children.

But what about the educative activity of the noncollege-bound young adults who drop out of high school or who graduate but do not complete more than a semester of full-time, post-high school education? Because going on to college for at least a year or two is mainly associated with family affluence, the majority of young people who do not are more representative of their age group than might be anticipated.

Social class, then, helps differentiate the extent of educative activity by college-bound versus noncollege-bound young adults. But what are the salient correlates of extent and type of educative activity among the noncollege bound? This was the focus of the major national study upon which this chapter is based (Knox, 1970). In addition to informal information seeking and to learning projects that used print and electronic media and conversations with other people, the study included all forms of part-time and short-term educational activity regardless of content, method, or provider (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; London, Wenkert, and Hagstrom, 1963; Parker and Paisley, 1966). Examples included occupational education provided by an employer or the military, part-time courses provided by educational institutions, study discussion groups provided by religious institutions or community agencies, patient education provided by hospitals, and workshops provided by associations.

This chapter presents the explanations about participation in continuing education by noncollege-bound young adults that emerged from this study and from the few similar studies that have been conducted (Carson, 1965; Hendrickson and Foster, 1960; Horner and Knox, 1965; London, Wenkert, and Hagstrom, 1963; Super and Associates, 1967; Trent and Medsker, 1968; Waldron, 1968). Salient correlates with participation occurred in relation to past experience, current relationships, and personal outlook (Sewell and Associates, 1969). This chapter looks at each of these three categories of correlates, then looks at the patterns of relationships across categories, and concludes with a section on the implications for practitioners.

Past Experience

The noncollege-bound young adults varied greatly in their experience prior to adulthood, and various aspects of their past experience were associated with the extent of current continuing education activity. As previous research cited above indicated, most of the noncollege-bound young adults in

Knox's (1970) study had fathers with blue-collar jobs and no formal education beyond high school. By contrast, young adults from higher-status families acquire more education, both full time and part time. Thus, social class strongly differentiates the college bound from the noncollege bound. How does it relate to participation in continuing education activities? Among the noncollege bound, parental family status variables (such as levels of educational and occupational attainment) were not highly associated with the young adult's educational *participation* (although the father's level of occupational prestige was associated with the young adult's expressed *interest* in continuing education).

By contrast, adolescent home environment of the noncollege-bound young adults varied greatly and, as researchers anticipated, was one of the variables most highly associated with the extent of current continuing education activity. These home environments varied from abundant to impoverished regarding books, reading, and the use of library materials. The abundance of the adolescent home environment was positively associated not only with the extent of current educative activity but also directly or indirectly with most of the other variables associated with participation. The fathers' level of occupational prestige was associated with home environment, even though it was little associated with the young adult's current educative activity. There was also an association among the young adult's verbal ability, home environment, adjustment, and amount of time spent reading magazines.

Noncollege-bound young adults varied greatly in their general adolescent activity level in terms of recreation, jobs, and nonschool-sponsored education. A high general adolescent activity level and more engaged life-style were moderately associated with the extent of current educative activity, even though individual variables such as working or recreation were not. However, the extent of out-of-school educational activities during high school years (such as public library use and learning through youth group projects) was positively associated with the extent of current continuing education participation. As previous research had led us to expect, feelings about high school were not greatly associated with actual participation in continuing education but were associated with the extent of expressed interest in participation.

Current Relationships

The young adults varied greatly in their current role relationships, and the extent of their involvement in various roles was positively associated with the extent of educative activity. They tended to have lower-prestige occupations and to have somewhat lower levels of role performance and satisfaction than more highly educated adults. About half belonged to no organizations, compared with about one third of adults generally, and those who did belonged to fewer organizations and were less often in leadership positions.

The extent of current educative activity was associated with leisure styles that were active and that included reading, cultural activities, and

community participation. The highest correlate of educative activity was the extent of organizational participation, which was in turn associated with adolescent home environment and current magazine reading. However, organizational participation was not highly associated with job-related educational activity, and level of occupational prestige was not associated with variation in educative activity but it was associated with interest.

The other people whom the young adults perceived as most significant or important to them were typically relatives or residents of the same neighborhood. Few "significant others" were associated with job or organizational settings. Significant others were typically older than the young adults but had about the same amount of education. Most were perceived by the young adult to feel that the young adult should obtain more education, and even more of them were perceived to feel that education was very important. In addition to a strong association with actual participation, the proportion of significant others who urged the young adult to obtain more education was the highest correlate with interest in continuing education (Booth and Knox, 1967).

Personal Outlook

The outlooks of noncollege-bound young adults were oriented toward the present and the future, and they included abilities, self-concept, and attitudes toward self and work. Their outlooks were in some respects more variable than for the general adult population. There was evidence of somewhat more need for affiliation and somewhat less personality integration than for adults generally, which probably reflected the adjustment problems of young adulthood. There also was slightly less happiness, security in groups, and activity out of groups. This conflict in self-concept and moderate self-satisfaction was especially characteristic of the most active continuing education participants. This was an indication of their recognition of discrepancies between current and desired proficiencies (Bocknek, 1980; Knox, 1980).

The intellectual abilities of the most able noncollege-bound young adults were well within the range of college students. Contrary to expectations, ability was only slightly related to educative activity and to general functioning. As anticipated, ability was less associated than socioeconomic status with educative activity. Vocabulary level was somewhat associated with educative activity, especially with participation in continuing education provided by educational institutions (in contrast with programs provided by employers).

Social and emotional adjustment is a global concept related to many variables associated with participation, but its direct relation was not to formal continuing education participation but to informal information seeking and especially to magazine reading. As anticipated, adjustment was associated with expansiveness and performance in the roles of worker, organization member, and user of leisure. Adjustment was also associated with an abundant adolescent home environment, the need for affiliation, thoughtfulness,

planfulness (which was associated with verbal ability), and the selection of an autonomous favorite leisure activity. Contrary to expectations, planfulness was not associated directly with educative activity but was associated indirectly through adjustment, low adherence to authority, positive feelings toward school, perception of reading as a desired job characteristic, organizational participation, preference for autonomous leisure activities, and a reading orientation.

The association between continuing education participation generally and both reading orientation and organizational participation reflected for the noncollege-bound the familiar barriers to participation faced by most adults who seldom read and who belong to no voluntary associations. Most continuing education activities have implicit rules, as do other organized groups, and they depend on reading; thus, they tend to discourage people whose life-style does not include these activities. For the young adults who were only engaged in job-related continuing education, there was less of an association with a reading orientation and more of an association with optimism about promotion chances. However, other attitudes toward their current job were little related to the extent of educative activity. Optimism about promotion was also positively associated with both adjustment and work satisfaction.

Patterns of Relationships

Some of the basic conclusions from the study spanned the three categories of variables. Educative activity by noncollege-bound young adults was significantly associated with various personal and situational characteristics related to past experience, current relationships, and personal outlook toward the future. In other words, there was not one or a few variables that were highly associated with the extent of educative activity; it was the *number* of facilitating variables more than the types of variables that differentiated between participants and nonparticipants. There appears to be a threshold for continuing education participation, such that three or more major facilitating variables (with at least one personal and one interpersonal) will result in participation. This reflects a transactional basis of motivation to participate, in which both personal inclinations and situational factors are influential. It is important to remember that, although social class and intelligence may differentiate the college bound from the noncollege bound, these two variables were not major predictors of the extent of educative activity among the noncollege bound. A combination of other variables had stronger and more direct relationships with participation.

The transactional pattern of related variables is illustrated by the following two composite clusters of variables that were highly associated with the extent of educative activity by noncollege-bound young adults. These clusters can be called an "engaged life-style" and an "idea orientation."

Some of the young adults in the study seemed to have a more active,

curious, *engaged life-style* than the others, and these young adults were more likely to be involved in continuing education. Associated characteristics included growing up in a more abundant home environment; having achieved high-status occupations; and currently tending to be more autonomous, planful, and thoughtful about ideas. Also associated was expansiveness, as characterized by active coping and social adjustment and by assertion, achievement, and expansion of life space in a variety of domains (such as through organizational participation).

The *idea orientation* was characterized by an emphasis on reading and thoughtfulness about issues of self and society. Reading of books and magazines was more central to the leisure style of participants than nonparticipants. This may help explain why twice as many significant others of the participants urged them to obtain more education than was the case for nonparticipants. Perhaps evidence of an idea orientation (such as reading and interest in issues) encourages significant others to urge young adults to obtain more education.

These two patterns emerged for almost all categories of noncollege-bound young adults, regardless of region, community size, and race. However, there were several ways in which the young women in the study differed from their male counterparts. They were more reading oriented, had a somewhat different leisure style, and experienced somewhat different career development (Mulvey, 1963; Trent and Medsker, 1968). Regarding reading orientation, they liked school better, described a more book-oriented adolescent home environment, spent more time reading magazines, and were more interested in an ideal job that included reading. Regarding leisure style, they belonged to fewer organizations, their favorite leisure activity was more other directed, their leisure role performance ratings were lower, and fewer of their significant others urged them to obtain more education. Regarding career development, they held higher-status occupations (not necessarily higher paying), but their worker role performance ratings were lower, and they were less optimistic about their chances for promotion.

For both male and female noncollege-bound young adults, there were small age-related differences that seemed to reflect developmental trends during late adolescence and early young adulthood, indicative of a maturing process (Knox, 1977). With age, the older young adults were progressing occupationally (as reflected in higher-status occupations, higher worker role performance ratings, and higher work satisfaction); became more reading oriented (as reflected in more time spent reading magazines, higher vocabulary test scores, and more interest in an ideal job that would entail reading); were more socially engaged (as reflected in belonging to more organizations and in higher ratings on leisure role performance and social adjustment); and were gaining greater mastery over their environment (as reflected in greater orientation toward planfulness and achievement).

Most of these relationships were consistent with findings from the small amount of previous research and the predictions of experts, especially regard-

ing the importance of a reading orientation and of the encouragement of others. The low direct relationships between participation in educative activity and both social class and intelligence were not anticipated.

Implications for Practice

Based on the overview presented in the preceding sections are the following major implications for continuing education practitioners who want to develop responsive programs to attract and serve noncollege-bound young adults.

1. *Relate Programs to Adult Roles to Encourage Participation.* Educative activity was positively related to performance in the worker role and to organizational participation. Some young adults combined organizational and educational participation, while others appeared to rely on organizational coping strategies instead of more formal educative activity. The latter young adults used coaching and informal orientation to enhance their proficiency while avoiding the book orientation and structure of more formal continuing education. Thus, practitioners can include people who interact in work, church, organization, or informal group settings in the process of planning educative activities that are based on their shared organizational experience and commitment.

In addition to informal learning projects and group discussion, practitioners can emphasize educational methods that relate learning to life roles; such methods include case-study exercises, role playing, and action learning.

One way to encourage participation by current nonparticipants is to begin with change events (such as marriage or a job promotion) that can trigger participation by producing a heightened readiness to learn (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980). Another spur to participation are discrepancies between current and desired proficiencies as reflected in only moderate job satisfaction and perceived conflicts in adjustment and self-concept; in the study, these were associated with the extent of educative activity. Practitioners can help nonparticipants clarify discrepancies that nonparticipants believe they can deal with, using strategies that alternate between action tasks and relevant educational resources (Smith, 1982, 1983).

2. *Capitalize on Developmental Trends of Young Adulthood.* Adult growth and development is most likely when the setting encourages the changes a person wants to achieve (Knox, 1977). This transactional and developmental process was reflected in the study in the shift toward more engagement and an idea orientation during late adolescence and early young adulthood. Substantial motivation and development were reflected in increasing occupational development, mastery over the environment, role differentiation, social engagement, and reading orientation.

People are more subject to influence when they are changing (Bocknek, 1980). The many major role changes of young adulthood produce a heightened

readiness to learn that practitioners can use to encourage such young adults to engage and persist in educative activity. Marrying, parenting, changing jobs, moving, or joining an organization entails inescapable uncertainty, adjustments, and questions (Knox, 1977). Practitioners can help young adults to include educative activity as part of the natural problem-solving process. For example, acceptance of new responsibilities in a job or organization that entail careful reading can encourage efforts to increase reading speed and comprehension, which might be viewed as unimportant under other circumstances. Parenting can stimulate interest in community and value questions and in child development. Job expectations can help a young adult focus on new skills to be mastered for continued employment and advancement.

3. Accommodate the Distinctive Developmental Patterns of Young Women. In addition to having somewhat different approaches to career development, leisure role, and reading, young women engaged in educative activities that were more separately clustered around work or leisure. Practitioners can provide programs focused on these separate interests and, in these programs, can rely more on books and reading. Continuing educators can also help young women make plans that fit their interests and circumstances, including making adjustments in program arrangements to accommodate student, work, and family roles.

4. Appeal to the Multiple Influences That Can Be Strengthened. Various personal and situational variables were associated directly or indirectly with participation in educative activity. Some of these potential influences are easier to reinforce and strengthen than others in order to encourage further educative activity by recent participants and similar young adults. For example, the highest correlate with continuing education participation generally was the extent of organizational participation, which in turn was influenced by the abundance of the adolescent home environment and by the extent of planfulness. While it is impossible to go back in time and enrich the adolescent home environment of current young adults, it is possible to encourage them to join an organization and to emphasize planfulness in both work and organizational activity as useful prerequisites to more formal educative activity.

Other characteristics highly associated with interest or participation have potential for marketing purposes. Examples include a reading orientation and encouragement by significant others. To increase the encouragement of significant others, a continuing education provider can cosponsor educational activities with an organization to which the young adults already belong; sometimes just adding one more "facilitator" (such as the leaders of the organization) will result in participation.

In addition, marketing efforts can focus on significant others and reference groups related to family, work, religious or secular organizations, or informal social groups. Marketing messages aimed at these significant others can encourage them to talk with noncollege-bound young adults to increase awareness of opportunities, stress the value of education, facilitate initial

enrollment, urge persistence, and assist the young adults to use what they learn (Knox and Associates, 1980).

Nonparticipants may also be attracted to informal programs (that lack an emphasis on reading and the formal structure of a voluntary association), which may be more compatible with their current life-styles.

5. *Each Provider Agency Should Serve the Types of Young Adults It Most Readily Attracts.* Although there is substantial overlap, various providers attract adults with somewhat different characteristics. For example, verbal ability was associated with participation in continuing education provided by educational institutions but not with that provided by employers. Knowledge of the clientele of various agencies can indicate which provider is most likely to attract an underserved segment of young adults. Employers, labor unions, urban recreational centers, occupational training programs for the unemployed, the military service, community colleges and technical institutes, the Cooperative Extension Service, penal institutions, and religious institutions can each make a distinctive contribution. Cosponsorship by such providers may further increase involvement of nonparticipants.

6. *Adapt Arrangements to the Client's Life-Style to Attract the Harder to Reach.* The noncollege-bound young adults who recently participated in continuing education activities were quite similar to those who went on to college full time. You will probably need different approaches to attract and serve current nonparticipants (Darkenwald and Larson, 1980). Successful approaches will compensate for lower levels of aspiration (by clarifying discrepancies between current and desired proficiencies), of organizational participation and encouragement by significant others (by increasing reference-group support), of reading orientation (by avoiding reading as a prerequisite and developing it as a concomitant), and of occupational prestige (by recognizing limited ability to pay and providing subsidy as needed). Successful approaches are likely to entail practical learning-by-doing methods in concrete situations with direct applications.

7. *Strengthen the Continuum of Preparatory and Continuing Education.* Although it is impossible to go back and change the early life experiences of current young adults, it is possible for continuing education to be aimed at parents, teachers, and youth-group leaders who work with children and adolescents so that these young people enter young adulthood with a stronger orientation toward lifelong learning. For example, in-service education programs for teachers could emphasize learning how to learn and positive attitudes toward self-directed learning projects as well as content coverage. Parent education programs could emphasize the contribution of a reading-oriented home environment to the child's subsequent development. Teachers of youth groups could be helped to appreciate how influential informal learning projects are on later educational participation.

Public stereotypes sometimes center on social class or minority groups or on differences between rural and urban backgrounds. It is important to

recognize how little such differences are associated with the extent of educative activity among noncollege-bound young adults. By contrast, continuing education practitioners *can* do something about the major correlates, such as reading and idea-oriented home environments, encouragement by significant others, organizational participation, and recognition of discrepancies between current and desired proficiencies (Knox, 1980).

Summary

This chapter does not present continuing education practitioners with a simple explanation of a few major influences on the extent of educative activity by noncollege-bound young adults. However, it does offer practical suggestions based on an understandable rationale.

The continuing education participants are differentiated from nonparticipants by a more engaged life-style and greater orientation toward reading and ideas. The various correlates of participation reflect a transactional, developmental process in which past experience, current relationships, and personal outlook interact. Evidence of developmental maturation includes increasing occupational development, an orientation toward reading, social engagement, and a mastery over the environment.

Major past-experience correlates of participation include the abundance of the adolescent home environment and the extent of adolescent out-of-school educative activity. Major current-relationship correlates include organizational participation and the extent of encouragement by significant others to obtain more education. Major personal-outlook correlates include a reading orientation, occupational dissatisfaction, and (for job-related continuing education) optimism regarding promotion.

Practitioners should feel optimistic that current influences (such as organizational participation, occupational opportunities, and encouragement by significant others) can override past influences (such as negative feelings about school or the low socioeconomic status of parents).

In short, the research indicates that responsive educational activities for noncollege-bound adults must relate directly to practical tasks associated with role performance and adjustments. The list of references suggests further reading for practitioners interested in strengthening educational programs for this large group of young adults.

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