

Adults get more attention from educators

Adult Development & Learning by Allan B. Knox, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977, pp. 679, \$25.00

A welcomed sign of our times is the increasing attention being paid to adults in the ways that they continually adapt, change, learn and grow. Knox's handbook synthesizes the results of over 1000 studies in adult learning and development. From his current position as professor of education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he has assembled research from such diverse fields as education, physiology, psychology, sociology and the biological sciences which focus upon the mature adult. The text provides a selective but yet highly comprehensive overview of tested knowledge that is useful for educators and many other helping professions such as social workers, ministers, nurses, counselors and librarians. Practitioners will find the volume to be useful in many ways such as: (1) to help adults identify and cope with the problems and opportunities, (2) to estimate the duration and intensity of adjustments that need to be made, and (3) to obtain a general overview of trends regarding stability and change during adulthood.

Adult development is complex because it is influenced by so many variables, such as environment, occupation, heredity, health, social and economic factors, education and exposure to stress. The term development refers to the orderly and sequential changes in characteristics and attitudes that one experiences over time. The context for development is usually affected by community differences. Whether the adult lives in an urban or rural community affects his life-style and opportunities available for education, cultural resources, social influences and recreational opportunities.

Adult performance on the other hand is continually being modified as the individual interacts with social or physical environment. Some influences affecting adult performance are: occupational requirements and stresses, desire for increased income, or for increased prestige, increasing excellence in performance and specialization.

Change can be beneficial and increase the individual's potential, thus providing impetus for growth. Adults can be encouraged to revise old dreams and create new ones to provide a sense of direction. For some adults, personality development includes an increasingly mature

capacity for growth. Knox states that personality is made up of tendencies that influence the adult in dealing with people, feelings of self-actualization, uses of defense mechanisms. As people grow older, they become increasingly individualized with their own special talents and resources. Their development centers around their career, family and community.

Societal attitudes toward adulthood vary. The stereotype attitude toward young adulthood is one of being active, energetic, and outgoing. We live in a youth-oriented culture as evidenced by the advertising media. Middle age is thought to be more mature, understanding and controlled. Old age is perceived as energyless, socially inefficient, rejected and retrospective. Inaccurate stereotypes can be changed by practicing open-mindedness and tolerance and understanding for individual differences. When the various ages work together for a common cause, then age loses its boundaries and each benefits from the talents and resources of all participants. An example of an active organization is the Grey Panthers. This organization is a group of older adults working for increasing the image and benefits of the "senior citizen." They are also attracting young college students who believe in the goal and wish to help out their cause.

The text also deals with family role performance. The way adults understand and deal with family role changes influences happiness, self-concept and performance in job and community. The role of marriage encounters many problems such as finances, sex, living conditions, parental interference, and general incompatibility. A crucial ingredient for successful marriage is the partners' willingness and ability to learn and grow regarding important family goals and ways to achieve them.

Parenthood is often an early problem in marriage. Statistics indicate that one female in five is pregnant when she marries for this first time. As a consequence, problems arise with negative feelings toward parenthood, inadequacy and unwillingness to accept role changes. Divorce creates a variation in the functioning of the family. Statistics show one-third of marriages in the United States end in divorce! The major causes are unhappy, depressed, hypercritical people.

Retirement creates new adjustment to change of activity and interests. It can bring increased companionship and enjoyment of leisure activities and travel. A libertine individual can also experience problems and dissatisfaction if there is not a hobby or new interest to help the individual feel active and useful.

One's occupation is a major factor in shaping self-concept and setting life-style and prestige. The occupational activity has a powerful influence on family structure and community life. Factors that contribute to satisfactory choice of occupation are: (1) familiarity with the occupation (2) similarity between occupation and personal interests, (3) availability of role models, (4) job requirements and expectations, (5) congruity of work values, (6) socialization that occurs in the education and work setting. Young adults seem to do better at high speed manual skills whereas older adults show more steadiness, experience, conscientiousness, patience and better work attendance.

Women in the work force face discrimination and competition with men in various ways such as tasks, salary and prestige. Many women work for necessity to maintain an average living, but also work for prestige

reasons, social contact, independence and achievement. Many females have combined homemaking with an occupation or career and seem to find self-actualization through ability to do both. Those with families have added problems and responsibilities but the author repeats many times that children do not suffer when the mother works and they grow and develop in a normal pattern.

The elements of physical condition within adults are well covered in the book. Heredity affects height, appearance and initial endowment of good health. Life expectancy has increased for men to approximately 68 years and for women 75 years due to improved nutrition, better preventive medical care, and increased technology in medical expertise.

The emphasis appears to be on exercise which gives benefits of increased vitality, strength and endurance. The older person who increases his exercise has increased heart rate and blood pressure and circulation, but due to the occurrence of arteriosclerosis and atherosclerosis, his muscular performance is decreased. Osteoporosis develops with advanced age and causes a decrease in height and brittleness of bones due to lack of absorption of calcium.

As one grows older, the physical senses are decreased. Diminished visual acuity and peripheral vision, hearing, tolerance for noise is decreased, and taste buds atrophy with age. Malnutrition frequently occurs due to reduced income, anorexia, depression, loss of family to eat with and irregular eating habits. There is an increase in the incidence of diabetes mellitus and chronic illnesses such as arthritis and diverticulitis. The older adult learns to compensate for inadequacies by increased accuracy, decreased speed and extra care and attentiveness. Practitioners can help older adults increase their self-confidence by making sure the learner succeeds in initial learning tasks. Preventive health measures which slow the gradual deterioration of the adult are good nutrition, proper exercise and maintain good health habits. The human body has the capacity that exceeds the limits reached by performance of most adults in the United States.

The chapter on adult learning is excellent and possibly the best unit in the text. Adults usually learn for immediate application and want to learn to increase competence. Advanced new learning should occur throughout life. The process of life-long learning is essential if adults are to make their life purposeful and satisfying. This concept is becoming more and more popular as evidenced by the trend of increasing numbers of adults in formal learning settings.

Most adults approach learning with specific expectations of what they will gain so the education climate is very important. Preparatory experience influences feelings of achievement or failure. The expectation of learning has multiple goals of enjoyment, increased competence, and interest in the material. Practitioners can assist learning by emphasizing abilities, clarifying structure, memorable encounters, personal pacing, varied resources and positive feedback. They should encourage the adult to set educational objectives that challenge them in a satisfactory manner.

Adults tend to learn and recall better when the information is related to previous learning experiences. Errors made by older adults are more in omission, forgetting, rather than by commission. Older adults tend to problem solve by searching past experience rather than generating new solutions. Older adults learn less effectively as more increased complex tasks are presented. Individuals with low efficacy appear to believe in the old adage, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." They need encouragement with successful experiences. Practitioners should slow down presentations and build on relevant areas, diagnosing understand and competence. It is a fact, that "almost any adult can learn anything he wants to given time, persistence and assistance."

Three additional chapters are entitled Women's Roles, Adjusting to Change Event and Perspectives on Adulthood. Collectively they indicate that each stage of life has its own values and age-related stereotypes. Developing a perspective can enable adults to grasp essential features of their lives and recognize similarities and differences of others.

Rapid social change leads to "future shock" which makes it difficult for individual adults to develop a comprehensive perspective on adult life cycle. Practitioners can help with adaptations and should work to increase adult access to opportunity systems. should enhance developmental perspective through professional associations, preparatory and continuing education, and collaborative efforts.

The book seems to be well-written and has much practical application for those interested in adult education. It incorporates various educational philosophies with constructive implications for use. Much current research is cited to make the content relevant and meaningful. This text should be included in the professional library as an excellent resource reference for those individuals concerned with the total adult being.

Robert E. Scott
Kansas State University