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ABSTRACT

Monette divides the definitions of needs into four categories. Basic needs are caused by a deficiency and lead to gratification-seeking behavior. Felt needs are self-defined wants or desires which, when expressed, suggest an unmet need and a means of gratification or imply ultimate goals. A normative need refers to a deficiency between the present state of affairs and some criterion. Comparative needs arise when an individual or group is not receiving a service others in a similar situation are receiving. Different types of needs have been identified, including motivational and prescriptive, felt and expressed, and subjective and objective. Scissons proposes a typology of educational need based on three need components (reliance, competence, and motivation) and two categories (wants and complex needs). Methods of assessing educational needs include Tuomisto's social demand method, investment in educational method, and manpower method and McKinley's individual self-fulfillment models and system discrepancy models. Adult educators generally use the terms "need" and "demand" synonymously, but the existence of an educational "need" may not necessarily imply the existence of "demand" for education. Neoclassical theory of consumer behavior can be used to show that demand for continuing education arises when the student participates in the continuing education program. (YLB)

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## THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATIONAL NEED: AN ECONOMIC INTERPRETATION

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### Introduction

There is a general consensus among adult educators on the pivotal role needs assessment plays in programming planning. Most adult educators would agree with the statement that "educational programs should be based on the needs of the learners." (Campbell, M.D., 1980). Thus, the starting point for adult education program development should be an assessment of the educational needs of individuals, organizations, or societies. To successfully assess these "needs", one must have a concise and workable definition of the term "need".

In this paper we will review adult education literature in order to identify the definitions of the term "needs". Secondly, the typology of "needs" will be dealt with. Thirdly, the meaning, purpose, and scope of several methods of needs assessment will be examined. Finally, a distinction will be drawn between the term "need" and the term "demand".

#### (i) Definition of the Term "Need"

Monette (1977) divides the definitions of "need" into four categories: basic human needs, felt or expressed needs, normative needs, and comparative needs.

Basic needs are caused by a deficiency and lead to gratification-seeking behavior. According to Monette (1977, 117), "the term 'need' is most commonly

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used in the sense of an individual "want" or "desire" or "felt need"...and accordingly"...[such a] need suggests a means of gratification...and implies an ultimate goal...."

Felt needs are, therefore, self-defined "wants" or "desires" which, when expressed, suggest an unmet need and a means of gratification or imply ultimate goals.

A normative need refers to a deficiency between the present state of affairs and some criterion. Normative needs will help the educator assess needs, but requires value judgments to set standards.

Comparative needs arise when an individual or group is not receiving a service that others in a similar situation are getting. This lack, however, does not necessarily warrant provision of the service for anyone.

Beatty (1981) gives a "working definition of need" which is similar to Monette's definition of "normative need." Beatty observes that the term "need" is casually used in problematic sense. In Beatty's words, "...what we hear is an array of value-laden assertions which equate the term 'need' with current situations which are viewed as problematic by some person or group of persons." Having stated the circumstances under which the term is used, Beatty then defines "need" as "...the measureable discrepancy existing between a present state of affairs and a desired state of affairs as asserted either by an 'owner' of need or an 'authority' on need." (Beatty, 1981, p.40).

#### (ii) Etymology of Need

Atwood and Ellis (1971) broadly divide the notion of "need" into two different categories according to the sense the term is most commonly used: motivational and prescriptive.

Motivational needs are "...a deficient state that initializes a motive on the part of the individuals." (Atwood, Ellis, 1971, p.211). This

definition of need is exactly the same definition given to "basic human needs" by Monette in his 1977 article.\*

Tuomisto's (1981) categories of "need" consist of "felt need" and "expressed need." A "felt need" is "...all need for education that is experienced by individuals, while an 'expressed need' is a need that has become real; i.e., it appears as participation in adult education activities." (p.37) This definition by Tuomisto for and "expressed need" closely resembles the definition of a demand for education.

Prescriptive needs, as the name implies, prescribes the context in which a need is felt. Atwood identifies several situations in which "needs" might arise. However, none of the categories he mentions (needs in terms of objectives, in terms of necessity, in terms of deficiency, and needs and obligations) are operationally meaningful, and will not be discussed in this study.

Scissons (1982) classifies needs into two categories also: subjective needs or "wants" and objective needs or "deficiencies." A "need" will be classified as subjective or as a "want" if it is specified by the individual in need. A need is classified as objective or as a "deficiency" if it is specified by some other individual.

Scissons (1982) provides a typology of educational need based on three need componets (reliance, competence, and motivation) and two categories which he calls "wants" and "complex needs."\*\*

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\* As a matter of fact, the above quotation from Atwood and Ellis can be found verbatim in Monette's article, without Atwood and Ellis using quotation marks or giving reference to Monette's article.

\*\* Competence refers to a person's ability to perform a certain task with various degrees of skill. Relevance refers to how useful the skills are in an individual's occupation, while motivation refers to the degree by which an individual intends to improve his/her skills.

A combination of motivation with one of the other components is called "wants." Complex needs are divided into two categories: (1) discrepancy need which refers to a combination of reliance and competence. This type of need in an individual implies that the person is incompetent in the performance of a task and it is important to that person that he/she is incompetent; and (2) derived need which refers to a situation where the three need components are present.

(iii) Methodology of Needs Assessment in Adult Education

Tuomisto (1982) asserts that needs assessment models are the starting points of educational planning, and he classifies these methods into three different categories.

(1) The Social Demand Method. Utilization of this method by an analyst presupposes the existence of a ready-made demand for continuing education. (We will have to say more on this topic later). Thus, this method sees the provision of "...education as a satisfier of individual demand for education." (Tuomisto, p.40).

(2) The Investment in Education Method. This approach deals with education as economic activities. Therefore, like any other alternative economic activity, it requires utilization of scarce resources. Thus a rational (optimal) expenditure of resources in education requires a comparison of the rate of return of investment in education with the social discount rate. Such an economic calculation requires utilization of benefit/cost analysis or other methods to ascertain the results of investment on educational programs.

(3) The Manpower Method. This method of educational planning aims at the development of training the required skilled labor force.

Mckinley (1973) gives a more refined classification of needs assessment models. He divides these diagnostic models into the following categories: individual self-fulfillment models and system discrepancy models.

Individual self-fulfillment models are further classified into random appeal models and selective appeal models. Random appeal models attempt at identifying, to use Tuomisto's term, the expressed needs of the individual, that is, those needs which are strong enough to urge the owner of the need to take concrete action in satisfying them. Selective appeal models, on the other hand, concentrate on the presumption that the educational needs of a specified segment of the population are already known. Individuals in both of these approaches are involved in the need assessment process.

System discrepancy models are the models used to identify the educational needs of social systems. These types of models are normative in nature since they compare the existing state to a desired state or attempt to solve some existing problems.

Note that both of these methods, that is, individual self-fulfillment methods as well as system discrepancy models, fall under the social demand method of educational planning.

As we have seen in previous pages, the term "need" is defined differently and loosely by different writers. To compound the problem, with the exception of Tuomisto, all the other writers use the term "need" synonymously with the term "demand." Does the existence of an educational "need" necessarily imply the existence of "demand" for education? Although most adult educators implicitly suppose so, we cannot definitely assert with any degree of certainty, that it is indeed the case. Let us elaborate this point.

Educational needs of persons, organizations, or communities might be easily assessed. But there are no a priori reasons for us to suppose that those expressed needs will be satisfied by the potential students. For the satisfaction of needs requires that the student should take concrete steps in acquisition of the desired knowledge.

Given the fact that existence of an educational need is not synonymous with actual enrollment in a program, we must examine the process used by a consumer to satisfy his needs, wants, desires, or, what is the same thing, reveal his/her preferences. To do so, we now turn to a study of neo-classical theory of consumer behavior.

It is a well-known fact, at least among economists, that human "wants" are insatiable. However, economists distinguish between human "wants" and human "needs". Although human wants are insatiable, human material needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing, etc.) are, at least in most cases in advanced industrial societies, regularly satisfied. The problem of scarcity (the requirement to economize) arises when the insatiability of human wants is coupled with limited availability of resources (i.e., land, labor, and capital).

Because of the dual problem of insatiability of wants and scarcity of resources, societies are forced to attempt to optimally allocate resources among competing uses. This act of economizing requires the individuals in the society to maximize their satisfactions. However, they are constrained by their limited incomes. According to the neoclassical consumer theory\*, each consumer has a preference function whose arguments are the quantities of different goods and services consumed. We, as consumers, show our

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\* For an excellent and concise treatment of consumer behavior, see Varian, 1978 (Chapter 3).



preferences by selecting from a menu of available goods and services. Education, particularly adult education, could be conceived as an item in such a bundle of goods and services.\* Thus, as an example, when Professor Knowles (1980) in a discussion of educational needs writes, "If a need is expressed behaviorally as a "want" or as a "desire" ... ", what he is probably referring to is that the consumer has selected education as a variable in his preference function and is attempting to maximize his/her satisfaction given his/her income constraint. Therefore, the demand for a good or service is determined by a process which economists call consumer preference maximization problem. The preferred, or what is the same thing, the selected bundle of goods and services which maximizes the consumer's satisfaction is the consumer's demand bundle. Simply stated, it shows how much of each commodity or service the consumer needs (wants, desires) given prices and income. The function which relates the prices and income to the consumer's demanded bundle is called the consumer's demand function.

Why do some people choose to satisfy their educational needs and other people don't? That is a question which is not in the realm of economic analysis.\*\* An economist is only concerned with the demand for education; that is, the action of those who have educational needs and at the same time take concrete action to satisfy those needs.

### Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we reviewed the literature on adult education in order to find the definition of the term "needs". Furthermore, different types of

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\* Some theorists perceive outlays in education as decisions to invest. We will not treat adult education as an investment decision in this study.

\*\* We refer the readers interested in this question to Darkenwald and Merriam 1982 (Chapter 4).



"needs" were identified. The methods of assessing educational needs of individuals and organizations were identified. Finally, a distinction was drawn between the terms "needs" and "demand". Utilizing neoclassical theory of consumer behavior, it was shown that a demand for continuing education offerings arises when the student participates in the continuing education program.

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