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ABSTRACT

Trends in research on participation in adult education have reflected social changes, shifting from sociodemographic surveys toward emphasis on understanding motivation for participating. Participation has been studied primarily from the perspective of service providers, gathering data on participants or dropouts. Since the 1970s, researchers have shifted from a narrow preoccupation with participation in education to interest in participation in learning. Although research had been mainly descriptive, researchers seek now to explain adult participation. The descriptive studies have identified sociodemographic characteristics of participants in formal adult education, their motivations for attending classes, barriers or deterrents to their attendance, and characteristics and perspectives of "nonparticipants." The largely descriptive variables of previous studies (situational, institutional/environmental, and dispositional) are seen as interacting in complex ways to influence individual participation. Some comprehensive theories and models that have been developed to explain participation are as follows: congruence model; expectancy theory; expectancy-valence theory; chain-of-response model; psychosocial interaction model; and ISSTAL (Interdisciplinary conceptual framework, Sequential Specificity of relations, Time Allocation-Life span perspective) model of social participation. None of the theories is sufficient. Critical areas for future research are studies that place educational participation in the broader context of adults' life course, identify and document the influence of individuals' perceptions, and use qualitative methodology. (Contains 70 references.) (YLB)

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A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This review of the research on adult literacy participation indicates that there are many deterrents to the widespread and sustained participation needed to attain the national goal of universal adult literacy. Theories of adult literacy participation are becoming increasingly complex as researchers attempt to represent the many multidimensional influences on participation. As useful as expanding and improving the current array of adult literacy education programs might be, it is unrealistic to expect that all or even most of the targeted adult literacy development will result by increasing participation in existing types of programs. The concept of "participation" in literacy development must be expanded both theoretically and practically to be situated in the context of adults' lives as they perceive them. It thus encompasses engagement in diverse literacy practices, including (but not limited to) literacy instruction. This broader understanding of participation will enable us to encourage and create appropriate alternative activities and opportunities for adults to improve their literacy skills and knowledge.

Introduction

In the last few years, there has been an increasing recognition and discussion of the need for a more literate adult population in the United States. A variety of forces — changing demographics, increasing international economic competition, rapid technological changes — seem to be driving these calls for increased adult literacy. Universal adult literacy has now been officially established as a national goal for education (U.S. Department of Education, 1990), an historically unprecedented expectation (Resnick & Resnick, 1977; Miller, 1988). New private and public initiatives are materializing to improve the capacity and quality of both traditional programs (e.g., adult basic education) and specialized programs which serve adults in particular social and economic situations (e.g., welfare reform, family literacy and workplace literacy programs). This deluge of policy, legislative and fiscal initiatives is stimulating research and development efforts which are targeting expansion of the nation's service capacity for adult literacy education.

A recent series of public forums on adult education addressed a broad range of issues and made numerous recommendations for action (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Two major challenges were identified as means to reach the new national goal for adult literacy: (1) expand the capacity of the existing adult education system, and (2) improve the quality of the services offered by its providers. The majority of the testimony suggested incremental actions, seeing needed change as evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

In many cases and contexts the themes identified in the testimony are no doubt critical areas for program improvement. It is not immediately clear, however, that gradual, continuous improvement and expansion can meet the heightened expectations for adult literacy inherent in the national goal. Some adult educators and adult education researchers (e.g., Auerbach, 1989; Beder, 1992; Fingeret, 1991; Harman, 1987; Kazemek, 1990; Sticht, 1988; Street, 1987) have questioned whether the mere expansion of existing approaches and programs can meet existing needs. There are both practical reasons (based on the experience of programs) and theoretical reasons (gathered from research on literacy development) to question whether the extant array of institutional arrangements and programmatic approaches can be harnessed effectively to meet these needs.

Looking at the experience of various types of programs which provide adult literacy education, two major issues come to the fore. Participation rates in established adult literacy programs are very low. The National Governors' Association (whence the National Goals originated), for example, estimates that only 5% of the target population is served by existing programs (National Governors' Association, 1990). Furthermore, of those who do come, very few stay in the programs for sufficiently long periods of time to achieve significant learning gains. A typical finding, which is fairly constant in reports from diverse types of programs, is that adults participate in approximately 100 hours of instruction per grade-level equivalent gained in basic skills (Darkenwald, 1986; Fingeret, 1983a; Mikulecky, 1986; Sticht, 1982, 1988)—and most adult learners must somehow find those 100 hours (per grade level) after work, away from home, family and other interests and commitments. Many deterrents are encountered in participating in these literacy programs, some due to logistical problems; some are the product of a poor fit between the goals and values of program providers and those of potential participants (Reder & Green, 1985). These conflicts are frequently cross-cultural in nature, whether due to ethnic, socioeconomic class, family, or individual differences.

A particularly common source of conflict between the literacy-related values and goals of service providers and those of their potential participants stems from the confounding of *literacy* and *schooling*. As many authors (e.g., Heath, 1983; Olson, 1977; Scribner & Cole, 1978, 1981; Sharp & Gallimore, 1988) have noted, the dominant sociohistorical context for literacy development in Western societies in this century has been formal education. Academic success and literacy development have been very closely linked by the schools. Both the content and pedagogy of the schools have close affinities to particular cultural forms of literacy that have developed in the West. Olson has characterized this relationship thus: "schooling is an instrument of literacy."

This institutionalized intertwining of schooling and literacy has broad practical ramifications for adult literacy education. All involved—whether policymakers, program designers, administrators, teachers, or (potential) adult learners—tend to conceive of literacy programs in *remedial* terms. Society, in general, and policy makers, in particular, envision waging literacy "campaigns" to "eradicate illiteracy" (as if it were a disease like smallpox). Program designers, administrators, and teachers tend to recreate school-like programs embodying many of the structures, assumptions, and values that characterize the K-12 public schools. Participants and potential

participants tend to perceive and experience the adult programs accordingly—as extensions or continuations of the school programs in which they have previously experienced failure, loss of self-esteem, and lack of responsiveness to their personal needs and goals (Fingeret, 1983b, 1991; Reder & Green, 1985). The close relationship here between K-12 and adult educational systems is likely at the root of the positive correlation between previous success in school (i.e., educational attainment) and participation in adult education: The farther one managed to progress through the K-12 system, the likelier one is to participate in subsequent adult education (Cross, 1981; Sticht, 1988; Valentine, 1990).

Although, in principle, many of the suggestions for the evolutionary improvement and expansion of current programs could remove or at least reduce the logistical deterrents to sustained participation, conflicts of values and goals cannot be so readily overcome without radical changes in the nature of adult literacy programs (Auerbach, 1989; Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989; Harman, 1987; Kazemek, 1990; Lytle & Wolfe, 1989; Reder & Green, 1985). Many programmatic strategies are being tried or considered for inducing the so-called “hard-to-serve” to participate in literacy programs, e.g., compensating employees for participation or linking welfare or parole eligibility to participation (for those who do not pass a literacy screening test). Even if such incentives can induce higher rates of participation, it is far from clear that the learning gains achieved will be incorporated in and applied to participants’ lives in ways that will promote lasting literacy development. To accomplish such lasting change, Heath (1983) argues that literate behaviors rather than mere literacy must be developed. There is a growing body of research (some of which is reviewed in Reder, Hart-Landsberg, Schwab, & Wiklund, 1991) which indicates that literacy programs will be most effective when they “situate” instruction within the activities, lives, values and cultures of their individual learners (Fingeret, 1991; Reder & Green, 1985; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In this sense, the larger problem may be what Ray McDermott has described as “literacy acquiring people” rather than the other way around.

This is not to say that the current programs are ineffective and should be replaced in a wholesale manner. They have demonstrated their ability to serve some segments of their target population effectively, and large-scale efforts to expand and improve them may well benefit many who are not presently served. But there is also a clear and growing need to add some new kinds of programs to the mix, ones which are better designed and better positioned to serve adults who are not likely to participate in and benefit from existing

types of programs, whether for logistical or substantive reasons. We have coined the phrase "giving literacy away" (Reder & Green, 1985) for the strategy of trying to situate literacy education within the logistic and cultural contexts of learners' everyday activities rather than within the school-like institutional contexts characteristic of many providers. Some programs, particularly those based within multi-service, community-based organizations, have achieved a measure of success at providing effective adult literacy education apparently more closely aligned with local individual and community values, needs and goals (Association for Community-Based Education, 1989). Although these represent a promising step in the direction of giving literacy away, of helping literacy to acquire people, even greater innovation may be needed to design new ways to promote adult literacy development.

The tension between these two programmatic paths towards adult literacy development—expand and improve existing types of programs versus innovate new approaches—is rooted in the recurrent tension between viewing literacy as a vehicle to meet the expectations of the wider society or as a means of responding to diverse personal, community and cultural demands and goals (Fingeret, 1991).

This review of the literature on adult literacy participation reflects the need to re-examine our traditional understandings of the factors which underpin adult literacy and explore the circumstances which shape the decisions of adults to participate (or not) in literacy activities and programs. This theoretical orientation assumes a view of participation which is very broad and encompasses not only involvement with formal programs but also the literacy practices of everyday life. It is in the context of daily life—at work and at home—that an expanded understanding of adult literacy is so sorely needed. At the same time, we must view literacy as a complex phenomenon—as cultural practice laden with meanings created and interpreted by the individuals involved. This view has important implications for understanding how literacy develops among adults and how it can be fostered and enhanced. Finally, this theoretical orientation assumes that changes in literacy practice are often associated with events and circumstances which signal marked transitions in individuals' lives. Understanding the interrelationship of literacy development and social transitions should provide new insights with which to develop strategies and approaches to meet the needs of the vast numbers of adults who could benefit from enhanced literacy, yet, for whatever complex or simple reasons, have slipped through the nets of existing approaches or programs.

In this technical report, we provide an overview of research and theory pertaining to adult literacy participation placed within the context of an expanded definition of literacy development and the influence of life transitions and the individuals' concept of self. Reviewing previous work in the field enhances our understanding of relevant issues and facilitates the development of perspective and direction for future inquiry. The review is illustrative rather than comprehensive and of necessity is limited to principles and conclusions rather than the details of the numerous cited studies. Interested readers should consult the cited sources for further details of methodologies and data.

Brief History of Participation Research

Participation in adult education has been the subject of much research in this country since the early part of this century. Research trends have reflected societal changes, gradually shifting from sociodemographic surveys that placed participation in the broader perspective of community involvement and tended to link participation to social class, toward emphasis on understanding individual motivation for participating (Courtney, 1984, cited in Benseman, 1989; Rubenson, 1988). Such trends move research from education as a social concern to a focus on the psychological underpinnings of individuals' decisions to participate.

Participation has been studied primarily from the perspective of the service providers, gathering data on participants themselves or on program dropouts. This is not surprising considering that program success has been measured in numbers of participants attracted and retained and that funding for continued service has been determined by those numbers, an indicator called "the enrollment economy" as early as the 1950s (Clark, 1956). Intent on helping practitioners to serve greater numbers of adults, researchers studied the adults who did respond, to find out what attracted them to the programs and what personal motivations they had for deciding to improve their skills through program participation. They also studied, when possible, the adults who "dropped out." Because it was assumed that adults with low basic skills who enrolled in adult education needed to participate to be able to improve their skills, dropouts were viewed negatively. This perspective was based on the prevailing negative view of dropouts of K-12 school, despite the fact that adult education is not compulsory and adults' lives and decision-making processes are far different from those of children.

This program mentality was carried to the extent that the assumption was made (and continues to be made) in analyzing and

reporting data from participation studies that if individuals did not participate in the educational activity as defined in the study (i.e., the particular adult-education program) they were not learners. Rockhill (1982, p. 7) points out the "flagrant" value imposition inherent in the classification of nonparticipants as "non-learners" and the obvious danger for the field of adult education:

In defining people as non-learners, the false notion that people become educated only through educational programs is perpetuated. If one is to arrive at greater insight into the phenomenon of participation it would seem useful to leave definitions open and focus instead upon the range of activities engaged in in order to learn any particular thing. In this way, definitions of participation and drop-out, as well as the incidence of and relationship of various forms of activity, would derive their meaning within the context of the individual's learning experience.

During the 1970s and into the mid 1980s, researchers tended to lose sight of the "nonparticipant." The Swedish educator Kjell Rubenson (1988) notes that one indicator of this is found in the nature of articles published in *Adult Education Quarterly*. From 1970 to 1987 there were three times as many articles about motivation as about differences between participation and nonparticipation. He notes that, in fact, there was no major empirical North American study comparing participants and nonparticipants.

Another important change occurred during the '70s: Researchers began to broaden their view of participation, shifting from a narrow preoccupation with participation in education to interest in participation in learning, including both organized education and self-education (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Rubenson, 1988). As we shall see, however, the field is still struggling with accepting a broader definition of participation in literacy development. Rockhill (1982) described this "definitional dilemma"—the fact that adult education cannot be equated with a given set of institutions or a level of schooling, which leaves researchers to come up with their own operational definitions of participation. Unfortunately, these usually have been simply linked to institutional schooling. In this way, participation has been viewed in a restrictive, "does he or doesn't he" framework, rather than as an activity in which people engage with differing degrees of energy and focus at different points in their lifetimes.

Research on participation can be categorized as two major types: descriptive and explanatory. Until very recently, descriptions of adult learning have been more substantial than the available explanations. Indeed, the vast majority of research in the past was descriptive in nature, attempting to identify characteristics of learners, dropouts, and nonparticipants. In 1982, Rubenson felt compelled to critique the direction the emerging field of adult education was taking, especially in North America. He noted that adult education research had been defined mainly from assumptions about the characteristics of the learner, with little consideration of the functions adult education fulfills in society. Consequently, the field was largely limited to a psychological perspective of the issues. In addition, the "normative" nature of the discipline of adult education as it was developing in North America (normative in that it is concerned with deliberately helping adults to develop in specific ways) was not conducive to critical analyses, thus limiting the development of theories.

As the field of adult education in the United States has grown and begun to mature, researchers are seeking to develop theories of adult learning and participation that explain adults' behavior and allow prediction of future participation. The development of useful or comprehensive theories has been slow, however, perhaps in part due to ambiguity in the development and definition of adult education as a discipline in this country, in part due to the growing recognition of the complexities of understanding adult learning and participation. In 1990 Kazemek lamented the "meager theoretical base of adult literacy education," expressing surprise at the continued disinterest or inability of those involved in adult literacy education to make widespread use of the insights from the study of semiotics or linguistics, for example, or from methodologies such as ethnography. The field of adult education and participation, in particular, is clearly in transition.

Descriptive Studies

As noted, the majority of research studies of adult education participation have been descriptive surveys. We now know a lot about the sociodemographic characteristics of adults who choose to participate in formal adult education. We also have demographic profiles of those who drop out after having given it a try. We know something about participants' motivations for attending classes, and we have identified barriers or deterrents to their attendance. We even know about what almost deterred some participants. A careful review of the numerous studies carried out to describe participants, dropouts, and, by extension, nonparticipants is not within the scope of this present literature review. However, a summary of the findings of these studies provides a context for examining subsequent attempts to build theories and models to explain the phenomenon of participation.

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

For the past 30 years researchers' findings on participant characteristics have been very consistent: People who are younger, better educated, and employed in more skilled occupations are more likely to participate in adult education than those who are not (Scanlan, 1986). The "hard-to-reach" adult typically has low socioeconomic status (SES)—based on educational attainment, occupational status, and income, is older, and is isolated from ready access to educational resources (Darkenwald, 1980). Of these variables, educational attainment is the most powerful (for predicting both participation and persistence). Low SES is correlated with other characteristics such as race and ethnicity; however, when these variables are held constant, race does not distinguish between participants and nonparticipants.

The direction of the educational attainment variable as consistently the most powerful predictor of participation indicates the strong relationship of adult education and schooling in people's experience. Individuals with low educational attainment who may well have had negative experiences with their formal schooling will be unlikely to place themselves voluntarily in school-like settings again unless the rewards they perceive clearly outweigh their negative expectations for the experience.

Motivations

Recognizing that factors other than demographic variables influence adults' choices about participation, researchers have focused on understanding what motivates adults to participate. Exemplary of recent work is Beder and Valentine's (1990) Iowa study based on interviews with 323 adult basic education (ABE) students in 1985. They found 10 basic motivations for attending ABE: self-improvement, family responsibilities, diversion, literacy development, community/church involvement, job advancement, launching, economic need, educational advancement, and urging of others. The diversity of these reasons for participating is noteworthy in itself, for it demonstrates a fundamental aspect that must be understood and considered in any research on adult learning: Adults, even when they are categorized by common denominators such as participation in formal instructional programs, are not a homogeneous group.

Beder and Valentine conducted a cluster-analysis market segmentation so that their findings might have practical application for improving program outreach. They identified six market groups: mainstream women, the urged, young adults, the climbers, least affluent/least employed, and low ability strivers. They concluded that these motivations appear to be associated with life-cycle status; they could also be categorized as intrinsic (for example, self-improvement) and extrinsic (including economic gain or job advancement). They noted that the existence of different motivations has important implications for marketing and service delivery.

To place their study in context, Beder and Valentine remark on the diversity of outcomes from participation in literacy education—adults often gain far more personally than specific technical skills or cognitive achievements. Beder and Valentine speculate that, beyond a means to acquire skills, literacy education is also a “symbolic activity” in which learners may expunge their internalized (and socially reinforced) feelings of inadequacy, and it is a “vestibule activity” necessary to enable participants (logistically and psychologically) to make changes in their lives (p. 79).

Deterrents

Within the last decade researchers have increased their focus on describing *barriers* or *deterrents* that keep adults from participating or cause them to drop out. Cross (1981) grouped barriers into three major categories: situational (arising from one's situation in life at any given point in time, e.g., lack of child care or transportation); institutional (practices or procedures that exclude or discourage

adults' participations, e.g., scheduling and availability of courses); and dispositional (barriers based on attitudes and perceptions about oneself as a learner, e.g., feelings about school and one's ability to succeed). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) expanded on Cross' categories, listing four: situational, institutional, psychosocial, and informational. Their psychosocial category expands Cross' dispositional barriers about oneself as a learner to include the broader social context that shapes individuals' perceptions, beliefs and values. The inclusion of the informational category recognizes the importance of awareness of educational resources and opportunities.

While adult educators have found the concept of deterrents useful for identifying ways to improve the classes they offer and attempting to reach out to students in more appropriate ways, Benseman (1989) warns that the identification and explanation of barriers to participation are often used as substitutes for theory to explain individuals' participation behavior. Barriers as described above are only part of the reason people don't participate. Individuals respond differently to the same barriers. The identification of barriers does not help us understand why one young single mother will go to great lengths to find child care so she can get to class and another will find that barrier insurmountable.

A decade ago Darkenwald (1980, p. 6)—known for his work on reaching and retaining adult education students—thoughtfully commented after reviewing potential barriers to participation:

Participation behavior is complex and our understanding of it still rudimentary. What is particularly lacking in the literature are theories or models of the participation process which can give us a deeper understanding of the factors that influence participation, how they are related to one another, and how they operate to affect actual behavior.

In his review of research on deterrents, Scanlan (1986, pp. 35-36) listed deterrence factors found to affect adults' participation in educational activities. These included: home-related problems; cost concerns; worth, relevance or quality of educational opportunities; negative perceptions about the value of education in general; lack of motivation (anomie, apathy); lack of self-confidence; proclivity toward nonaffiliation; and incompatibilities of time and/or place. He noted that the concept of "deterrents" is multidimensional, including psychological, social and environmental variables. In addition, the deterring power of such variables is influenced by potential learners'

perceptions of them. Perhaps most important, the impact of these variables on behavior varies with individual personal characteristics and life circumstances. The need to examine broader contexts and design composite models to help explain participation behavior is clear.

Benseman (1989) also points out how barriers are usually identified from an institutional perspective, rather than from the point of view of the adults whom the institution is trying to serve. Fingeret (1983a) provides one of the few attempts to describe the perspective of adult illiterates. Based on her studies, a major deterrent from their perspective might be the potential change in or loss of their well established and mutually satisfying social networks that contribute to their sense of independence and self-esteem as contributing members of their communities. Researchers working from a "deterrent" perspective tend to identify typologies that describe people based on their deterrents, i.e., in negative terms. They are not described, for example, as caring so much for their family's well-being that they had to stay home instead of attend class or as having such a strong sense of self or community that they did not want to jeopardize it by attending classes that would identify them with the dominant culture. On the other hand, individuals who do participate are described in the research literature based on their motivation to participate, i.e., positive characteristics and behaviors.

Characteristics and Perspectives of "Nonparticipants"

As Brookfield (1986), Fingeret (1991), and others have so eloquently pointed out, it is arrogant to assume that only participants in formal education are engaged in purposeful learning. Brookfield (1986, pp. 7-8) notes that:

..."lifelong learning" is an empirical reality, not a political strategy, in that adults learn throughout the developmental stages of adulthood in response to life crises, for the innate joy of learning, and for specific task purposes. There is no need to advocate the introduction of lifelong "learning" since adults are continually engaged in purposeful learning in familial, interpersonal, community activist, recreational, and occupational settings.

Cookson (1986), too, notes the need to rid ourselves of the characterization of adult education participation as a dichotomous or even trichotomous variable (with the respondents categorized as participants/nonparticipants or participants/nonparticipants/would-be

participants). He reminds us that Houle pointed out in 1965 that if the intent of the research is to encompass the entire range of individual learning efforts, then "...the stark division into participants and nonparticipants cannot be maintained, since people take part to a greater or lesser degree."

Though we may work toward the time when such a term is obsolete, we cannot leave the literature on "nonparticipants" behind. Recent studies that examine the perspectives of nonparticipants or resisters vary greatly in their scope and methodology, from hundreds of anonymous phone interviews analyzed with sophisticated cluster analysis, to a handful of face-to-face personal interviews, to a study of fictional characters in literature who resisted schooling. A common thread throughout is the realization on the part of the researchers that these "nonparticipants" are adults who made the decision not to participate based on their own personal perspectives of their needs, and that researchers and practitioners alike must expand their understanding of nonparticipants' perspectives.

Valentine and Darkenwaid (1990) have re-analyzed their 1985 study of potential learners (a better choice of label than nonparticipant or nonlearner, though it still implies that adults who have not participated in formal adult education are not learners) in an attempt to situate deterrents to participation more fully into the context of adults' lives. The 215 New Jersey adults in this study responded to a mailing (11% response rate). They had not participated in adult education. Only 37% of them had not received their high school diploma. Family income was quite high (7% below \$15,000, 39% above \$45,000). Cluster analysis was done on factors that had previously been identified as deterrents. The researchers identified five types of potential learners deterred by: (1) personal problems (30%), mainly homemakers with demanding life situations that make participation in organized adult education difficult; (2) lack of confidence (27%), mature people who lack confidence to participate, but otherwise could (personal resources and life circumstances would permit); (3) educational costs (13%), young women of moderate education and means who have the confidence but cannot afford the direct and indirect costs; (4) lack of interest in organized education (14%), well educated, affluent, working individuals who place a relatively low value on participation; and (5) lack of interest in available course (16%), highly educated, middle income, working individuals who place high value on continuing education but find existing programming irrelevant.

Valentine and Darkenwaid grouped these types into two categories, those *externally deterred* (59% of the sample) and those *internally deterred* (41%) by psychological factors. Despite the fact

that respondents represented such a small portion of the target population and that their characteristics were not representative of the usual target population of adult basic education and literacy programs, this study has value for the field. It points out the diversity among the reasons adults do not participate (even within a somewhat homogeneous group), and it places participation in the broader context of these adults' lives.

Beder (1990a, 1990b) conducted a survey of adult basic education (ABE) nonparticipants (129 phone interviews) to investigate their reasons for not participating and their personal characteristics. He identified four factors for nonparticipation: (1) low perception of need, (2) perceived difficulty, (3) dislike for school, and (4) situational barriers. The first and last were related to life-cycle status (age and mid-life roles of family and work). Beder points out that the high correlation of age with low perception of need leads one to question the utility of providers' current statistics and goals (only 5-7% of the population is being served), since over half of the adults eligible for ABE are 60 years old or older and may, therefore, perceive little need to participate.

Recently, Beder (1992) has identified three categories of eligible nonparticipants: (1) the "demand population," potential participants who are motivated and not constrained to participate, a small group for whom expanding services is a solution; (2) the "motivated but constrained", people who would like to participate but are constrained by life circumstances, such as child care, transportation problems, schedule conflicts, etc.; and (3) the "resisters", the largest of the three groups, not motivated to participate and the most difficult to attract. All in this group reported difficulties with previous schooling and perceived that becoming more literate would be difficult. Most also reported cultural conflicts with schooling. Most of these individuals have learned to cope with their modest levels of literacy and would feel stigmatized by participating. Without alternative forms of participation that minimize their educational alienation, these individuals are likely to continue to resist activities to improve their skills.

Alienation and the need for alternative programs to counteract it is the subject of another recent study (Popp, 1991). Past and present participation in education by parents in Kenan Trust Family Literacy programs was the focus. All parents had been high school dropouts and half had dropped out of adult basic education programs. The study found that a process of disengagement from schooling beginning at the transition from elementary to middle school or shortly

thereafter and a resulting sense of alienation from schooling is the underlying cause of school dropout and subsequent decisions to leave adult education as well. Family literacy programs help to develop a positive identification with schooling for both parents and children as the foundation for lifelong learning.

Beder and Quigley (1990) collaborated to report on three very different types of studies of nonparticipants: the quantitative phone survey described above, a study of literary fiction to help establish a framework for how and why adults resist adult basic education, and an interview study of 20 adults (ages 18-57) who resist ABE. From the two "resister" studies Quigley concluded that nonparticipation is not due to lack of awareness, fear of failure, poor self-image, insurmountable barriers, lack of motivation or learning disabilities. Based on his findings, nonparticipants are not resisting learning; they're resisting the irrelevant, unacceptable cultural and socioeconomic values they see in schooling.

Through this interesting combination of methodologies, Beder and Quigley have drawn the following implications for the field of adult education: (1) nonparticipants are not homogeneous (their lives are complex, like those of other adults); (2) nonparticipants have aspirations that may or may not involve education; (3) we must ask ourselves about the right of undereducated adults to choose not to participate, and we must also reconsider targeting older adults as prime consumers of adult education; and (4) we need alternative, relevant, acceptable programs grounded in learner needs and unschool-like in form.

Some of the characterizations of nonparticipants have been addressed in thoughtful descriptions of adult "illiterates" and the social context of literacy education. In their report on their experiences with the Vermont Adult Basic Education program, Eberle and Robinson (1980) provide grist for examining the assumptions that literacy researchers and providers bring to their work. They note that for some adults, having realistically assessed their situations, energy, time, and resources available, the decision not to try is the right one. Cultural conflicts are being recognized as important reasons for choosing not to participate. These may take a variety of forms, from situations in which individuals may be responding unwittingly to the lack of fit between the educational institution's approach and what feels appropriate for them (based on their tradition of learning), to those in which individuals are very clear that they are resisting the imposition of the values of the dominant society through its institutions (schools being one type). For these individuals, resistance (nonparticipation) is a form of group identity. To participate may mean

leaving or losing one's own community and cultural identity. (See, for example, Auerbach, 1989; Conklin & Hurtig, 1986; Fingeret, 1983b; Gowen, 1990; Holzman, 1986; and Wikelund, 1990.)

Explanatory Studies: Building Models and Theories of Participation

Although the process of developing a theory or theories of participation is still in its infancy, as more theories and models of adult participation in learning have been developed, they have become more complex, with researchers attempting to place learning in the larger context of adults' social roles and life situations. The largely descriptive variables of previous studies (situational, institutional/environmental, and dispositional) are seen as interacting in complex ways to influence individual participation. Here we review some of the more comprehensive theories and models that have been developed in an attempt to explain participation.

Motivations for Participation

Identifying and understanding people's motives for participating in adult education is a common thread in the research. Perhaps one of the most well-known efforts to explore adult education participants' motives for attending or dropping out of instructional programs is the series of studies conducted by Boshier (1971, 1973, 1991; and Boshier & Collins, 1985). Using psychometric survey instruments and a factor analytic approach, Boshier developed his "congruence model." Boshier attempted to move beyond descriptive surveys to explain adults' behavior and predict dropout by measuring self-concept incongruency variables. He hypothesized that participants could be described as either "growth" motivated or "deficiency" motivated (following Maslow). Growth-motivated people are more inner directed, deficiency-motivated more affected by social and environmental pressures. Growth-motivated individuals are likely to manifest intra-self (self/ideal) congruence and thus self/other congruence and satisfaction with the educational environment. In contrast, deficiency-oriented individuals experience intra-self incongruence, which leads to self/other incongruence and dissatisfaction with the educational context.

Boshier is one of the few researchers who has attempted to test others' models (building on Houle's typology of motivation, 1961) and has tested his own model widely and cross-culturally (Boshier & Collins, 1985). His work has been criticized, however, for psychological reductionism, and the generalizability of his model has not been adequately addressed (Garrison, 1987). There are problems with his conceptualization of a dichotomy between growth-motivated and deficiency-motivated people. He saw the latter orientation as related to lower socioeconomic status (which has the potential to increase the incongruence such people feel with educational institutions, typically biased toward the middle class). Rockhill (1982) has criticized this "leap in logic," and Benseman (1989) is concerned with the apparent "blame-the-victim" orientation of this perspective and the implicit sense of inevitability about deficiency-oriented individuals' non-involvement.

Expectations and Perceived Opportunity

At the heart of an adult's decision to participate in activities to acquire new skills and knowledge is the individual's perception of the benefits of participation. A mother who sees the fun of reading with her children and the potential value of such support to their educational growth and well-being perceives the rewards she expects to reap for herself and her children as well worth the effort of improving her own reading skills. One of the clearest examples today of the potential relationship between expected outcome and participation can be found in workplace training programs in which employees perceive the benefit of receiving promotions or salary increases (pay-for-knowledge) or the benefit of retaining their jobs in exchange for participation in training to upgrade their skills. The fact that some employees still choose not to participate illustrates the influence of multiple factors on adult participation choices and the need for comprehensive models and theories.

Expected outcomes may not always be clearly identified or tangible, easily measured skills or accomplishments. For some, the expectation may be as intangible as the hope that they will be able to "have a better life" or gain some self-respect or the respect of their children. For others, the tangible accomplishment of getting a GED or passing the driver's license test may represent a step toward the less defined "better life." Even though ill-defined, individual expectations can be powerful motivators to initiate participation and to persist. They may also be powerful motivators to resist participation—as when one expects to fail in the instructional setting, or when one expects to be giving up some part of one's self-identity, as in the case

of homeless street youth who equate getting a GED with leaving their street "family" (Conklin & Hurtig, 1986; Wikelund, 1990). Such variations in interpretation or perception are culturally driven, as well as individually distinctive. Some of the factors influencing expectations are described below.

Most research on participation recognizes, at least implicitly, the power of individuals' expectations. Some researchers have designed participation theories or models around this concept. *Expectancy theory*—which originated as a theory of work motivation and job satisfaction—views people as purposeful beings who interact proactively with their environments based on their expectancies about the likelihood that their efforts will result in outcomes that they value. (In other words, they choose to perform/ behave in ways that are likely to benefit them.)

In the last 10-15 years this theory has been adapted for use in adult education to help predict dropout (see, for example, Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987). Researchers have tested variations of *expectancy-valence theory* in a variety of educational settings with mixed results, largely due to problems with research methodology and, more important, the lack of a comprehensive model that considers the complex interactions among the multiple variables that affect individual participation behavior (Howard, 1989). Expectancy is the belief regarding the probability that certain actions will lead to certain outcomes. Valence pertains to the value—positive, neutral or negative—a person places on the expected outcome.

Rubenson incorporated the concepts of expectancy-valence theory into cognitive motivational theory, creating a composite model of participation which he called a "recruitment paradigm" (Rubenson, 1977). Rubenson's model is significant as an early attempt to portray participation behavior as shaped by the interaction of both personal and environmental variables in an adult's life. The personal variables considered in the model include: the individual's prior experience, "congenital properties" (personal attributes), and current needs (developmental tasks confronted during the life cycle). Environmental factors deemed to have an impact include: the degree of "hierarchical structure" of an individual's lifespace (environmental constraints on one's control over one's situation), norms and values of individuals and their reference groups, and available "study possibilities" (institutional facilitators or deterrents to continuing education). However, in and of themselves, these variables cannot explain participation behavior. Rubenson's model further represents the fact that the influence of these variables is mediated by the

individual's response to their meaning, resulting in the variables of active preparedness, perception and interpretation of the environment, and experience of individual need(s). In turn, these three variables then interact to determine both the perceived value of an educational activity (the valence) and the probability of being able to participate in and/or benefit from it (expectancy). Rubenson believed that the power of the expectancy and valence ultimately determines the force of the motivation to participate.

What is most relevant to our research is Rubenson's emphasis on the perceptual aspects of an individual's lifespace. As Scanlan (1986) points out, implicit in this model is the assumption that actual experiences, environmental structures and individual needs are less important determinants of behavior than how the individual perceives them. Rubenson's model thus makes an important contribution to our understanding of the factors that influence participation behavior by helping to explain why individuals in seemingly similar circumstances might choose to respond very differently to the apparent educational opportunities offered.

The concept of "perceived opportunity structures" is an important aspect of the adult literacy development research we are conducting. Going beyond internal and external control in various situations, it refers to individuals' expectations about which kinds of situations will arise and what their outcomes will be, emphasizing self-direction and self-regulation in forming these perceptions and motivating action based on them (Bandura, 1986). This complex of perceptions—encompassing one's expected opportunities, control of "fate" in making the most of them, and belief in the chances of success—may affect the investment people are willing to make in literacy, education, and careers. (See Reder et al., 1991, for further discussion of this concept and its role in literacy development.)

Bergsten (1980) used the expectancy-valence theory to better understand why people in Sweden with short previous formal education participate in adult education at lower rates than might be desired. He hypothesized that one could better understand why certain people participate in adult education and others do not by focusing on their contemporary experiences and satisfaction in their work and leisure roles. Bergsten created a model of the relationships between work and leisure and interest in adult education based on expectancy-valence theory. Central to the model is how the individual perceives his/her current (actual) work and leisure roles. After interviewing over 1,000 individuals with 9 years or less of formal schooling, one of Bergsten's findings was that a person's perceptions

related to work and leisure roles (one's basic values and attitudes) are of importance in the choice of leisure activities (including adult education). A person's work may have crucial importance for his/her attitude and willingness to participate in education. If a person's work requires or creates a passive, alienated attitude, that may shape his/her experiences, expectations, and behavior during non-working hours into a sense of powerlessness, resignation and social isolation.

Howard (1989) has proposed the need for a more comprehensive expectancy model that places expectancy motivation within the larger context of the process of development of skills and knowledge. His model includes past experience, motivation, effort, performance, reward, and need satisfaction. Of interest to an expanding definition of participation is Howard's explicit recognition of the important role of acquisition of "knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)" during previous experiences (direct personal experience, observed experience and communicated experience) and through repeated exposure to situations similar to the particular learning program currently undertaken.

Composite Models

Building on prior theories, Cross (1981) developed a composite model to shed light on individuals' reasons for participating or not in learning activities. The *Chain-of-Response Model*, as it is called, represents adult participation as a result of a complex chain of responses to environmental conditions as perceived by the individual. Cross believes that the series of responses that ultimately lead to participation tend to begin with one's self-concept and attitudes toward education. These internal variables, of course, may have been affected by previous educational experiences (explicitly indicated in Cross' model), as well as by other social, environmental and experiential factors (only implicitly indicated, subsumed under the category of life transitions). In the model, these internal variables interact with and influence the expectancy and the valence attributable to participation. An important aspect of Cross' model is the explicit recognition of the influence of the life transitions one passes through and the developmental tasks necessary during certain stages of life on an individual's values and goals. Depending on the combined motivational force of these variables, the individual then interacts with opportunities and barriers associated with the educational activity being considered. One's motivation affects one's perception of these variables as well, shifting the balance from opportunity to barrier or vice versa and leading to the final decision to participate or not.

Cross' model has been criticized for being too linear in nature. Benseman (1989) wonders how well it fits the realities of people's lives. This may reflect the difficulty of attempting to display simply the complex interactions of many variables. Benseman praises Cross' model, however, for the importance she places on self-esteem as the beginning of the educational decision-making process. The model is also noteworthy for being the first to incorporate the influence of life events and transitions (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Another variation on this type of model has been proposed by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). In his review of their *Psychosocial Interaction Model*, Scanlan (1986) notes that it synthesizes previous characterizations and expands upon them to facilitate the testing and development of more concrete elements of theory. Like Cross' model, this model also appears to represent a deceptively simple linear progression, in this case from the individual and family characteristics and preparatory education and socialization of pre-adulthood through the six variables to the end probability of participation. One of the main features that distinguishes this model from previous ones is the centrality of the influence of socioeconomic status on participation. It is placed first in the line of variables affecting the decision to participate. It most immediately affects the "learning press" of the individual's environment—a new concept representing the extent that one's environment requires or encourages further learning. Of course, the influence of socioeconomic status on ultimate participation is also mediated by the learning press and other variables in the model. The close relationship between socioeconomic status and learning press is based on common elements, such as general social participation, occupational complexity, and life-style.

The subsequent variables in the model shift from social and environmental influences to more personal, psychological factors: perceived value of adult education and readiness to participate. The thinking behind this order of progression is that perceptions about the value of education develop from particular learning presses and that such perceptions affect readiness or disposition to participate.

The next two variables are participation stimuli and barriers. Here life events enter into the equation. "Trigger events" (such as those described by Aslanian and Brickell, 1980, in their life transitions research—a change in job, family status, health, etc.) may stimulate interest in improving one's skills and knowledge. A generalized desire for change or improvement might also be a stimulus for participation. The placement of barriers as the last variable indicates the authors' view that barriers may overpower other strong variables.

and stimuli. As noted earlier, Darkenwald and Merriam expand on Cross' categories of barriers, listing four: situational, institutional, psychosocial, and informational. It is in these last two barriers that Darkenwald and Merriam again recognize the role of socioeconomic status. They note the consistent reports in the literature about a direct relationship between levels of awareness of educational opportunities and the socioeconomic status of the populations studied.

An Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

Responding to the paradox that participation is considered a core concept in the study and practice of adult education but has yet to be supported by a "sound theory-illuminated, empirical base," Cookson (1986) proposed an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for research on adult education participation. His model is built on D. H. Smith's "ISSTAL" model of social participation, which suggests the need to incorporate all relevant social-psychological and situational variables. The ISSTAL model takes its name from the elements it includes: interdisciplinary conceptual framework, sequential specificity of relations, time allocation-life span perspective.

According to this framework, adult education participation, as the dependent variable, is treated as a form of *individual discretionary behavior*. It is considered to be a consequence of the combined and interactive influence of six classes of independent antecedent variables: (1) external context factors; (2) social background and social role factors (including physical and physiological features; ascribed social positions and roles; voluntary or achieved social positions and roles; experience and activity history; and resources, possessions, and access to resources); (3) personality and intellectual capacity factors; (4) attitudinal dispositions; (5) retained information; and (6) situational factors.

Cookson postulated that the ISSTAL model applied to explain adult education participation might be significant to the field because it provides a conceptual scheme for integrating the disparate and discipline-bound theoretical explanations and research results. He noted that other than Darkenwald and Merriam's Psychosocial Interaction Model there has been no serious attempt to integrate different theoretical explanations of adult education participation. He felt that the ISSTAL model might also be instrumental because of the direction it can give for further research. It highlights the importance of examining participation in relation to other forms of individual discretionary behavior, differential patterns of adult education participation across the life cycle, and various psychological, sociological,

and macro-societal factors. In addition, it might have practical significance for practitioners by suggesting points of intervention to increase the probability of program participation.

Merriam and Caffarella (1991) report that Cookson has conducted two studies to test his model, including 58 measures of the various classes of independent variables listed above. The measures did not prove useful in predicting participation, causing Cookson to reflect on the complex and multi-dimensional nature of participation in adult education and the utility of focusing more modest studies on the overlapping portions of the ISSTAL model variable categories. Benseman (1989) comments that Cookson's model suffers from the same difficulties as other models that use sophisticated sequential, statistical analyses of a wide range of "ingredients" without understanding the meaning of participation in the individual's world.

Expanding Theory Development

From the foregoing presentation of research on adult literacy participation and the state of participation theory development to date, it is apparent that adult participation in literacy education is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, influenced by numerous interrelated forces in individuals' personal makeup, their families, their lives, and the environment and society in which they grow, learn, work, and live. To gain a more accurate understanding of adults' participation in literacy development activities and thereby contribute to enhancing their development further, it is clear that the field must examine other disciplinary perspectives and methods more carefully.

The theories discussed above have incorporated some of the elements necessary for that understanding: Rubenson's emphasis on the role of individual perception, Cross' inclusion of self-concept and the significance of life transitions, Darkenwald and Merriam's inclusion and expansion of those concepts, and Cookson's recognition of social roles as well as the complex interplay of many types of variables. However, none of these theories is sufficient. It may be that no single theory can represent what Merriam and Caffarella (1991, p. 247) have called the "vexing complexity" of adult education participation. They conclude that at least an appreciation of that complexity "may well serve to preclude a simplistic approach to increasing participation in adult learning activities."

We have found the literature on the life structure and self-concept development of adults very useful for expanding our thinking on

literacy participation. The various models reviewed above lead in this direction, as does our own research on adult literacy development. To improve access to and interest in programs and activities that encourage literacy development, we must understand the various roles literacy plays in individuals' lives, how it is perceived—the social meanings attached to its development and use (Reder & Green, 1983)—and how it is actually used. This necessitates examining individuals' definitions of self in the context of their lives and the ways the issues and tasks they take on during their lifetimes engage them (or do not engage them) with literacy.

Elsewhere we have discussed significant theories of the ways adults develop a sense of self in society during the course of their lives and the role of life transitions as critical junctures that may encourage changes in individuals' literacy development (see Reder et al., 1991). We have also pointed out some implications of these observations for research on participation in literacy development.

Implications for Future Research

Expanding the Concept of Participation

Participation in adult education continues to be viewed within the value-laden framework of schooling. Educators, researchers, participants, and potential participants tend to equate adult education with educational institutions. This perspective pervades the way participation is measured and interpreted. It also explains in large part the extremely low percentage of the "target population" that participates in formal programs. Simply providing more services without vastly expanding the nature and format of those services will not greatly increase the numbers of adults who choose that form of participation.

Future research efforts must expand the concept of participation beyond these narrow limits. As we have discussed elsewhere (Reder et al., 1991), expansion of our understanding of what constitutes literacy development (and activities that encourage it) must go hand in hand with broadening our definition of participation. We must begin to see adult literacy development as an ongoing aspect of adult life in this society. Individuals, in this society at least, acquire and hone their literacy skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis, sometimes overtly (as when they participate in specific instructional programs or structured training), at other times inadvertently (perhaps while casually observing someone else use or create written materials). Literacy development is a form of lifelong learning, not a set of skills one learns but never enhances except in a structured, intentional way.

Based on this definition of literacy development, participation may be seen as taking place throughout the course of life, with varying degrees of intensity. Because of the underlying purpose of the research on participation in the past, we have some understanding of what motivates and deters individuals from taking part in instructional programs. We know little, however, about the participation in learning by individuals who have never enrolled in a structured class to develop their skills. By recognizing that they are, indeed, participating, we can begin to identify and document the ways they are learning and the contexts and methods most suitable to encourage

their development. Ironically, if we can let go of the marketing, "enrollment economy" orientation so long attached to adult education and consider broader types of programs and learning opportunities, we may be able to accomplish the national policy goal of increasing the numbers of adults served.

Need for Grounded Theory Building and Critical Collaboration

Courtney (1984) notes that adult education research has not been central to the practice of adult education (even though it has been formulated in ways to serve it). Research has had little impact on practitioners. He attributes this to the dearth of professionals engaged in serious and sustained research, the lack of a "critical mass" of researchers engaged in the same set of core questions. Cookson (1986) also remarks on the "noncumulateness" of theoretical explanations for participation and their independence from empirical inquiry. Indeed, remarkable in this review of the development of theories of participation has been the limited interaction among the various developments. Researchers (with few exceptions) seem to have been working in relative isolation, developing their models and presenting them. There seems to have been little further application and critical examination.

There have been several recent endeavors to address this limited interaction. In 1988 the Transatlantic Dialogue (TAD) was held in Leeds, England (Zukas, 1988). This was a joint conference between the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA), the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC), and the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE). With renewed federal interest in adult literacy, many new research and demonstration initiatives are underway (such as workplace literacy and family literacy programs, and projects funded by the National Center on Adult Literacy and by the National Institute for Literacy). Despite some well-intentioned efforts to stimulate discussion, the field remains divided and dispersed. Collaboration among researchers exploring a set of core questions to expand and shape theory and practice is clearly needed.

Specific Research Directions

This review of participation research, coupled with our own research experience, has highlighted certain areas critical for future research in adult education participation.

Studies that place educational participation in the broader context of adults' life course. Cookson (1986) asks us to inject a fresh perspective into the ways we view adult interest in learning by conducting longitudinal studies focusing on indicators of movement through the life cycle (to understand the relationship with role indicators of movement other than age). He also notes the importance of understanding social background and social role factors other than occupational status and formal educational attainment, such as the role of certain structural imperatives of the job (supervision, routinization), involvement in alternative forms of social participation, and other personal experiences.

Fingeret (1983a, 1984, 1990, 1991), who has championed the integrity and contributions of adults with low basic skills, has called for research that increases our understanding of illiterates' characteristics and the roles of literacy development and practice in their lives. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) also focus on literacy development in the context of people's lives, suggesting that future research be collaboratively designed with adults who are learning on their own or in informal ways, as well as with participants in formal learning activities.

As adults grow and develop, their opportunities for literacy development and the meanings of those opportunities change. The role of life transitions as critical points in people's lives that may encourage literacy development needs to be explored.

Studies that identify and document the influence of individuals' own perceptions of literacy development and practice and their perceptions of learning opportunities, potential benefits, and likely outcomes. As noted, Rubenson in particular considered individual perceptions among the most powerful determinants of adults' participation behavior. Benseman (1989) also calls for studies of people's own perceptions of education and learning. Our own research (Conklin & Hurtig, 1986; Reder & Green, 1983; Reder, 1987; Wikeland, 1990) underscores the critical need to (1) recognize the wide range of perspectives that may exist regarding something so seemingly positive as literacy or education, and (2) understand the powerful influence of culture in shaping those perspectives. Individuals' perceived opportunity structures must be identified and understood before useful options for increased literacy development can be created. Our work on adult literacy with a variety of communities over the past decade has indicated the urgent need to develop alternative forms of educational training based on individuals' perceptions of the need to learn and of the resources available to them, including their natural helping networks (Reder & Green, 1985; Wikeland & Conklin, 1989).

Studies that use qualitative methodology. Rockhill (1982) pointed out the promise of qualitative research that makes it possible to look at educational participation as it is embedded in learning and begin to understand how learning is embedded in everyday life. "Participation in adult education is an act that is integral to the life-world of the individual; its meaning waits to be explored" (p. 16). During this past decade, qualitative methods have become more popular in investigating educational issues. Merriam (1989) notes that the use of qualitative research methodology has made significant contributions to the knowledge base of adult education, and she believes it has great potential to discover the meanings people perceive in their lives and experiences. Too often qualitative and quantitative methods are seen in opposition. Each has great value. They are best used to complement each other, with quantitative data identifying broad social patterns and qualitative data discovering the meanings people share which underlie those patterns.

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