The Rise of the Adult Education and Literacy System in the United States: 1600-2000

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In the last decade of the twentieth century nearly 40 million people enrolled in the programs of the U.S. Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS)[1] (Sticht, 1998). What is even more remarkable than the sheer number of enrollees is the fact that these adults were for the most part members of the

very population identified in numerous studies and reports as being unlikely to seek such education (Quigley, 1997, pp. 191-217; Beder, 1991, pp. 67-99).

Studies of participation in adult education generally note that when it comes to education, the "rich get richer," meaning that those people with the most education are the ones who seek out more education (Kim & Creighton, 2000). But of the more than 31 million enrollees in the AELS from 1992 through 1999, 7.9 million were the working poor, more than 3.3 million were welfare recipients, 9.3 million were unemployed, and 2.2 million were incarcerated (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). More than two-thirds of the 15 million enrollees during 1992-1996 had not completed twelve years of education or received a high school diploma, and more than 3.4 million were immigrants (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).[2]

With roots stretching back some four hundred years to the religious instruction, vocational apprenticeships, and common schools of the original thirteen colonies and to the first federal involvement in adult literacy education during the Revolutionary War, the AELS experienced a huge growth spurt just some thirty-six years ago with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. This act, which provided federal laws and funding for adult basic education (ABE), was followed by the Adult Education Act of 1966, which moved ABE from the poverty programs of the Economic Opportunity Act to the education programs of the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) (Rose, 1991, pp. 14-18).

Today the AELS is an adult education delivery system funded in part by federal monies appropriated by the U.S. Congress and in larger part by the states

and localities. In 1998, the DOE estimated that of some four thousand federal grant recipients, 59 percent were local education agencies (public schools), 15 percent were postsecondary institutions (mainly community colleges), 14 percent were community-based organizations, 4 percent were correctional institutions, and 8 percent were "others" (including libraries, literacy councils, private industry councils, and sheltered workshops) (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

This chapter provides a broad-brush history of the emergence of the present-day AELS in the United States over the last four hundred years.[3] Exhibit 2.1 provides some historical signposts for keeping track of the four-century span of the chapter. The first column presents important dates associated with the historical events listed in the second column, which are those events traditionally given as critical in general,

popularized histories of the United States (such as Davis, 1995). Finally, the third column presents some-but far from all-of the significant events, institutions, and people in the history of the rise of the AELS.

In the discussion that follows, the progression from Colonial to contemporary times follows a path from general to specific, reflecting the emerging nature of the AELS. That is, the earlier history of adult education is characterized by a broad array of educational activities engaged in by adults with a wide range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Over the decades, it becomes possible to discern people, organizations, and events having a more direct influence on the eventual formulation and passage of the Adult Basic Education Section of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the subsequent passing of the Adult Education Act of 1966, which provided

the federal organizing framework for the present AELS.

During my research for this review, four themes emerged that reveal critical social forces involved in the formation of the AELS: the role of the U.S. military, the movement for self-improvement and charitable activities, immigration, and the movement for a liberal education that makes "good citizens" versus human resources development for economic productivity.

1. The U.S. military. From the Revolutionary War to contemporary times, the U.S. military has played a foundational role in the development of the AELS, providing literacy instruction to hundreds of thousands of young adults and securing information on the language and literacy abilities of adults that has stimulated political action on behalf of adult literacy education.
2. A shift from self-improvement to charitable education. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, adult education went from being regarded primarily as a middle-class activity for self-improvement in the wake of a flood of new scientific and technical knowledge to being regarded as a charitable activity for the benefit of

the undereducated and mostly lower economic classes.

3. Immigration. A continuous, albeit uneven, stream of immigrants has brought millions of adults into the nation. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing to the end of the twentieth century, immigration has created a persistent need for a system of adult education that can provide instruction in the English language and knowledge of American culture.
4. Liberal education versus human resources development. Related to the second and third themes, particularly during the second half of the twentieth century, has been the conflict between those individuals and organizations favoring a national adult education system focused on broad, liberal education for all adults and those favoring a "human resources development" point of view, seeking education for the least well-educated adults to enable them to contribute to the economic productivity of the nation.

In addition to these four themes, two topics, concerning the definitions of adulthood and literacy, are especially salient across time in the area of adult literacy education. The history of adult education is complicated by changing ideas about who is considered an adult. In Colonial times, according to Long (1975), girls and boys aged fourteen

years were likely to be considered adults. Using U.S. Census Bureau definitions of adulthood and literacy, Soltow and Stevens (1981, p. 5) reported that in 1840, 1850, and 1860 census enumerators were interested in the literacy skills of "adults" twenty years or older, while in 1870 "adults" were ten years or older. Cook (1977) reported that from 1900 through 1940, persons aged ten years or older were used to calculate illiteracy statistics for the U.S. Census. From 1950 through 1970, "illiteracy" or "functional illiteracy" was estimated for those aged fourteen years or older and was based on the highest number of school grades completed.

The definition of adulthood in government regulations regarding adult literacy education has changed only a little over the last half-century. Under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, ABE was to be provided for those eighteen years or older. In 1970,

amendments to the Adult Education Act dropped the definition of an adult to age sixteen or older (Rose, 1991, p. 19). This age of sixteen or older has persisted to the present as the definition of adults qualified for programs funded under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Currently, the number of adults qualifying for adult education is based on U.S. Census data giving the number of adults sixteen years or older, out of school, who have not completed twelve years of education.

In most studies of the history of literacy in the early United States, the term literacy has been more or less understood as the ability to read or write. Studies of the prevalence of literacy among adults during Colonial and Revolutionary times have used indicators such as signatures on wills, marriage licenses, military records, or other legal documents to infer the prevalence of literacy (Long, 1975; Lockridge, 1974; Gubb, 1990).

During the 1800s, U.S. Census enumerators asked respondents about the number of adults unable to read or write, and in 1870 they asked, "Can you read and can you write?" (Soltow & Stevens, 1981). From 1900 to 1930, the Census asked people whether they could read or write in their native language (reading was always considered the less difficult of the two literacy skills, and those taught to read were often not taught to write) (Long, 1975). After 1930 questions about literacy were dropped and people were instead asked to give the highest grade in school they had completed (Cook, 1977). At different times during this thirty-year period adults with less than three, four, five, or eight years of education were considered "functionally illiterate," a higher standard of literacy than that indicated by signatures or the simple ability to read or write (Cook, 1977).

In addition to changing definitions of literacy, it should be noted that there has been a shift across time in how people who are not literate are addressed. In the earlier years of the growing nation and up through the mid-1980s, it was common to talk about "illiterates" or "functional illiterates," and organizations gave themselves names like National Illiteracy Crusade and Commission on Illiteracy (Nelms, 1997). But in the last decade of the twentieth century, the community of literacy workers has been more likely to talk about literacy and degrees of literacy than about illiteracy and to address the development of literacy rather than the "stamping out of illiteracy" (Sticht, 1984). In this chapter I retain the common usage for the time period under discussion.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD AND EARLY NATIONAL PERIODS: 1600-1799

Adult education during the Colonial and

early National periods included apprenticeships for young adults aged fourteen and older as well as a number of opportunities for learning reading, writing, mathematics, and a variety of trades and crafts in commercial schools (Long, 1975; Cremin, 1970; Knowles, 1962).

The foundations for our present-day public school system were laid early in the Colonial period. A Massachusetts law of 1647 provided "(1) That every town having fifty householders should at once appoint a teacher of reading and writing, and provide for his wages in such manner as the town might determine; and (2) That every town having one hundred householders must provide a grammar school to fit youths for the university, under a penalty of 5 pounds for failure to do so" (Knowles, 1977, p. 6). This basic arrangement for a common school set the stage for the subsequent emergence of the tax-

supported school system that provides for the largest number of programs in the contemporary AELS.

Present-day public libraries had their origins in the private collections of well-to-do colonists. Some of these collections were donated to towns for general use by their citizens and some parish libraries were available to the public. However, the largest impact on library use came from the organization of "subscription libraries" established by a voluntary association of individuals who contributed to a general fund for the purchase of books made available to association members. The first such library was established in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, who later established the Junto, a club whose members studied and discussed intellectual concerns such as morals, politics, and natural philosophy (science and technology) as a form of self-improvement (Knowles, 1977, pp. 7-11; Kett, 1994). These early

library and discussion groups provided a foundation for the later emergence of public libraries as well as institutions such as the Lyceums of the nineteenth century. Early on, these institutions played active roles in the liberal education of adults for the purpose of self-improvement. Later, they also began to provide basic literacy instruction for many of the least literate adults in what became referred to as "second chance" or "remedial" education rather than "self-improvement."

Though the education of children in reading and writing was first expected of parents and later of common schools, the teaching of reading and writing to adults was generally left to enterprising tutors and various commercial, proprietary schools that taught vocational as well as basic literacy skills. Tutors advertised in Colonial newspapers, often noting that they taught children during the day and adults in the evening. Between 1733 and

1774, more than four hundred such advertisements were published in the South Carolina Gazette, and many similar notices appeared in newspapers in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia (Gordon & Gordon, 1990, p. 252). Between 1765 and 1767, one William Elphinistan advertised for students in the New York Mercury, offering to teach "persons of both sexes, from 12 years of age and upwards, who never wrote before, to write a good legible hand, in 7 weeks one hour per day, at home or abroad" (p. 246).

While there is scant evidence regarding the extent to which adults learned to read and write during this time, Galenson (1979) used occupational records for samples of native-born colonialists and found that minors were less literate than older workers, which suggested to him that adults engaged in some literacy learning. By comparing the signatures of girls and widows on legal documents,

Main (1991) estimated that in the period 1673 to 1694, 13 percent of girls signed documents of guardianship, while 32 percent of women signed documents of deeds (p. 585, Table 4). In another study estimating literacy learning in adulthood, Main presents data comparing the signing of guardianship papers by children with the signing of deeds by adults born in the same time period. About 45 percent of girls born between 1700 and 1745 signed letters of guardianship, while 60 percent of women born during those years signed deeds (p. 582). These studies led Main to suggest that some females learned to write as adults during and directly following the Colonial period and National periods.

If the ability to write one's name (rather than just making a mark on a document) is evidence of literacy, then, excluding American Indians and African Americans, there was near universal

literacy, in excess of 80-90 percent, for both men and women by the end of the eighteenth century (Perlmann & Shirley, 1991). Of course, all such studies of literacy during these early years of the nation depend on samples of adults who do not represent the entire adult population of the colonies and so are contentious on the basis of sampling bias. For instance, Herndon (1996) presents data from documents of "transients" (nonpropertied persons) showing that, just as in contemporary times, literacy rates for New England's poor, including whites, American Indians, and African Americans, were considerably lower than the rates estimated on the basis of property document signatures. Kaestle (1991a) provides a critique of literacy estimates that rely on the signing of documents such as military records and deeds.

One of the more significant events in adult literacy education during the later

eighteenth century was the first commitment of government resources for teaching literacy skills to troops of the Continental Army. In 1777, General George Washington asked the Continental Congress to provide funds for a small traveling press that could be used to write about the war (Houle, Burr, Hamilton, & Yale, 1947). While this request was tabled and eventually forgotten (p. 13), General Washington's desire to communicate with his troops in writing led him to direct chaplains to teach the soldiers at Valley Forge basic literacy skills (Weinert, 1979).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Navy employed schoolmasters and teachers to teach reading and writing to seamen (Langley, 1967). Navy regulations published in 1802 included among the chaplain's duties the following requirement: "He shall perform the duty of a school-master; and to that end he shall instruct the

midshipmen and volunteers, in writing, arithmetic, and navigation, and in whatsoever may contribute to render them proficients" (Burr, 1939, p. 111). As these and later examples illustrate, from the very beginnings of the United States of America, the military has played a key role in the emergence and development of the AELS. The military continued to contribute to the AELS by educating former slaves who served in the Union Army during the Civil War.

THE ANTEBELLUM, CIVIL WAR, AND RECONSTRUCTION PERIODS: 1800-1899

Kaestle (1991a) observed that "One of the ëcauses' of higher literacy rates, in a sense, is higher literacy rates. For example, as more people become literate, the amount of fiction circulating commercially will increase and newspapers will become cheaper; in a society where more reading material is available, there is more motivation for

people to learn to read and to use their skills. If schools turn out more highly literate people, this will, in turn, affect the job structure, which can affect the future demands placed on schools. Thus one of the effects of literacy at the societal level is that it fosters more literacy" (pp. 28-29).

The rapid assent of literacy in the United States might well be traced to the influence of the writings of those who advocated for freedom from British rule and the creation of a new democratic republic. For instance, Thomas Paine's tract Common Sense went through repeated printings totaling more than 100,000; by 1810 more than 360 newspapers were circulating in the new nation (Knowles, 1977, pp. 13-14). In the twenty years after 1830, five times as many books were published than in the preceding sixty (Kaestle, 1991b, p. 54). Truly, the nineteenth century became the prime example of how more literacy

begets still more literacy.

The explosion of knowledge being released in volume upon volume of fiction, scientific, and technological writings begged for dissemination to a wider audience than those who could afford to possess books, and numerous adult education activities were taking place. To make books more readily available, following on Benjamin Franklin's idea of a "subscription" membership library, fee-based libraries such as the Mechanics' Apprentices Library of Boston were created, followed by the eventual rise of tax-supported public libraries in the New England states and the eventual formation of the American Library Association in 1876 (Knowles, 1977, pp. 15, 19-20).

As noted earlier, popular demand for knowledge spawned the Lyceum movement, a national network of local study groups that numbered more than

three thousand by 1835. The aim of group members was self-improvement through learning and mutual teaching. One of the movement's most significant effects was to mobilize public opinion in favor of tax-supported public schools. Another was to serve as a model for adult study and learning. This later encouraged the formation of the Chautauqua Institution in western New York, which grew to sponsor education programs across the nation and led in 1878 to the "first integrated core program of adult education organized in this country on a national scale" (Knowles, 1977, p. 37).

Perhaps the most important occurrence in the nineteenth century for the future of the Adult Education and Literacy System was the rise of the national system of state-supported schools. Overcoming resistance from private schools, conservative taxpayers, church schools, and other vested interests, those in favor

of publicly supported schools saw them established in most northern states by 1850. Following the Civil War, by 1880, each of the thirty-eight states then in the Union had free public schools, including both elementary and high schools, and a chief educational officer.

With the growth of the public school system came parallel growth in evening schools for youth and adults in both elementary and high schools. For the most part, these evening schools served young people who could not attend school during the day, and their curriculum was the same as that followed in the daytime. Still, these evening schools laid the foundation for today's adult education programs in the public schools (Knowles, 1977, p. 30).

A large number of voluntary associations formed during the nineteenth century contributed to the rise of the AELS. Among many others were the Young

Men's Christian Association (founded in 1851), the Young Women's Christian Association (1855), the National Teachers Association (1857), the American Library Association (1876), and the General Federation of Women's Clubs (1890). All promoted educational activities for youth and adults, including literacy education for adults (Knowles, 1977, chapters 2, 3; Gere, 1997).

In 1870, the National Teacher's Association amalgamated with the American Normal School Association and National Association of School Superintendents to become the National Education Association (NEA) (Wesley, 1957), which was to play a major role in the emergence of the AELS in the first half of the twentieth century.

Education of African Americans

In the Antebellum period, the education of African American slaves was generally forbidden by various state

laws. For instance, acts passed by the General Assembly of North Carolina in 1830 made it a crime punishable by thirty-nine lashes to teach "slaves to read and write, the use of figures excepted" (Jacobs, 1861/1987, p. 270). Nonetheless, many adult slaves were taught to read and write by abolitionist whites or other slaves. Some learned from their masters or by overhearing tutors working with their masters' children or by other surreptitious means (Woodson, 1919/1968).

During the Civil War, the Union Army provided many educational opportunities for former slaves (Cornish, 1952). Blassingame (1965) provides numerous examples of educational activities engaged in by officers of the Union Army, including the work of one General Banks: "General Banks sought to eradicate the widespread illiteracy among the 18,585 Negro troops serving in the Department of the Gulf by

appointing several members of the American Missionary Association as lieutenants in some of the colored regiments. Banks appointed these men for the sole purpose of teaching the Negro soldiers. Later, Banks realized that he could not procure enough teachers for the Negro soldiers. As a result, on November 30, 1864, Banks modified his system by ordering the chaplain in each regiment to teach the colored soldiers" (pp. 156-157).

After the Civil War, the U.S. Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands as the primary agency for reconstruction. This agency was placed under the jurisdiction of the War Department and was popularly known as the Freedmen's Bureau (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, pp. 164-166). The Freedmen's Bureau provided education for freed slaves, engaging teachers who were primarily from voluntary organizations, such as the

American Missionary Association. Collectively, these organizations became known as Freedmen's Aid Societies. Between 1862 and 1872, fifty-one antislavery societies, involving some 2,500 teachers and more than 2,000 schools, were conducting education for freedmen (pp. 164-165). Citing fiscal burdens, the U.S. Congress disbanded the Freedmen's Bureau in 1872.

Immigrant Education in Settlement Houses

In the middle of the nineteenth century, J. W. Hudson published his History of Adult Education (Hudson, 1851/1969). According to Houle (1992), Hudson was apparently the first to use the term adult education, which he regarded as the organized and institutional provision of learning opportunities, principally for "the lower classes of the community" (p. v). Excluding the many service organizations providing education for former slaves, most of the adult

education activities that arose during the nineteenth century were not intended to help the "lower classes" but as means of self-improvement for the somewhat educated "middle classes," as mentioned earlier. These organizations included the many women's literary clubs that surfaced as an integral part of the growth of the women's movements for suffrage, temperance, and general equality as citizens of the growing democracy.

An exception to these middle-class self-improvement efforts was the importation of the idea of settlements or neighborhood centers from London, where Toynbee Hall center was founded in 1884. In 1886, Stanton Coit founded the Neighborhood Guild (later called University Settlement) in New York City, and in 1889 the most famous of the settlement houses, Hull-House, was founded in Chicago by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr (Knowles, 1977, p. 65; Addams, 1910, 1930). Hull-House was

founded to help immigrants adjust to American life. At the end of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were coming to America, most of them poor and undereducated, and some four hundred settlement houses had sprung up, inspired by the work of Jane Addams and Hull-House. The settlement houses provided basic education, including reading, writing, and English-language training. Many provided health care that the hundreds of thousands of immigrants, most of them crowded into urban tenement slums, could not find elsewhere (Davis, 1995, pp. 229-230). The work of these settlement and neighborhood centers was instrumental in stimulating the federal government's Americanization movement in the first half of the twentieth century, and they were the forerunners of the community-based groups that make up 14 percent of the AELS today (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

THE RISE OF THE ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY SYSTEM: 1900-2000

With the Civil War in the fading distance and a general prosperity throughout the nation, the turn of the twentieth century saw a plethora of institutions and organizations engaged in one way or another in adult education. Knowles (1977) catalogs the following institutions that emerged in the late 1800s and early 1900s to advance what he called "the adult education movement in the United States": business and industry, colleges and universities, cooperative extension services, foundations, government agencies (including the military), voluntary health and welfare agencies, independent and residential centers, labor unions, libraries, mass communications media (newspapers, books, magazines), museums and art institutes, proprietary schools, public schools, religious institutions, and

voluntary associations.

Within this rich assemblage of adult education institutions, all of which have contributed to the rise of the AELS to a greater or lesser degree, some institutions and individuals stand out. Among the institutions are the U.S. military, the National Education Association, and the Carnegie and Ford Foundations. While the military's contribution to the emergence of the AELS primarily concerned the invention of the technology of mass standardized testing (Sticht & Armstrong, 1994), the National Education Association and the Carnegie and Ford Foundations helped to establish the profession of adult education by forming associations for educating and training professionals in the field of adult education, conducting research in and disseminating information about adult education, and providing guidance and advocacy for shaping adult education policies at the

federal and state level (Knowles, 1962, 1977; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

Among the many individuals who helped the AELS emerge, one, Cora Wilson Stewart, played a major role in focusing attention on the problems facing illiterate and semiliterate adults (Nelms, 1997). She created programs of instruction for adult literacy education, mobilized tens of thousands of volunteers as teachers and tutors for adult literacy programs, and advocated strongly for public support of educational opportunities for adult literacy learners. More is said about Stewart and her work later.

Throughout the twentieth century and up to the present, a tension has existed between those advocating for the professionalization of adult education as a broad, liberal, general educational enterprise for adults of all social classes and educational levels and those advocating for adult literacy education

for the least educated and most needy citizens or those foreign-born who have immigrated to the United States in search of a better life (Rose, 1991; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). The large institutional educational providers, mainly the tax-supported public school systems in the states, have typically favored adult education in the broadest sense, while those community-based organizations that rely heavily on charitable contributions and volunteers to accomplish their work typically favor service to the least educated and most needy adults.

To a considerable extent, the history of the rise of the AELS in the latter half of the twentieth century is the history of the struggle between and the mutual accommodation of these two philosophies of adult education that made possible the passage of the Adult Education Act of 1966. This struggle is traced in a summary fashion in

subsequent sections. First, however, there is an overview of the military activities in World War I and World War II that influenced the thinking of adult educators in each philosophical camp.

The Role of the U.S. Military in the Rise of the AELS

As noted earlier, during the eighteenth century, the Continental Army set the precedent for federal provision of adult literacy education when chaplains tutored the troops fighting the Revolutionary War. In the nineteenth century, during the Civil War, the Union Army provided African Americans and other soldiers with literacy education, and, following the war, during Reconstruction, the War Department took initial responsibility for the Freedmen's Bureau and the education of former slaves.

But it was in the twentieth century that the military had its greatest influence on

adult education. In 1917, during World War I, the U.S. Army sponsored the development of the first group-administered, standardized tests of "intelligence" for literates, illiterates or low literates, and non-English-speaking recruits (Yerkes, 1921). This had the immediate effect at the time of providing "objective" evidence that large numbers of native-born young adults were not literate and that large numbers of immigrants were neither literate nor functional in the English language. This information fueled the cause of advocates of adult education, who could claim that large numbers of adults were in need of literacy education and that large numbers of immigrants needed education to help them become "Americanized."

On one hand, the World War I experience with "intelligence" testing convinced some people that large numbers of adults, both native- and

foreign-born, were mentally incapable of benefiting from adult education (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. 187). On the other, in what has been a second major influence of the military on adult education, it has repeatedly demonstrated that thousands of adults considered "uneducable" could indeed acquire at least basic literacy skills within fairly brief periods of instruction lasting from six to twelve weeks. In World War I, literacy education for both native- and foreign-born young adults was accomplished in so-called Development Battalions. Nearly twenty-five thousand illiterate and non-English-speaking troops had received such training by February 1919 (p. 182).

The military's testing efforts developed the technology, and the propensity to use the technology, of standardized testing to determine for large groups of people exactly who would get what sort of educational or occupational opportunity.

This had a major effect during World War II, when, in 1942, the tests of General Educational Development (GED) were developed to give military service members a chance to use their experience in the military to qualify for a high school education equivalency certificate (Baldwin, 1995; Rose, 1990). For tens of thousands of members of the armed services who had cut short their high school education to serve the nation during World War II, obtaining the equivalent of a high school education made it possible for them to get jobs and to use the GI Bill to pursue further vocational training or a college education. Many of the GIs who did go on to college became the first in their families to earn a university degree (Olson, 1974). Today the GED is widely used in both the United States and Canada to certify high school equivalency. In the United States, the AELS devotes an increasing portion of its resources to helping adults acquire a

credential that has its technical origins in the "intelligence" tests of World War I and served the vocational and educational needs of the troops during and after World War II.

As indicated later, the results of the military's standardized tests of "mental ability" initially developed in 1917 would play another pivotal role in shaping the AELS almost half a century later, in the early 1960s, as part of a new "war," this time fought not on foreign soil but at home, the domestic program called the War on Poverty.

The Adult Education Professionalization Movement

The drafting and eventual passage of the Adult Education Act of 1966 was largely the result of two major, interactive strands in the movement for adult literacy. One worked toward the goal of professionalizing and expanding adult education, the other toward that of

helping the least well-educated native- and foreign-born adults to acquire basic literacy and language skills.

The professionalization movement started in the early 1920s and aimed at forging a professional field of adult education from the disparate activities of educators in the many institutions identified by Knowles (1977). The work of these various institutions captured the attention of the Carnegie Corporation of New York in the early 1920s. The Carnegie Corporation was founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote the diffusion of knowledge among the population. One of his major contributions toward this end was to donate millions of dollars to help develop and support public libraries (Learned, 1924). Based on this interest in diffusing knowledge, it was natural for the Carnegie Corporation to become interested in the broader array of institutions that could help people

acquire the knowledge they needed to more effectively manage their lives (Rose, 1989).

In 1924 the Carnegie Corporation Board of Trustees directed the new president of the corporation, Frederick P. Keppel, to initiate a program of activities that would move the many efforts in adult education forward. Keppel had been an assistant secretary of war in World War I, and he knew about the wartime programs of education for soldiers and other activities in adult education (Keppel, 1926/1968). He was devoted to the role of broad, liberal education for adults, and, working from the recommendations of an advisory council of adult educators and the results of several studies and regional conferences, in 1926 he committed Carnegie Corporation funding to the administrative support of a new adult education organization, the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) (Rose, 1989; Stubblefield &

Keane, 1994, pp. 187, 192-193; Knowles, 1977, pp. 190-192).

A major function of the AAAE was to screen applications from adult educators who were applying for funds from the Carnegie Corporation. The association also conducted research, experimental projects, and other such activities that would advance adult education. It published the Journal of Adult Education to disseminate information about adult education and to promote the use of the term adult education, hoping to bring coherence to the field by giving it a name (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. 193).

From 1926 to 1941 the Carnegie Corporation provided administrative support for the AAAE; additional funding came largely from membership dues. Membership was limited to individuals and organizations having "a direct and usually professional interest in

adult education" (Knowles, 1977, p. 197). In 1941 the Carnegie Corporation ended its support of the AAAE, and from 1941 to 1951 the AAAE relied mainly on membership dues. These dues were inadequate to support the AAAE, and, in 1951, based on the recommendation of a Joint Commission for the Study of Adult Education consisting of members from five organizations that practiced adult education, the AAAE approached the Department of Adult Education of the National Education Association (NEA) to discuss the formation of a new association.

The NEA, which originated in the mid-1800s, had become the major organization representing teachers and administrators working in the nation's expanding tax-supported public school system. It was a primary force for the professionalization of teaching and a strong advocate for public education. Early on in its history, the NEA

recognized the problems of illiteracy for both foreign- and native-born Americans and, through its Department of Adult Education, played a major role in the subsequent movement to advance adult education as a mainstream component of education in the United States. In 1951, when approached by the AAAE to discuss their mutual interests in adult education, the Department of Adult Education, now called the Division of Adult Education Service, was separated from the NEA and its membership merged with that of the AAAE to form the Adult Education Association of the United States of America (AEA/USA) as the major association for promoting the professionalization of adult education.

The Americanization Movement

In the latter part of the nineteenth century there was a growing concern among civic groups and state and federal policymakers about
the large influx of illiterate immigrants

into the country. In 1910, the U.S. Census indicated that 7.7 percent of adults-more than 5 million people-were illiterate and that almost 30 percent of these individuals were foreign-born. In 1917, after the results of the military's standardized tests had confirmed that large numbers of both native- and foreign-born Americans were not literate in any language, the government passed a law that prohibited immigrants from entering the country if they were sixteen years old or older and could not read in any language (Cook, 1977, pp. 11, 13).

For the millions of illiterate foreign-born who were already in the country, the idea arose to "Americanize" them in immigrant education programs. Between 1915 and 1919, the Federal Bureau of Education gave extensive professional aid to groups interested in providing Americanization education (Cook, 1977, p. 19). Many of these programs were provided by public schools in evening

classes, and many of the teachers and administrators of these schools were members of the National Education Association. In 1920, the NEA formed a Department of Immigrant Education to provide professional members working in the Americanization movement with assistance. As the movement for adult education began to spread, the NEA in 1924 changed the name of the Department of Immigrant Education to the Department of Adult Education and broadened its mandate beyond concern for immigrant education to include adult education in general (Knowles, 1977, pp. 173-174).

At first, membership in the NEA's Department of Adult Education was limited to public school educators and served to advance their work. In 1927, it redefined its membership to include "all those educators who instruct adults from beginning English classes to evening high school and general evening classes

in special subjects, all under public auspices" (Knowles, 1977, p. 210). With this new, expanded definition, the NEA Department of Adult Education became more competitive with the AAAE for the membership of adult educators working "under public auspices," whether in public schools, libraries, museums, or other settings.

By 1945, the NEA Department of Adult Education had become the Division of Adult Education Service, a staff advisory office of the NEA. Then, as indicated earlier, to put an end to the competitiveness between it and the AAAE and to more effectively represent the totality of adult education, in 1951 the NEA Division of Adult Education Service was dissolved and its membership merged with that of the AAAE.

Cora Wilson Stewart and the Illiteracy Movement

In the first third of the twentieth century, Cora Wilson Stewart stands out as an exemplar of what one person can do to advance a cause. Stewart's cause was the eradication of adult illiteracy, and she began to work for it in her home state of Kentucky. In 1911, while she was superintendent of public schools in Rowan County, she started a program to eliminate adult illiteracy. This program, according to Cook (1977), "might well be classified as the official beginning of literacy education in the United States" (p. 13).

The schools operated only on moonlit nights so people could find their way to and from school safely, hence the name Moonlight Schools. The schools were staffed by volunteer teachers from the day schools for children. Stewart was convinced that adults should not use the same materials as children to learn to read, so she developed for adult students the Rowan County Messenger, a

newspaper with short sentences and lots of word repetition. In teaching writing, she concentrated first on teaching adults to write their own names, believing that this was a vital way to develop what we would today call self-esteem.

The success of the Moonlight Schools, coupled with Stewart's apparently superior public speaking and presentation skills, helped to spread the success of the Rowan County experiment to numerous counties in Kentucky, and, in 1914, the governor of the state established an illiteracy commission, the first such commission in the United States (Cook, 1977, p. 14).

Nelms (1997) reports that Stewart's strong advocacy for adult literacy education took her in 1918 to the annual convention of the NEA, where her speech so impressed Mary C. L. Bradford, then president of the NEA, that Bradford quickly established an

NEA Committee on Illiteracy and issued a proclamation calling for the Americanization of immigrants and the teaching of literacy to native-born illiterates. Stewart was invited to chair the committee, which she did until 1925.

From 1916 to 1926, Stewart carried out numerous activities on behalf of the education of illiterates. Not only did she chair the NEA Committee on Illiteracy for seven years, she also led a crusade in Kentucky to eliminate illiteracy, developed The Soldier's First Book to teach military recruits to read during World War I, conducted dozens of illiteracy conferences throughout the United States, chaired from 1919 to 1925 the Illiteracy Division she had convinced the General Federation of Women's Clubs to form, chaired the Illiteracy Section of the World Conference of Education Associations five times, spoke about adult illiteracy issues before the Democratic National Convention in

1920, and initiated the National Illiteracy Crusade in 1926 (Nelms, 1997).

Throughout these years when the adult education movement was forming and Americanization was the primary goal emphasized by the federal and many state governments, Stewart continued to focus on native-born illiterates. She denounced the NEA's naming of a Department of Immigration because she feared it would overshadow work with native-born illiterates. Later, she denounced the replacement of the Department of Immigration with the Department of Adult Education because she thought that the emerging field of adult education was too broad and "middle class" and did not focus on the educational needs of the least literate and most economically needy. These concerns led her in 1925 to resign as chair of the NEA Committee on Illiteracy, and in 1926 she struck out on her own to advocate for programs for

adult illiterates by forming the National Illiteracy Crusade, with the goal of wiping out illiteracy by 1930.

But the economic collapse following the stock market collapse of 1929 and the start of the Great Depression got in the way of these efforts. Though Stewart was instrumental in getting President Herbert Hoover to appoint the National Advisory Committee on Illiteracy in 1929, by 1933, funding ran out, and the committee concluded its work. After that, Stewart's work centered mostly on the National Illiteracy Crusade. By the time of World War II, national interest in the cause had faded, and Stewart turned her energies away from adult illiteracy issues to the activities of the Oxford Group, a religious organization advocating a particular form of spiritual life within the Christian faith. She died in 1958 at the age of eighty-three.

The Human Resources Conservation

Movement

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, New Deal programs were implemented with the goal of employing teachers while providing an education for adults who had fallen on hard times. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was initiated and developed educational programs for unemployed illiterate and undereducated young men. In 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was initiated to provide work for unemployed teachers, and in 1938 WPA officials were able to announce that more than 1 million illiterate persons had been taught to read and write. Like Stewart's early materials for the Moonlight Schools, the WPA teachers developed functional materials with adult-oriented content on topics such as health, safety, work, and family life (Cook, 1977, p. 41). In 1941, the urgent demand for workers fueled by the advent of World War II led the government to terminate the WPA.

During World War II, as in World War I, it was discovered that hundreds of thousands of American adults were undereducated and functionally illiterate-that is, having literacy skills at a level lower than those of a fifth-grade student (Cook, 1977, p. 51). General Dwight David Eisenhower, commander of the Allied Forces during the war, was concerned that poorly educated, functionally illiterate adults were a threat to national security, a drain on America's industrial productivity, and a general waste of human talent. After he retired from the army and assumed the presidency of Columbia University, he established there the Conservation of Human Resources project. Like the CCC, the goal of which was to develop and preserve the nation's natural resources, the Conservation of Human Resources project was intended to develop and preserve the nation's human resources.

Picking up on these concerns about wasting the country's "human resources," Ambrose Caliver of the U.S. Office of Education organized in 1957 the National Commission on Adult Literacy to look for a solution to the adult illiteracy problem in some sort of government program (Rose, 1991, p. 15). Because of its strong focus on employment and illiteracy, however, the commission's work was not wholeheartedly supported by the adult education community as represented by the AEA/USA, with its interest in broad, liberal education for adults.

When the AEA/USA was formed in 1951, the Ford Foundation made an offer of funding support. The Ford Foundation had recently established a program called the Fund for Adult Education with the goal of supporting programmatic and administrative activities that provided liberal adult education (Fund for Adult

Education, 1961). To further these goals, Ford's Fund for Adult Education gave grants to create positions for state directors of adult education and to improve the ability of community public schools to provide liberal adult education. This promoted a view of adult education as civic-minded, liberal education with broad purposes as opposed to the economic productivity-oriented focus of the human resources agenda.

These contrasting points of view about the goals of adult education became more important when the AEA/USA adult education community, consisting of public school teachers and administrators, found itself without the strong support it had enjoyed as part of the NEA. In 1952, the National Association of Public School Adult Educators (NAPSAE) was formed as an affiliate of the AEA/USA. In 1953, NAPSAE also affiliated with the NEA,

and in 1955 it dropped its affiliation with the AEA/USA and became a department of the NEA, with the full strength of the NEA's strong lobbying experience behind it (Knowles, 1977, p. 231).

While the National Commission on Adult Literacy was lobbying for a federal adult literacy program in the late 1950s, the NAPSAE/NEA was lobbying for an Adult Education Act that would help professionalize the adult education field. As stated by Rose (1991), "As envisioned by this group, adult education would become an equal of the other branches of education, with adequate state and local funding" (p. 15).

By the beginning of the 1960s, the adult education community had become fragmented into several factions: those seeking recognition for adult education as a broad, liberal educational component of the national education system; those who, like Cora Wilson

Stewart earlier, sought education for the least educated, least literate adults; and those seeking the conservation of human resources to enhance America's security and increase the industrial productivity of the nation by giving education and job training to adults living in poverty.

As it turns out, none of these groups was having much success getting adult education or adult literacy education implemented in federal legislation. An Adult Literacy Act drafted in 1962 was deemed too narrow, and so it was renamed the Adult Education Act even before it was introduced for legislative hearings. But the U.S. Office of Education considered the term adult education too broad. The name finally decided on was the Adult Basic Education Act of 1962, but it went nowhere (Rose, 1991, p. 17).

At the time, President John F. Kennedy, struck by issues of poverty, particularly

poverty among African Americans, had placed the adult education issue within the human resources development framework and problems of labor force training. He had been successful in getting the Manpower Training and Development Act and the Area Redevelopment Act for community economic development passed in 1962. But further legislation to combat poverty was stalled. In 1963, Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Baines Johnson became president. He would soon find a way to break the logjam and advance his "War on Poverty," which would carry adult education along with it. Once again, leverage for social action in adult education would come from the nation's military.

According to biographer Godfrey Hodgson (2000), in July 1963, Daniel Patrick Moynihan-then an assistant secretary of labor-read an article in the Washington Post stating that about half

the young men called for examination for military service by the Selective Service System (the "draft") had failed the tests of physical or mental abilities or both. Hodgson reported, "Moynihan had observed how the sacred plea of national security could be used to persuade politicians to support causes they might not otherwise care two pins about" (pp. 81-82). After reading the article, Moynihan got hold of Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz and convinced him to have the president establish a task force on manpower conservation for which he, Moynihan, would serve as staff leader. Wirtz agreed, and on September 30, 1963, just two months before Kennedy was assassinated, he established the Task Force on Manpower Conservation, which Johnson continued when he became president.

The task force set out to understand why so many young men were failing the military's standardized entrance

screening exam, the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), and to recommend what might be done to alleviate this problem. Just three months later, on January 1, 1964, Wirtz delivered the task force report to President Johnson. The report was stunning in revealing that half of the young men called for service by the draft were unqualified for military service and a third did not meet the standards of health and education (President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation, 1964). It went on to recommend methods for using the AFQT to identify young adults with remediable problems and to provide them with services by increasing the funding for several ongoing federal government programs (like the Manpower Training and Development Program) and by enacting legislation that would provide additional education and training (pp. 29-33).

In May 1964, President Johnson gave the

speech that launched his "Great Society" programs, in which he argued, "The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time" (Davis, 1995, p. 367). With his appeal to "abundance and liberty," Johnson captured the interest of those in Congress concerned with employment, productivity, and poverty ("abundance") as well as those concerned with national security ("liberty"). In August 1964, Public Law 88-452, the Economic Opportunity Act, was passed by the Congress and signed by President Johnson. It contained within it Title IIB: the Adult Basic Education Program (Rose, 1991, p. 14).

Two years later, in 1966, when the Economic Opportunity Act legislation came up for legislative review, the NAPSAE/NEA and the AEA/USA lobbied to move the Adult Basic

Education Program from the poverty programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity to the educational programs of the U.S. Office of Education, where it had, in fact, been administered all along. The two organizations also lobbied for a change in title, from the Adult Basic Education Program to the Adult Education Act, seeking to broaden its applicability beyond basic education (Rose, 1991, p. 16). Congress agreed to these changes, and, in November 1966, President Johnson signed an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that included Title III: the Adult Education Act of 1966. The acorn from which the AELS would grow had finally been planted.

Growth in Funding and Enrollments: 1965-1999

Figure 2.1 shows the funding and enrollment trends for the newly formed AELS from 1965 to 1999. In 1965, the federal adult education program received

federal funds of some $18.6 million for some thirty-eight thousand enrollments. By 1999, federal funds had increased to more than $365 million and enrollments to more than 3.6 million (Sticht, 1998, p. 4). While the funding rate grew sporadically, enrollments appear to have grown at a fairly constant rate up to 1997.

Over the years, the federal funding share of adult education has declined and the share of matching funds by states and local education agencies has increased. In 1966, federal funding for adult education was around $20 million for some 377,660 enrollees ($53 per enrollee), while state and local funding was around $10 million ($26 per enrollee). By 1998, federal funds for adult education had risen to more than $345 million for some 4 million enrollees ($89 per enrollee), while around $958 million ($240 per enrollee) was available for adult education from

state and local matching funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2000; Sticht, 1998, p. 4).

Four amendments to the Adult Education Act of 1966 contributed to the growth of the AELS over the last third of the twentieth century.

- In 1970, amendments to the Adult Education Act of 1966 lowered the age of those who could participate from eighteen to sixteen years.
- Also in 1970, amendments expanded educational services to
  go beyond ABE for those students with fewer than nine years
  of education, those who spoke English as a second language, or those who wanted citizenship classes. New provisions included students needing adult secondary education involving the completion of high school or passing the GED.
- In 1978, amendments expanded services beyond the school-based definitions of basic skills-such as "ninth grade" or "high school"-to include a functional, competency-based definition for adults who might have high school diplomas but whose basic skills were considered too low to permit them to function well in society.
- In 1988, amendments expanded services to permit partnerships with business, labor unions, and educators to provide workplace literacy programs

for employees with limited basic skills (U.S. Department of Education, 1991; Rose, 1991).

Another factor contributing to the growth of the AELS during this period was a large influx of immigrants that created heavy demand for English-language education, especially from 1981 to 1990, when some 7.3 million immigrants came to the United States (Sticht, 1998, p. 10).

In addition to the amendments that expanded the number of adults entitled to services under the Adult Education Act of 1966, several amendments expanded the number of education service providers eligible for funding through the act. As described by Rose (1991, pp. 15-31), the major changes included the following:

- Amendments in 1968 permitted state grants to private non-profit agencies in addition to the public schools and public nonprofit agencies already eligible to receive state grants.
- Amendments in 1978 required state plans to describe how
  the delivery of educational services could be expanded beyond schools, particularly by public

or private nonprofit organizations, and to reach out to those least educated and most in need.

- Amendments in 1984 allowed grants to for-profit agencies.
- Amendments in 1988 permitted special grants to workplace literacy programs, English literacy programs, and programs for commercial drivers, migrant farm workers, and immigrants.
- The National Literacy Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-73) replaced the Adult Education Act of 1966 and further encouraged the expansion of the number of nonprofit education providers eligible for federal funds by including a requirement that every provider in a state have "direct and equitable access" to federal basic grant funds (Moore & Stavrianos, 1995, p. 5).

The changes in the Adult Education Act influencing the eligibility of adult populations and of service providers from 1966 to the end of the century reflect the relative influence of three major groups:

- The professional associations of adult educators who advocated for the broad, liberal education of adults for self-improvement, which eventually became the contemporary call for "lifelong learning." This group followed the lead of the American Association of Adult Education (1926 to 1951) as it transformed first into the American Association of Adult Education in the United

States of America (1951-1982) and then into the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (1985-present).

- The associations for public school teachers and administrators who were in favor of diverse educational programs for adults that would ultimately have equal footing with the K-12 system as part of a public adult education system. This group of mostly public school-based educators formed several professional associations of the National Education Association, Department of Adult Education (1924-1951), then the affiliate of the AEA/USA known as the National Association of Public School Adult Educators (1952), which eventually became a part of the NEA and then became a separate organization known as the National Association for Public and Continuing Adult Education (NAPCAE) (continuing education was added to include the many community college educators that were engaging in noncredit adult education through divisions of continuing education). Other influential organizations include the Council of State Directors of Adult Education and the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC) (1990-present), established to provide state adult education staff a presence in Washington, D.C.
- Many community-based adult educators who followed in the footsteps of Cora Wilson Stewart and advocated for basic literacy education for adults. Among the groups exerting particularly strong influence over the last third of the century have been Laubach Literacy (1955-present;

Laubach Literacy, 1999) and Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (1962-present; Colvin, 1992). The Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) (1971-present), which started as a part of the AAACE and is now a separate organization, has also been a strong advocate for adult basic literacy education (Campbell, 2000). In 1981, the National Coalition for Literacy was formed by eleven associations concerned with adult literacy education (Newman & Beverstock, 1990, pp. 168-181). By the end of the century it included more than thirty organizations and was firmly established as the primary advocacy organization for adult literacy education in the United States.

Though it was the second of these groups-the public school teachers and administrators, with some support from the first group of adult educators-that was most influential in naming the Adult Education Act of 1966, it was the third group, the largely community-based groups serving the least educated and relying largely on volunteer tutors, that prevailed over time to get the Adult Education Act recast and renamed the National Literacy Act of 1991. Community-based groups were assisted

in this effort by the Business Council for Effective Literacy (BCEL), a nonprofit agency established to help promote the interests of public and private organizations, including businesses and industries, in providing literacy education for adults (McGraw, 1984). The BCEL was instrumental in stimulating an influential report by the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis (Chisman, 1989) that informed the drafting of the National Literacy Act of 1991.

With the passing and signing of the National Literacy Act (NLA) of 1991, the U.S. Department of Education, Division of Adult Education, was renamed the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL). But just seven years later, in 1998, the NLA of 1991 was gone.

Ironically, the same report that had helped stimulate the drafting of the NLA,

with its emphasis on literacy as a broad educational goal, had also emphasized the importance of adult literacy education for workforce development to ensure America's competitive position in the world economy (Chisman, 1989). Armed with this and other influential reports of the 1990s (O'Neil, 1997), advocates of adult education for human resources development, like those who had been so influential in making the Adult Basic Education Program part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, rose to prominence.

This time, however, the argument for adult education as human resources development was not focused on the need to eliminate poverty but to prop up America's economic competitiveness in the new global economy. In this context, the NLA was incorporated into the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 as Title II: The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) (Tracy-Mumford,

2000, pp. 3-9). Though obviously colored with an orientation toward preparing students for the workforce, by virtue of its inclusion in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the AEFLA permits the full array of adult education and literacy services that existed prior to the enactment of the WIA.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the WIA/AEFLA is the source of the federal rules and regulations that guide the work of more than four thousand state, local, and community-based organizations that annually receive federal funds for adult education. Among other things, the WIA/AEFLA determines who may attend programs, who may deliver programs, how institutions should develop strategic plans, and how programs should be monitored for the purposes of accountability and quality improvement. The cooperation and coherence that this federal guidance provides for the many

disparate programs across the nation has made for a third unique system of education that exists alongside the K-12 and higher education systems, all supported by public funds for the general health and prosperity of the nation.

Yearly, millions of adults who seek education to improve their lives as parents, citizens, workers, and individuals find an opportunity for learning and development in this third branch of public education, the Adult Education and Literacy System of the United States.

Notes

1. Thousands of programs in the United States and its territories provide adult basic education and literacy instruction. In this chapter, the Adult Education and Literacy System is defined as the subset of those programs that must operate in accordance with the provisions of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act) and that are funded wholly or in part by the federal government and administered by the Division of

Adult Education and Literacy in the U.S. Department of Education.

2. Note that a given adult may have had multiple enrollments and may have appeared in more than one of these categories.

3. Given constraints on the length of this chapter and the time provided to prepare it, considerable use has been made of a limited number of mostly secondary sources. In-depth analyses of many important events, institutions, and individuals and their work have been sacrificed to present a concise overview of some four hundred years of the history of adult education and many of the factors that eventually contributed to the rise of the AELS. No history is ever complete, and that is certainly true of the present work. The aim has been to provide those interested in the AELS with a breadth of information and references that they may consult for greater depth of coverage of various topics, personalities, and issues.

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Chapter 3