

Alan B. Knox



Over the years, much of my attention has been on future directions for the field of adult and continuing education. As with most of us, I backed into it. I taught my first adult education course in 1946. It was an arts and crafts course provided by the YWCA in Albany, New York. Between then and 1953, I taught many part time courses for people of all ages by school, museum and university providers. During most of that period, my field was art and adult education was just a place to teach about it.

I have been a fortunate beneficiary of societal and educational trends during my career. I and others born during the low birthrate period of the late 20's and early 30's started our careers during the post world war II period characterized by economic and educational expansion. As the first graduate of the newly established adult education doctoral program at Syracuse University, I joined the relatively few annual graduates of the 16 adult education graduate programs in North America. Concurrent graduate study and work in adult education reinforced a career long conviction about praxis between theory and practice.. Throughout the past fifty years, there has been an intertwining of roles as administrator, professor, researcher, association member, and editor that contributed to the specific opportunities that an expanding field made possible.

During the 1950's as an administrator and recent doctoral graduate at Syracuse, I was serving as chair of the research committees of three of the main associations in the field, each with few committee members interested in research. This led to my founding and chairing what was later named the **Adult Education Research Conference**, which attracted a critical mass of people prepared to discuss and collaborate on research. During the 1970's, while serving as University of Illinois associate vice chancellor of academic affairs and director of continuing education and public service, we formed the Illinois Council on Continuing Higher Education which brought together directors from public and private higher education institutions to address planning and policy issues.

[In the writing of] more than a dozen books and more than a hundred articles and chapters, there has been an evolving trend in my scholarly interests from quantitative to qualitative methods and from personal to societal issues. My early publications address motives and characteristics associated with individual adult participation and persistence in educational activities. This interest merged with a focus on learning style and achievement, including a major experimental study with Sjogren. My reading, editing and teaching about adults as learners at

Nebraska, Teachers College and University of Illinois contributed to Adult Development and Learning, which explored both personal and societal influences. Exploration of participation and learning prepared me to delve more deeply into the teaching learning transaction, such as Helping Adults Learn. My administrative experience, combined with collaboration on major qualitative studies, such as the 1975 book, Last Gamble on Education (with Mezirow and Darkenwald) further broadened my attention to program development and to institutional and societal influences at the provider agency level, such as Leadership Strategies for Meeting New Challenges (1982). Increased association with international students and scholars during the 1980's and 90's contributed to international comparative topics and methods, such as Strengthening Adult and Continuing Education (1993). From this field wide perspective, since then more of my focus has been on future directions.