

tools of the trade

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Adults as Learners

Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning. K. Patricia Cross. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981. 300 pp. \$15.95.

If you're an Extension professional concerned about your own future and the future of the Cooperative Extension Service, you should get your hands on a copy of Cross' book *Adults as Learners*. The book starts with a penetrating statement:

Lifelong learning is not a privilege or a right; it is simply a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with the escalating pace of change—in the family, on the job, in the community, and in the world-wide society.

That's the reason Cross wrote this book, to pull together the research and theory of the field of lifelong learning of which Cooperative Extension is a vital part.

This book isn't easy reading nor are suggestions for Cooperative Extension spelled out in detail. In fact, Extension isn't even mentioned. But the pages are filled with important information that we should be using in planning our future.

Here are a few gems. Adult entry into learning programs is in part explained by expectancy theory. First, there's expected success. If I don't think I can succeed in a program, I won't begin it. Second, there's expected payoff. If I don't expect to benefit from the program, I won't participate. These operate with a multiplier effect—if either expectancy is zero, the person won't participate in our program.

This expectancy has a lot to say about how we plan, present, and publicize programs. We've got to convince clients

(raise their expectancy level) they can succeed in our program *and* benefit from their participation.

In a dandy section on the growth of the learning society, Cross points out we're becoming a nation of adults and better educated adults. Research indicates that the more education people have, the more education they want. But what about people with little education? It's harder to recruit them into our programs and perhaps we'd better become more realistic in our projections of success with these individuals. Incidentally, educational attainment was the best predictor of participation in adult education . . . better than sex, race, or income.

The excellent chapters on recruitment can help us strengthen our programs. And, the two chapters on theory can focus our attention on our own practices. There's nothing as practical as good theory and Cross does an excellent job on theory building.

Someone should build a workshop around the material in this book and offer it at Summer and Winter Extension Schools. There's an awful lot here we should be listening to *and* acting on.