Can Cooperative Extension and Community Colleges Work Together?

J. Daniel Hill

Where once Cooperative Extension was the sole adult education agency in a community, there are now often several agencies. And how should they work together? Hill discusses an approach for coordinating Cooperative Extension programs with community college adult education programs. He talks about the forces that work for and against coordination and describes a theoretical model that can be used to effect coordination. The result of coordinated programs is a broader educational program for the adult in the community.

An estimated 30 million adults (1 in 5) are engaged in educational activities. These activities may be as fundamental as basic literacy or as academic as advanced physics. Presentations range from adults meeting in a home to discuss a great book or solve a neighborhood problem to those attending a graduate lecture. Programs are conducted by public schools, community colleges, Cooperative Extension, universities, and other organizations adults have daily contact with—industry, governmental agencies, unions, churches.

A challenge confronting adult education is that of coordinating the efforts of these institutions. This article discusses: (1) forces working for and against coordination, (2) a theoretical model, and (3) the application of this model using Cooperative Extension and community college efforts in the adult education field.

Forces Working For and Against Coordination

Knowles lists the following forces favoring coordination: (1) the overlapping of the "markets" of the various adult educational activities that results in pressure from the "consumers" for better integrated services, (2) the marginality of the adult educational role that induces adult educators to seek mutual sup-

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port, (3) advances in the field that cause adult educators to seek beyond their knowledge for personal growth, and (4) adult educators who look to each other as natural allies in the struggle for recognition and financial support.

Forces that weaken coordination efforts, Knowles continues, are: (1) lack of agreement on the goals of adult education; (2) feelings of rivalry caused by competition for target audiences because of overlapping programs; (3) perceptions of different status groupings within the field that generate feelings of inferiority, fear of domination, and other emotions that obstruct cooperation; (4) adult educators from various groups who enter their educational roles from different backgrounds, with differences in vocabularies, philosophy, and methods of approach that interfere with communication; and (5) the difficulty of constructing a coordinating organizational structure because there’s no clear pattern of the field to be coordinated.⁹

The factors weakening adult education are the basis for formulating a theoretical model of cooperation. This article develops a model for coordinating adult education between Cooperative Extension and community colleges which will overcome the negative forces of program coordination.

A Theoretical Model

First, let's visualize two organizations, Cooperative Extension and community colleges, as being represented by information sets. Figure 1 is the Euler diagram of overlapping sets, suggested by G. A. Miller.⁹

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Figure 1. A theoretical model for organizational coordination.

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Information or organization only in Cooperative Extension.

Information or organization common to Cooperative Extension and community colleges.

Information or organization only in community colleges.
CE represents Cooperative Extension and CC represents community colleges. As information between the two is combined, various interactions occur. For example, CEO and CCO represent the organization of interactions between Cooperative Extension and community colleges. The CEI andCCI represent the naturally incompatible or irrelevant interactions. And, the CE-CC function represents the amount of common or compatible group interactions generated by the two organizations in contact.

Thus, the task or behavioral output of two interacting organizations with widely sociocultural groups would be expected to be confined to a relatively narrow common function (assuming the absence of total conflict). However, groups with similar organizations might be expected to mesh, so that the output takes advantage of both the wider variety and the constraints afforded by the two together.4

Applying the Model

Cooperative Extension and community colleges, even though they have some incompatible interactions, do have common areas of interest in adult education. As these interests are fed through each organization, more compatible interactions emerge that develop the CE-CC function.

We'll use the term "uniqueness" of each institution to mean those compatible interactions that will contribute to developing the CE-CC function.

Areas of Uniqueness

Areas of uniqueness that appear most common to Cooperative Extension are:

1. Development of a very broad and distinctive form of informal teaching.
2. Use of advisory committees representing a variety of interests from local lay and professional people who determine program content and emphasis.
3. Practice of working with and through other organizations and lay leadership.
4. Financial support by all levels of government—federal, state, and local.
5. Close relationship between Cooperative Extension and research at the Land-Grant College that has provided a two-way channel through which knowledge flows to the people and, in the opposite direction, problems and needs of people are transmitted to the researcher as the basis for further study.
6. Competence in subject-matter areas of agriculture, home economics, youth, and community development.

Areas of uniqueness that appear most common to community colleges are:

1. Professional personnel versed in formal education in academic, vocational, and cultural courses.
2. Communication channels with agencies, governmental and industrial, relating to their educational programs in business and vocational skills.

3. Advisory committees, made up of clientele from industry, fields of education, and special interests.

4. Facilities and personnel offering more subject-matter depth, therefore adding course sequence in subjects and serving as a basis for local research.

5. A daytime student body—future adults—that could benefit from adult experiences and contributions in solving community problems.

As these areas of uniqueness of both institutions are fed through the theoretical model, the CE-CC function becomes larger and more identifiable. Some of these functions might be: developing a common understanding of each institution’s concept of adult education, joint planning, and cosponsoring adult education activities.

In addition, each institution relates beneficial contributions within its other responsibilities; therefore, both contribute and benefit by coordination.

Cooperative Extension and community colleges could broaden their approach to adult education. Cooperative Extension could profit by professional personnel versed in formal education in academic, vocational, cultural courses, and by communication channels among more clientele. Using these local resources could add subject-matter depth and a daytime student body.

On the other hand, the community colleges would benefit by informal teaching, research, a broader audience, and subject-matter competence in agriculture, home economics, youth, and community development.

Steps for Coordination

The prime benefactor is the individual in the community. Coordination can offer him a broader curriculum and thus help him be a more active participant in community growth and development.

Since the individual is the focal point of adult education, the first step in our model is to develop a mutual understanding of a concept under which Cooperative Extension and community college personnel can operate. The second step is identifying areas of uniqueness and the third step is cosponsoring adult education activities.

Step 1—Mutual Understanding of a Concept. Understanding a concept of adult education is basic for further coordination. Both institutions might exchange views using the following guidelines.

The goal for adult education is to provide a lifelong learning process so that the individual can improve personal effectiveness as a worker, as a member of a family, as a citizen taking part in the affairs of his community, and as an individual fulfilling private aspirations and potentialities.
McClusky explains one concept of the adult and his relationship to the community. He says a community is a common holding of attitudes, values, and experiences of togetherness. The community is a gate to the adult as a learner. Practically all adults are associated with one or more communication systems. These might include formal or informal social networks which influence the adult. The community, therefore, becomes the teacher of the adult.

McClusky also believes that such organizations as libraries, schools, churches, colleges, and voluntary groups contain curriculum resources of the educative community. Joint informal staff meetings between personnel of Cooperative Extension and community colleges would be an activity designed to arrive at some mutual understanding of an adult education concept. Other techniques could be used to further develop areas of uniqueness.

Step 2—Identifying Areas of Uniqueness. It's necessary to identify areas of uniqueness by each institution that would benefit the adult in the community. The following points should be reviewed:

1. How can we develop educational programs that are relevant to the community? The answer might be: By combining the leadership and clientele contacts, the audience reached would be more representative of the rural and urban interests of the community.

2. What kind of curriculum can we offer? The difference of informal and formal educational experience, another possible area of uniqueness, could be valuable. For example, community colleges could use staff resources in academic courses in business, theory of leadership, etc. Cooperative Extension could use informal methods in the community as a follow-up to academic training through demonstrations, case studies, and group discussions. Integrating teaching resources could bring a sequence of courses such as Food I & II, Leadership Development I & II, Business I & II, and so forth. Sequence gives subject-matter depth in adult education.

The combination of resources could give the adult a wide range of subject matter from academic and cultural to agricultural, home economics, and community development.

3. What research is needed? Knowles states that there are voids in adult education which need research, especially in community development.
Step 3—Cosponsoring Adult Education Activities. As both institutions develop the CE-CC function within program development, they could be instrumental in coordinating adult education among other organizations in the community. Possible activities might include an adult counseling clinic and a directory of adult agencies in the community.

The purpose of a clinic is to help adults plan for lifelong education. Adult education agencies could send representatives to a one-day program for adults interested in finding out what these agencies have to offer.

In addition to Cooperative Extension and community colleges, the following organizations could be represented: board of cooperative educational services, state employment service, university system, state vocational rehabilitation, social security, community action, senior citizens, labor unions, welfare, health, American Red Cross.

The participants would be given a short orientation session, then visit the counselors from agencies of their interests. A directory of adult education agencies in the community is a logical project and a needed resource. This directory would provide a description of the adult education organization, its purpose and programs. In addition to organizations listed for the counseling clinic, there could be areawide church organizations and hospitals described in the directory.

Both an adult counseling clinic and a directory are activities that could be cosponsored by Cooperative Extension and community colleges. Success in these kinds of activities could build a stronger working relationship among all adult organizations in a community.

Summary

Cooperative Extension and community colleges have compatible areas in adult education. Coordination can be developed as suggested in Figure 2.

Coordination starts with a small nucleus, then can develop to a larger and more identifiable area. As Cooperative Extension and community colleges develop the CE-CC function, more agencies in adult education will add to this area. For example, education by libraries has an essential role as do secondary schools and governmental agencies.

Cooperative Extension and community colleges can start with coordination in community development and home economics, then build on the other areas of uniqueness.

The initiative for evolving the coordination model should be taken by Cooperative Extension because it has a sophisticated state and nationwide organizational structure, long experience in working with local people, and the personnel with expertise in organizational coordination.

Forces that weaken coordination of adult education can be used to strengthen its future. The model outlined provides for:
1. Improving working relations with adult education organizations in the community.
2. Developing a planning process that utilizes the involvement of clientele.
3. Increasing awareness of adult education, which could take it from the realm of a marginal to a primary activity in our society.

As we prepare for the future in adult education, let’s develop a process that will consider the:

1. Increased size of the student body.
2. High educational level of the student.
3. Differentiation of the curriculum and methodology.

4. Increasing demands from our changing society.¹⁰

The challenge of coordination in adult education is before us. Cooperative Extension and community colleges have the necessary resources to light the future path of adult education through coordination with other organizations in the community. They must focus their efforts on adult education now by demonstrating what can be done on the community level.

Footnotes