Leadership of Educational Opportunities for Adults:
American Perspective

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter on leadership of educational opportunities for adults in the United States includes chapter purpose about an American vision for conducting excellent learning programs. This purpose and format differ from the other book chapters. The middle section contains 15 brief examples about leadership tasks. The conclusion of each section poses a question about strengthening educational leadership. The concluding section provides a rationale for the reader's comparative analysis of similar leadership tasks, by considering similarities and differences between the American examples and similar educational opportunities for adults in the reader's setting. The chapter ends with a bibliographic essay on additional readings for readers interested in more detailed information and comparative analysis about a selected leadership task. These concepts help to explain the examples and guidelines and suggest future directions for related research and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter purpose is to provide 15 brief examples on leadership tasks for conducting-excellent educational opportunities for adults in the United States. Because American adult education is very diverse and decentralized, this overview was deemed preferable to analysis of one or two examples. In addition, this overview allows each reader of the chapter to analyze the similarities and differences be-

tween one or more of the 15 examples and related leadership tasks, compared with similar local adult education programs familiar to the reader. Each of the 15 task sections suggests reader use of this international comparative process by stating a guideline familiar to the reader for the selected leadership task that could be used to enhance leadership of a local program. The concluding section of the chapter is a bibliographic essay on additional readings for which major references are listed with full bibliographic citations.

American adult and continuing education programs are varied, diverse, and decentralized, with many types of learners, providers, and sources of financial support. This article contains many examples and generalizations about effective part-time and short-term programs for adults. The generalizations are based on research, evaluation, observations, and scholarly publications. This article explains guidelines based on the examples.

In practice, most such programs do not measure up to these standards. Many less effective programs occur because the people who coordinate educational programs, and guide individual sessions, tend to be unfamiliar with guidelines for planning and conducting effective sessions. They typically figure out what works for them because they have not discovered explanations and publications on available standards of effective practice.

In the United States, effective educational opportunities for adults reflect shared leadership contributions by multiple stakeholders. In essence, educational leadership reflects leaders who understand both what is and what might be as a basis for progress. Educational opportunities for adults are enhanced when planners know about and use effective guidelines.

Most readers of this article typically have some experience leading educational sessions for adults. Such experience usually provides the foundation of familiarity with basic ways of planning, conducting, and evaluating sessions, as well as questions about potential improvements. The intent of this article is to help readers reflect on and use insights from other people who are effective when helping adults learn and who share such explicit concepts.

There are some basic definitions of major concepts discussed in this chapter. Included are: educational opportunities for adults (referred to as adult education, continuing education, extension, human resource development, outreach), leaders (major contributions by provider agency administrators, and participants), educational session (any one or a series of educational activities), guide (one or more people who guide learning activities as presenters, faculty, trainers, mentors, supervisors, or specialists), coordinators (people who select and assist session leaders on behalf of the provider organization), provider (the association, enterprise, or community organization that provides educational opportunities), resource persons (experts regarding content, technology, or evaluation who help guides and participants),

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