

Adult Education Professional Societies

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Historically, the field of operations of adult education in the United States has taken place through the interaction of five dimensions: Institutional, content, geographical, personnel, and activity. Among the numerous types of voluntary institutions are professional societies or associations. These have been established for the purpose of promoting, guiding and protecting the foundation of the various professions. The adult educational role is typically two-fold: (1) Providing learning opportunities to their members through publications, conferences, short courses, educational travel and other means; and, (2) providing educational impetus and resources to other associations and to the general public regarding their fields of interest, through speakers, mass media, and publication (Knowles, 1964). One of these professions is adult education.

Additionally, in a general sense professional associations also play a variety of roles. These include addressing: The underlying feeling of commitment or calling, a desire to share in policy formation and implementation, a sense of duty, a hope for fellowship and community, cooperation with educational institutions, and a passion for learning. Adult Education professional associations have learned more toward informal leadership for the field and away from regulatory functions, and inspire some adult educators to become more deeply involved in the field (Birnbaum, 1960; Merriam and Brockett, 1997).

Prior to 1924, the term “adult education” (Houle, 1992, p. 15) was not used in the United States of America. In 1921, The National Education Association became interested in adult education and established the Department of Immigrant Education (Merriam and Brockett, 1997). In 1924, after broadening its scope, its name was changed to the Department of Adult Education (NEA/DAE). By 1927, they had included members from public school adult education, and any person engaged in teaching, supervising, or administering programs of adult education, under private or public auspices (Knowles, 1960).

In 1923, Frederick P. Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation, envisioned an agency that could unify the field of adult education through concerning itself with the problem of adult education as a whole. By 1925 and early 1926, a series of regional conferences were called by the Carnegie Corporation to consider organizing a new national organization for adult education. During each of these conferences, prevailing, although not unanimous, sentiment was expressed for forming a national organization. Consequently, on March 26, 1926, the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) was established at a national conference organizational meeting in Chicago (Knowles, 1960). The next ten years saw the Carnegie Corporation making grants totaling just under \$ 3 million through AAAE to organizations that engaged in adult education (Kett, 1990; Knowles, 1994).

By 1949, the purposes, programs, and memberships of both the NEA/DAE and AAAE overlapped extensively to the point that strong sentiment developed for merging them into a single unified national organization. Discussions of a joint

committee composed of leaders from the two organizations resulted in a decision to dissolve both organizations and the Adult Education Association of the United States of America (AEA/USA) was founded at an assembly of more than two-hundred leaders of adult education at Columbus, Ohio, May 14, 1951, with AEA/USA replacing AAAE as the national umbrella organization of adult education. However, some of the tensions that prevented an earlier amalgamation of the two associations remained. Consequently, in 1952, the National Association for Public School Adult Education (NAPSAE) was approved by the AEA/USA to focus on the educational needs of adult educators serving in public schools, and it became a department of NEA in 1955. Essentially this was the same group previously served by the NEA Department of Adult Education (Jensen, 1960; Knowles, 1977; Luke, 1960; Merriam and Brockett, 1997; Stubblefield, 1991).

During the next thirty years NAPSAE developed into a separate organization and by 1972 had changed their name to the National Association for Public Continuing Adult Education (NAPCAE). However, as time moved on the AEA/USA and NAPCAE worked on various projects and eventually began to hold joint conferences. As these events transpired, both AEA/USA and NAPCAE recognized that they shared many members and goals but had only limited resources. As a result, at the 1981 National Conference in Anaheim, CA, both organizations set in motion the process of a merger. Thus, AEA/USA and NAPCAE were dissolved to form the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) during the 1982 National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. AAACE continues to serve as the primary umbrella association for adult education while its goals and structure provides a place to serve a wide range of interests and audiences in adult education (Merriam and Brockett, 1997). Nevertheless, at times there have been those members who have not always been happy with the actions taken by AAACE (Cunningham, 2001).

In 1955, the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE) of the Adult Education Association of the United States of America (AEA/USA) was formed with financial assistance provided by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The CPAE met annually since then in conjunction with the AEA/USA Conference, and has continued to affiliate and meet with the AAACE Conference. The purpose of These gatherings is to enable the full-time professors of adult education to examine their own work carefully, decide on common themes, and project desirable courses of action. As a result, each of the numerous institutions which offer some kind of professional study in adult education, has its own conception and pattern of instruction. Moreover, this process also has helped the scope and nature of graduate study in this field become more clear-cut (Houle, 1960). This continues to be so now, forty-six years later, as it was then.

Much of the intellectual leadership of the field has been funneled through the National Associations – AAAE, NEA/DAE, AEA/USA, NAPSAE, NAPCAE, AAACE and CPAE. They have promulgated their points of view through doing research, writing, publishing, speaking, presenting at conferences, and facilitating the learning of adult education graduate students (Griffith, 1991).

Historically, the dissemination and using of the knowledge in the field of adult education through all the predecessor professional associations, and AAACE,

as well as other avenues, takes place through multiple means: Books, periodicals, monograph series, conference proceedings, dissertations, educational resources information center (ERIC), fugitive literature, nonprint materials, teaching activities, professional networking, and conference presentations. These, in turn, stimulate: Sharing new information and ideas, fostering professional socialization and reaffirmation, promoting critical thinking, developing new knowledge, analyzing content materials, developing studies, and utilizing studies (Brockett, 1991).

Some of the most important work that AAACE may perform in providing strategies for enhancing future dissemination and use of adult education knowledge are: Helping expand the literature base, reinforcing the mainstream literature base, recognizing historical literature, promoting dissemination and use of knowledge in professional development, and creating new approaches for dissemination and use.

The current structure of AAACE is depicted on the following website: <http://www.aaace.org> The major categories are: Home/General; Membership; Conferences and Meetings; Publications and Bookstore; Contacts; Public Policy; Links; Futures Committee; and E-mail & Feedback.

The Vision Statement of AAACE is: The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) is dedicated to the belief that lifelong learning contributes to human fulfillment and positive social change. We envision a more humane world made possible by the diverse practice of our members in helping adults acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed to lead productive and satisfying lives.

The Mission Statement of AAACE is: To provide leadership for the field of adult and continuing education by expanding opportunities for adult growth and development; unifying adult educators; fostering the development and dissemination of theory, research, information, and best practices; promoting identity and standards for the profession; and advocating relevant public policy and social change initiatives.

AAACE has the following eight Commissions that represent general areas of interest within the field of adult education:

1. Commission of Affiliate Organizations (CAO);
2. Commission on Community and Non-Formal Education (CNFE);
3. Commission on Continuing Professional and Higher Education Outreach (CPHEO);
4. Commission on Military Education and Training (CMET);
5. Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE);
www.aaace.org/cpae/
6. Commission on Program Management (CPM);
7. Commission on Workforce Development (CWD); and
8. Commission on International Adult Education (CIAE).

AAACE also has twenty-six units that represent specific areas of interest to adult educators:

1. **Adult High School;**
2. **Adult Psychology;**
3. **Aging Education;**
4. **Colleges and Universities;**
5. **Community Colleges;**
6. **Cooperative Extension;**
7. **Correctional Institutions;**
8. **Counseling and Adult Learner Services;**
9. **Distance Learning and Technology;**
10. **English as a Second Language (ESL);**
11. **GED Test Administrators;**
12. **Health Professionals;**
13. **History and Philosophy of Adult Education;**
14. **Human Resources Development and Training;**
15. **International Adult Education;**
16. **Literacy Issues;**
17. **Minority and Human Rights;**
18. **National Adult Education Staff Development;**
19. **Popular Education;**
20. **Religious Education;**
21. **Research and Practice;**
22. **Special Learning Needs;**
23. **State Directors of Adult Education;**
24. **Students of Adult Education;**
25. **Vocational and Career Education; and**
26. **Women's Issues, Status, and Education.**

Perhaps this short history on AAACE and its predecessor adult education professional associations may serve to enlighten present day adult educators with some of the consequences of the adult education activities of their forebears, and sober them as well as excite them with the consciousness of their great potential to liberate or oppress, to change and to conserve (Stubblefield, 1991).

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