

Public Libraries and Adult Education: Some Representative Programs

By Diana Ray Tope

Public libraries have historically been the location of books for borrowing, the traditional "store houses of knowledge." While the growth rate of the knowledge to be stored remained relatively static, this was not a bad proposition. People who had the desire or need for a particular kind of information — probably for literary, scientific or leisure reading — simply used their nearest library. If none existed they attempted to get their information in some other fashion. But something happened; something which has come to be called the "information explosion." Information grew proportionately so much faster than the ability of the general public to keep up with it that new directions for libraries were in order. Libraries in North Carolina, and around the country, have taken stock in the past five years, and new directions are being defined, developed, and revised to fit the needs of an increasingly knowledge-conscious public. The consensus is that, if public libraries are to survive as agencies to serve the public, they must provide for the new information needs of that public. Many of the specific information needs required by individuals today can be grouped together under the heading of education. Without ignoring the importance of the education of children in and through the public library, this discussion concerns itself with adult education by public libraries.

Adult education programs of formal, informal, cooperative, and outreach natures have been developing in the past five years in North Carolina's libraries. A few libraries, such as Forsyth County and Cumberland County, had structured adult education programs of one kind or another prior to 1972, but the incidence is so small as to be insignificant, other than as a portent of things to come. Library outreach projects, including some for adults, have been actively encouraged and supported by the State Library with Library Services and Construction Act funds. Identified as formal programs are those which run for a minimum of six weeks; others, though they may require considerable planning and coordination, are referred to as informal.

Formal Adult Education Programs

Formal adult literacy and adult basic education courses or programs are exemplified by Robeson County Public Library's Adult Reading Program and Forsyth County Public Library's Adult Continuing Education (AEC) project.

Both of these are ongoing projects, initially supported all or in part by Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) money. Each has made steps toward obtaining funds through the regular literary budget agencies, with the objective that over a period of several years the project will be totally operated through regular library sources.

The Robeson County Public Library's LSCA Reading Program is a one-to-one tutoring program designed to teach adults to read. The project is a volunteer program with volunteers trained by library staff. After the completion of a ten-hour workshop each volunteer is paired with a student. A tutor meets with his or her student for three hours a week.

The first training that volunteers receive is the Laubach Basic Reading and Writing Workshop. This ten hour workshop provides the tutors the teaching skills and techniques needed to use Laubach Skill Books 1, 2, and 3. After a student finishes Skill Book 3, he should be reading on approximately the third grade level.

The workshop is followed by a monthly meeting of project staff and volunteers. At this meeting the tutors' problems and successes are discussed, ideas are exchanged and further training for the tutors is provided. These monthly meetings become a part of the volunteers' participation in the library's program. One result is that the tutors are kept informed of new teaching techniques and materials. These meetings also provide an opportunity for the project staff to suggest solutions to problems which the tutors are encountering. They also provide an opportunity for the project staff to praise the volunteers' achievements. Making volunteers aware of the fact that their jobs are important, that they are needed, and that they are doing a good job are the cornerstones to a successful volunteer program.

The program is community-based. The library is trying to establish small reading centers in several of the major communities in Robeson County. At this stage in the program's development there are 40 volunteers working at the St. Paul's Public Library/Reading Center. These 40 volunteers (in combination with library staff) are reaching a total of 50 students. The program in St. Paul's deals with adults who have absolutely no reading ability and adults who are reading up to the fourth grade level. The advantages to having small community-based reading centers are (1) the program has the opportunity to become a part of the community with local leaders taking a vital part in decision-making; (2) the members of the community become more aware of the program because it is in their own home town. This means that local people are more likely to participate in the program; and (3) the library increases its outreach not only through literacy work, but also by providing a base in an area to begin other outreach programs.¹

Another formal program, the Adult Continuing Education Project (ACE), is at the Forsyth County Public Library with the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce. "The goal of ACE is to help the residents of Forsyth County to identify and reach their educational goals — both career and enrichment. This might be getting a job, advancing in your profession, or simply having the pleasure of learning about something you like."²

Nine major services are offered:

1. Career and Job Hunting Information — ACE developed a comprehensive career file with information about a wide variety of careers. Extensive material was also purchased on job hunting skills such as finding leads, making employer contact, writing a resume, and going for an interview. The Employment Security Commission provided ACE with their Job-Information-Service which has been heavily used.
2. Courses, Curricula, Schools —This is the information and referral aspect dealing with formal courses. ACE indexes courses offered by the 74 major educational institutions in Forsyth County and the courses of the major colleges in surrounding counties. The information is available on a card index that is revised weekly. Current course information from Forsyth County institutions is published bi-monthly in the *ACE Community Calendar*. Curriculum programs of all the colleges in Forsyth and surrounding counties are indexed in a Resource File. Services using this information range from quick information and referral to indepth searching for a specific curriculum program to meet a patron's needs.
3. Test Preparation — The collection in this area now covers most civil service tests, college entrance tests, high school equivalency tests, licensing tests, army entrance exams, and general test preparation. Since many exams do not have specific preparation books (eg., state merit tests), staff members must be familiar with the content of the books and be able to recommend them for tests not covered.
4. CLEP and External Degrees — To serve the patron interested in CLEP, ACE collected information about CLEP policies and procedures; textbooks that cover CLEP subject matter; test preparation books on CLEP subjects; and the policies of area colleges and universities toward CLEP. Many patrons are found who are choosing the college or university they will attend based upon the institution's CLEP policy. ACE has also gathered catalogs on over 50 external degree programs across the country.
5. High School Diploma or Equivalency — In addition to test preparation materials themselves, ACE works with patrons to choose from the six different methods of receiving a high school diploma or equivalency in Forsyth County. Two of the community programs are supplemented with textbook material on GED subject areas.
6. Independent Study — Some patrons normally have no interest in receiving credit for their learning projects, but wish to learn a subject in depth.
7. Financial Aid for Education — It was rapidly discovered that most adults wishing to return to school also needed financial aid information. A collection of material in the area was developed concentrating on local aid programs in Forsyth County.

8. **Aptitude and Interest Testing** —While the ACE staff has received training in counseling, they are quick to realize when a patron's needs exceed their capabilities. Patrons who have no idea which direction they wish their education or careers to take are referred to aptitude and interest-taking services throughout the county.
9. **Adult Basic Education** — This is a new area that ACE has only entered recently. However, the two agencies working with adult illiterates have requested that ACE develop a collection of high-interest, low-level recreational reading and we plan to do so in the coming year.

The ACE project is an example of a library program designed to meet some of the educational needs of adults. Because the staff and costs involved are extensive for a full time program, portions of it may be adapted by smaller libraries. Cooperative funds with several other local agencies or a grant could help the smaller library develop some aspects of the offerings of ACE.

Another early program was the literacy program of the Cumberland County Public Library, developed as a result of the Library-Community Project of 1955-1960.³ This American Library Association project, supported by a grant from the Fund for Adult Education, was designed to assist librarians in developing long-term adult education programs based on an analysis of community needs. The Cumberland County Public Library was a pilot library in this project for which the North Carolina State Library received a grant in 1958-1960. The study found that the greatest community need in Cumberland County, in 1960 was literacy education: 45.1 per cent of the county population had less than eight years of schooling.

The library decided to take action on this finding by initiating a literacy program in 1961. It arranged to join the circuit of Laubach Literacy Films and a class was organized to meet twice a week. PTA's, church and civic groups, Home Demonstration and Farm agents, and the health and welfare agencies joined in to reach and enroll adult illiterates. The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority agreed to co-sponsor the class.

The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, faced with mounting costs due to increased enrollment, approached the Fayetteville Technical Institute, a part of the North Carolina system of community colleges, to explore the possibility of combining resources. The Institute studied the sorority-library program, and, impressed with its obvious vitality and effectiveness, proposed to take it over. The sorority and the library, however, knew the value of their own involvement and insisted that the class remain in the branch library, near the homes of many students, that it continue with the same teacher with assistance from club members, and that decisions about materials, publicity, and recruitment should be made jointly by the library, the sorority, and the Institute's administration. The Institute agreed to pay the teacher's salary and book costs in exchange for its own administrative involvement and the opportunity to learn from a successful experience.

The most sophisticated education and career referral service in a library in North Carolina is the Adult Learning Information Center (ALIC) at the Olivia Raney Library in Raleigh. Funds for this project were provided by the Fund for Improvement for Post-Secondary Education, HEW. The library

provided the location and support services. It is hoped that local funds will become available to continue ALIC.

The Center provided general information about all types of educational opportunities in Wake County, and to a lesser extent in North Carolina and out-of-state; educational counseling; career exploration; interest testing; financial aid information; and referral to specific individuals at local educational institutions; and referral for additional testing or job information. Materials provided included the *Guide To Education Opportunities in Wake County* (compiled and distributed by the Center); college catalogs, catalogs for evening courses from local educational institutions, career information films, licensing and certification requirements for professions, information on apprenticeship programs; information about the College Level Examination Program; external degree programs throughout the U. S.; correspondence courses, high school completion programs, writing resumes, and local job information from the North Carolina Employment Security Commission. Obviously, most libraries are not yet in a position to offer all this, but portions of this extensive service can be developed in almost every library. Most libraries can obtain catalogs for the nearby colleges, for instance.

Informal Adult Education Programs

Another type of programming is more informal, and may run for several weeks, but less than six weeks. In this category are "public forums" which have been widely funded throughout North Carolina by the North Carolina Humanities Committee. Many of these have been of considerable interest to the general adult public. They have brought humanists of note into local communities to discuss current issues with local leaders and the general population. Libraries, along with other agencies, were quick to take advantage of this opportunity to get funds for these programs. Many of these programs ran for several weeks and were planned by librarians and other local people working together.

Educational programs which are designed for only one meeting are frequently planned by libraries. Programs of this type require less money, less planning, and less time for the library. They still offer an educational opportunity to a target audience. A library might schedule an expert to come in and give a Saturday morning program on the care and handling of snakes, or a current issue such as energy conservation might be the topic of an evening's seminar with a panel of experts making their experience available to the public. Programs such as these are educational in nature and within the realm of financial reality for many libraries. Some libraries are able to hold these on a regular basis, perhaps as many as ten or more a year. Although each may be on a different topic, the series provides a unique opportunity for the individual.

Other agencies in the community will gladly cooperate with libraries by providing space for the library's programs, or by using the library's space for their programs. The library can cooperate with other agencies by establishing contracts with them, and by collecting, distributing, and organizing materials and information. Establishing personal contacts with the leaders of other

community agencies will provide sources of accurate, up-to-date information; provide exposure for the library and later, the agencies; open the door to more cooperative ventures; encourage more effective referral (often adults feel more comfortable being referred to a person rather than an office); and help the library staff to collect and distribute materials and information. The library should provide four types of material: career guidance, admissions, financial aid, and curriculum related. The library might also identify local vocational aptitude interest testing centers, know who is eligible for testing at the centers, and the center's fees. The library can provide preliminary career and education guidance to adults by collecting materials and information. After using the library's resources, the learner is more likely to go to the appropriate educational agency with a firmer, more knowledgeable decision. Library cooperation with education agencies is essential.⁴

There are a variety of outreach programs being undertaken in North Carolina libraries. Many of these fall under the general category of education, particularly some of the Library Services and Construction Act supported projects which are designed to serve the culturally and socioeconomically deprived groups of our population. Many of these do not have education as the main objective, but education is an element in almost all of them. One example is the BOOKS BY MAIL service provided by the Albemarle Regional Library in the Northeastern section of the state. Requests may be made to the library by mail from a catalog or from the individual's own interests. Books are mailed out and returned by mail, thereby providing service to individuals whose transportation problems reach major significance because of the geography of the area in which they live. Using this mail service, individuals can obtain education materials and information. Since the end of the three-year LSCA support period, the mailing costs have been picked up by the local governments in three of the four counties involved because of the demand for the continuation of this service.

Another example is the Homebound Service provided by the Sandhill Regional Library System to homebound residents of four counties. Begun as a service to senior citizens, this was originally funded through the Older Americans Act for three years. The reception of this pilot program was so enthusiastic that an exception was made and the funding continued for another year. Two vans carry books, materials, and films and records to people who are unable to leave their homes. Again, this is not designed specifically as an educational program, but the information that is provided to these patrons frequently does serve an educational purpose.

A Challenge for Public Libraries

In view of the small amount of funds available to public libraries, i.e. basically a very small percentage of local and state funds, and LSCA funds for special projects, it is amazing that so much has already been done to aid adult education through public libraries. Librarians are people who earnestly believe in the value of education and in service to the general public. Perhaps it is a "natural" therefore, that so many librarians are seeking ways to offer adult

education opportunities through public libraries. The outlook for the future is promising. Many ways of making adult education available have been identified, and some of them are being tried, often as shoe-string operations which will gain financial support as their potential is proved. Libraries are flexible institutions compared to the traditional sources of formal education. They have learned to be flexible because their aim has been to give service — whatever may be required — to the public. Now they are beginning to take advantage of this characteristic to offer still more.

While libraries have been the traditional "store houses of knowledge," public libraries are beginning to think of themselves as community resource centers, or at least as centers that serve some of the functions of a community resource center. As libraries begin to develop their potential as centers for information needs, they will find themselves providing some or all of the three basic functions of the community resource center: (1) information exchange, where local people trade knowledge, ideas, suggestions, and skills. The emphasis is placed on trading. The library will act the role of intermediary by helping each person directly and by adding to the store of knowledge that is therefore available to others. (2) In the course of aiding and abetting this exchange, the library will find itself becoming a center for community dialogue, providing the opportunity and the facilities for groups of people to identify, research, debate, and find solutions to local issues. (3) As these actions take place, people will begin to band together with other people, groups will form, and organizations will be created of people trying to meet certain goals. All of the functions overlap, and many libraries are already doing some of these things without making a conscious effort to become "community resource centers." Still, this is a direction of the future for libraries that are trying to serve the perceived needs of their communities.

Many libraries have been offering programs for years. The tremendous rise of continuing education activity in America points out that there is a need for more, better organized service of this kind from libraries. Lifelong learning is rapidly becoming an accepted concept and one that people are beginning to expect. The library is often the only agency available to a particular segment of the public. There are no enrollment or admissions standards and libraries are free. The library has a collection of information to serve the learning needs of the patrons, and if the material is not available locally, usually the library can obtain it. Because the library is service-oriented for the entire public, and not just one segment of it (such as students, business people, senior citizens) it is adaptable, responsive organization which can meet a wide assortment of adult education needs, often at less expense than other, more traditionbound institutions with traditional requirements for entrance, performance, and graduation.

Each library must assess the needs of its community and service area and determine the priorities of those needs. It is a sure thing that in every community there are adult education needs which are not being met. The next time you look up you may find the public libraries in North Carolina meeting those needs.

¹Smith, Duncan, et. al. *Loose Paper No. 1: Literacy Programming*, 1977.

²ACE Director, *Education Opportunities for Adults in Forsyth County, North Carolina*, 1976.

³Literacy Activities in Public Libraries, "A Report of a Study of Services to Adult Illiterates." American Library Association, Chicago, 1966.

⁴"Cooperation with Other Local Educational Agencies," (*Serving the Entire Community*, Sept. 22, 1976, North Carolina State Library).

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