THE IMPACT OF THE BABY BUST GENERATION ON ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

The introduction of the Baby Bust generation into adult education classrooms in large numbers will accelerate existing trends towards individualized, just-in-time programming mediated by technology. This article explores key generational influences and categorizes the population into five distinct but fairly homogenous clusters. The implications these clusters will have, as a group and as a generation, on adult educational policy, administration, and curriculum are projected.

Résumé

L'arrivée massive de la génération du «baby bust» sur les bancs de l'éducation des adultes ne pourra qu'accélérer la tendance à l'enseignement individualisé avec support technologique. Dans l'article qui suit, on explorera les principales influences générationnelles et on établira au sein de cette population cinq catégories à la fois distinctes et relativement homogènes. À partir de ces données, on projettera les répercussions sur la formulation des politiques, les orientations administratives et la programmation en éducation des adultes.

Media fascination with the concept of age-based cohorts (e.g. the Baby *Boomers*) has brought demography into the popular-culture marketplace. Examining the cultural phenomena affecting the Baby Busters—from the decline of the family to the extension of adolescence—provides insight into the experience and perspective of the next generation of adult education participants. This article places the Baby Bust in historical context and outlines the major environmental factors affecting this group's social development. Of particular note are the disintegration of the family, the extension of adolescence, the transformation of the Canadian identity, and pervasion of the public media. The emergent profile of the Baby Busters divides the cohort into five, relatively homogenous groups. The implications of this generation, for adult educational administration, curriculum, and policy, are outlined; these include the rise of individualized, just-in-time

training; a shift to pull-driven programming, the growing importance of outcomes assessment; and the impact of declining public and personal resources.

Who's Who?

Sorting out who's who amid the sea of labels is important to understanding the social trends that affect each group. Canada's population is composed of four age-based cohorts:

1. The Blessed Ones (b. 1930–1945) cohort are the Depression and Second World War babies who benefited from being few in number during the rapid economic expansion of the 1950s and early 1960s (Howe & Strauss, 1993). Foot and Stoffman (1996) counted 4.7 million members of this cohort in 1996.

2. The Baby Boomers (b. 1946–1966) cohort resulted from a huge increase in the birthrate following the Second World War. A major generational split has occurred between the Boomers and subsequent generations because of the dramatic economic and social changes of the 1970s and 1980s (Bibby & Posterski, 1992). There were 9.8 million Boomers in 1996 (Foot & Stoffman, 1996)

3. The Baby Bust (b. 1967–1979) cohort were born to Boomers and Blessed Ones in approximately equal numbers. Their name is derived from the decline in birthrates during the years they were born (Holtz, 1995; Romaniuc, 1984). With 5.4 million members in 1996, this group will soon form a significant audience for adult education programming (Foot & Stoffman, 1996).

4. The Echo Boom (b. 1980 to present) cohort were born to both Boomers and Busters; they numbered 6.9 million in 1996 (Foot & Stoffman, 1996). Preliminary research into their characteristics suggests that this generation has been affected by the same trends as the Busters have (Tapscott, 1998). This suggests that the impacts of these trends upon the Busters will be even more pronounced for the Echo Boomers.

Segmenting a population based on sharing a common place in history (and, presumably a common perspective and circumstances) lacks precision. Most difficult is the evolving and heterogeneous nature of generations, based on both their aging and the interaction of their collective and individual *backgrounds* (ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) with the ever-changing social circumstances they experience (Sheehy, 1996). This difficulty is in part

ameliorated by M. Adams' (1997) research into segmenting a generation into homogenous values clusters. The four key environmental forces that have affected the Baby Busters are traced in the next section and the broad educational impact of these factors are reflected upon as the first step in developing some idea of the key issues facing adult educators in the next 10 years.

Environmental Factors Affecting Busters' Emergence into Adulthood

The attitudes of the Buster cohort have been fundamentally affected by the circumstances of their emergence into adulthood. These circumstances have been documented in three surveys (in 1984, 1988, and 1992) by Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski (Bibby & Posterski, 1985, 1992). The results provide a glimpse into the impact members of this cohort will have on adult education classrooms.

Bibby and Posterski's 1984 and 1992 samples of 3600 15- to 19-year-olds from high-schools across Canada yielded response rates of 76% and 93% respectively. The 1988 survey encompassed a wider age-range (15- to 24-year-olds) and was conducted by the Gallup organization; roughly 800 of the 2033 respondents fall within the 15- to 19-year-old age range. Despite concerns about sampling bias (i.e. excluding dropouts and those teens in post-secondary institutions), the surveys provide a comprehensive picture of Canadian youth and are contrasted with Bibby's 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990 surveys of 1500 Canadian adults. These findings are also broadly supported by related work (M. Adams, 1997; Tapscott, 1998). Four major environmental factors emerge as important influences of this group: the disintegration of the family, the pervasion of the public media, the extension *of adolescen*ce, and the alteration of Canadian culture.

Disintegration of the Family

The multi-dimensional emergence into adulthood that teenagers experience requires two basic contributions from adults: direction and room (Bibby & Posterski, 1992). Throughout their key stages of personal development, increasingly less support was available to Baby Busters.

Annual divorce rates in Canada sextupled between 1966 and 1981, from 200 per 100,000 to 1200. Prior to 1986, 52 per cent of divorces involved children (O. Adams, 1990). Families attend to children's material and psychological needs. These needs are key components of developing

autonomous adults, with the early years having an impact upon personality development and providing the basis for subsequent intellectual and emotional capacities (Nett, 1988). Marriage breakdown significantly affects children in a variety of ways over a long period of time by changing financial circumstances, violating expectations, and destroying preconceptions about relationships (Conway, 1990). Similarly, some of this anxiety about impermanence is transferred to children within two-parent families, both through interpersonal contact and exposure via television. The sense of adult failure and unhappiness that are concomitant with divorce are now a part of children's reality and, therefore, prematurely shatter their perceptions about child-parent relations. Without the cognitive structures necessary to cope with this ambiguity, permanent insecurity about relationships and the judgment of adults can result (Winn, 1981).

Women rejoining the labour force have further reduced the support available to children. Nearly half of all children from traditional families have both parents working—close to double 1967 levels (Moore, 1990). Combined with a rise in single-parent families, it seems reasonable to speculate that there has been a significant decline in the time parents have available for children starting in the late 1960s. In the sphere of interpersonal relationships, the consequence of absentee parents is a transfer of allegiance from adults to peers. Bibby and Posterski's surveys show a consistent paradox: Baby Busters supremely value relationships but frequently do not have good ties with adults. This is evidenced by the low enjoyment many teens derive from schools, jobs, and organized religion—all adult-directed activities.

Pervasion of the Public Media

The importance of television is unique to post-Baby Boomers. Winn (1981) argues that the content of television is less important than the role it has assumed in socializing children. Television is an essentially solitary activity that creates the illusion of interaction (whenever it is convenient to tune in). The elements of generosity, forgiveness, patience and hard work that are necessary in relationships are not present when individuals interface with television nor do these elements make good material for plots.

"Interpersonally, we have bought into the idea that relationships should add to our lives," assert Bibby and Posterski (1992), "and, if they don't, should be dispensed with in favour of more fulfilling ones. Alternately, if none are forthcoming, we should bask in positive solitude" (pp. 164–165).

But despite being a solitary activity, the messages on television affect millions of people and cultural norms are established without discussion or reflection. Television has also been instrumental in trumpeting the downfall of society's traditional role models. Ben Johnson made Canadians suspicious of sports heroes. Politicians are inconsistent and opportunistic. *The Boys of St. Vincent* disgraced the priesthood. The Challenger disaster discredited science and technology. Talk shows routinely ridicule (and at the same time glorify) a multitude of dysfunctional families headed by flaky adults. *Roseanne* turns a family on the backslope of the socioeconomic bell curve into white-trash role models, while *Cheers* shows that desperately lonely alcoholics are fun people too.

Perhaps more important in the long run, television (representing the crowning achievement of a broadcast society) is being replaced by interactive, digital media. A broadcast society is one where information is presented linearly to passive observers in a one-size-fits-all manner. Tapscott (1998) contrasts this with the interactive approach of digital media whereby knowledge is constructed on an as-needed basis by individuals. This societal shift towards a more individualized, active form of education, argues Tapscott, is fundamentally altering the way Echo Boomers construct knowledge and their worlds. This change is already being felt amongst the Baby Busters (see section on Baby Busters: A profile, below). Bibby and Posterski's (1992) findings fail to note this change—likely as a result of the dramatic movement of digital technology into mainstream since their study. M. Adams' (1997) study did make note of the importance of technology, particularly in its role of reducing the significance of demographic characteristics (e.g. race, religion, and region) as predictors of attitudes.

These findings suggest that personal choice is replacing mass culture (in marketing terms, pull-driven products are succeeding push-driven ones) and is reducing the social homogenization of a broadcast culture. This in turn reinforces the movement towards personal choice. Both Tapscott (1998) and M. Adams (1997) agree that the exposure of young Canadians to a wide range of different (and often contradictory) messages will force them to develop more sophisticated screening and synthesizing skills. This set of skills is critical in an interactive, information-based world and also erodes the position of established authority (e.g. government, corporations, media outlets, etc.) as the provider of information and social norms.

Extension of Adolescence

Prior to industrialization, there was little or no period of enforced and prolonged dependency: the entire concept of being a teenager is a social construct designed to compensate for reduced labour needs following industrialization (Cote & Allahar, 1994). The shift to a post-industrial, service-based economy has meant falling wages for young people (Rifkin, 1995). As the Baby Boomers approach mid-life, it appears that they are consolidating their economic positions (their earnings are rising) while the earnings of those aged 16-24 are falling. Part-time work and industrial restructuring towards more service-oriented and low-skill jobs means that the median weekly earnings of full-time, Canadian, working males, aged 16-24, as a percentage of the median earnings for all workers, fell from 94 per cent in 1967 to 69 per cent in 1984 (Wannell, 1990).

This same group (16–24 year olds) has the highest rate of unemployment (unemployment figures only include those actively seeking work, excluding those who have given up looking and those engaged in other activities—e.g. schooling, parenting, etc.). Nationally, in 1987, unemployment for men (16–24) hovered around 14.7 per cent, and that for women (16–24) was over 12 per cent. In contrast, women 24–44 were at 9 per cent unemployment, and men in that age range were at 7 per cent (Gower, 1990). Despite the recent discussion of an economic recovery, unemployment figures continue to demonstrate an age-based disparity.

In order to access good jobs (i.e. jobs with living wages, benefits packages, and opportunities for advancement), educational credentials are required (although, arguably, unnecessary for most jobs). The pressure credentialism has exerted means an increasing prolongation of youth. Those unable to gain entrance to post-secondary education will necessarily remain underemployed with their dreams and aspirations—along with the basic status and sense of independence associated with this age—unfulfilled (Cote & Allaher, 1994; Sheehy, 1996).

Education is not the panacea it once was, and underemployment may come to be the most serious problem for Canadian youth (Rifkin, 1995). There is evidence that the classroom–work transition has become more circuitous and difficult. With the increased creation of part-time, low-paying jobs in the service sector, the chances of eventually entering a rewarding career path have been reduced (Krahn & Lowe, 1982; Wanner, 1995). Cote and Allahar (1994) note that the irresponsibility attributed to the Busters may be the outgrowth of frustration at their social stasis. "Maturity and

responsibility are qualities that are acquired through experience and practice. They cannot be gained by reading textbooks and through classroom instruction alone" (p. 108).

Transformation of Canadian Culture

The extension of adolescence and changes in the job market are related to the significant shift that pollster Angus Reid (1996) notes in Canadian culture. Alberta's Klein revolution and the restructuring of Ontario's Harris government have provided young people with front-row seats to what Reid refers to the sink-or-swim mentality of the 1990s. The rise of neo-liberal governments have seen the emphasis of social policy shift from ensuring equality of opportunity to simply ensuring equality of right—an approach that downplays or ignores the systemic barriers that many Canadians face (Gibbins & Youngman, 1996). This stands in contrast to the spend-and-share ethos of the 1960s and 1970s. The consistently high levels of unemployment, the shift of debt from public to private, and—perhaps most importantly—the constant media coverage of the dismantling of the social contract are reshaping how Canadians view their world. Reid characterizes the big-government era of the 1960s–1980s as having unbound confidence in government, the sexual revolution, lust for material possessions, and soaring optimism. The 1990s—a decade being shaped by an aging population, global competition, and constant change—brings an *X-Files*esque suspicion of government, AIDS, unemployment, and pessimism.

Apple (1993) suggests western countries are shifting back towards a property orientation (and away from a people orientation) as the basis used to determine the right to participate in society. Changing the basic rules and patterns that ordered the lives of Canadians has created a society wherein the pursuit of self-interest (the primary social mechanism of neo-liberalism) is the dominant ideal. The erosion of Canada's public infrastructure through user fees, budget cutbacks, and privatization has created a defensive society wherein self-preservation is the most important goal. This contraction of generosity and growing cynicism is reflected in the Busters.

Reflective Implications

The four environmental forces that shaped both the Busters' developmental years and their adult world suggest that this cohort will manifest attitudes and traits different from their parents. One interpretation of these findings might be that this cohort has been prepared to be highly

autonomous, self-oriented, and self-sufficient. This is evidenced by Bibby and Posterski's (1992) finding that 72 per cent of teenagers put a high value on cleanliness, whereas forgiveness garners only 59 per cent and generosity 40 per cent. Generosity and forgiveness are, however, key components of friendship; therefore the low scores for generosity and forgiveness are inconsistent with the high value ascribed to friendship (91 per cent rated it as very important) and being loved (80 per cent). This excessive individualism is antithetical to good relationships (given the inevitable conflict between the personally desirable and relationally necessary) and this inconsistency of values may explain the reduced inclination of Busters to commit to communal life.

The effects of these environmental forces, however, may be mitigated by individual and group characteristics and resources; thus a sweeping description of the group as autonomous, self-oriented, and self-sufficient—while popular in the media—is inadequate for projecting Busters' participation in adult education. More likely, there will be a series of relatively homogenous subgroups with shared traits, attitudes, and values. The next section explores one segmentation based on the research of the Environics Research Group.

The Baby Busters: A Profile

As part of the sociocultural research conducted by the Environics Research Group, an annual poll is taken of approximately 2600 Canadians (M. Adams, 1997). In it, 250 questions about fundamental beliefs and values, personal characteristics, and lifestyle are asked; subsequent factor analysis groups the responses into roughly 80 trends. The results form a sociocultural map which is generated by crossing two bipolar continuums approximately at their midpoints. The first is anchored by traditional values and modern values (which question or reject more traditional ones), respectively. The second continuum is anchored by a social orientation (one's life tends to be defined in relation to the opinions of others) on one end and an individual orientation on the other (emphasizing a more self-focused perspective). The four quadrants produced by this process broadly correspond with the cluster analysis of respondents, which groups relatively homogenous respondents from each generation together (Adams refers to these groupings as tribes). One quadrant, however, contains two clusters.

Although the sociocultural map is intuitively sensible, the unavailability of the survey instrument and data (to protect the commercial interests of Environics) makes the results (both the map and the clusters) difficult to evaluate. Some support for the selection of continuums seems evident in the literature (Bibby & Posterski, 1985, 1992; Holtz, 1995). Because of the nature of cluster analysis, the validity of each cluster is dependent not on statistical properties, but rather on the ability of the researcher to explain why the groupings make sense. Given this requirement for explanatory consistency and the general agreement of Adam's clusters with the literature, the face validity of his results seem high.

Clusters of Busters

M. Adams (1997) outlines five large clusters in the Baby Buster cohort: (a) Thrill-seeking materialists (social and traditional in orientation), (b) Aimless dependents (individual and traditional in orientation), (c) Social hedonists (social and modern in orientation), (d) New aquarians (modern and social in orientation), and (e) Autonomous post-materialists (modern and individual in orientation). Each cluster represents the differing impact of the four environmental forces outlined above on the Busters. Traditional demographic data has less predictive ability with the Buster cohort than with the Boomers or the Blessed Ones, but some common characteristics do emerge. The following summaries are drawn from M. Adams' (1997) work.

Thrill-seeking materialists. Almost stereotypical products of the "Me" generation of the 1980s, 25% of Busters can be characterized as thrill-seeking materialists. On M. Adams' (1997) sociocultural map, thrill-seeking materialists are both social and traditional in their outlook. Members of this group are avid consumers of status items and show a distinct gender differentiation. Women report significant anxiety regarding both their economic position and a perceived increase in violence. New technologies appear intimidating to both sexes, although men see technology as another way to demonstrate their status. Members of this cluster are socially conservative and generally do not question established authority or procedure. They (particularly males) also tend to have neo-liberal values regarding questions of equity (perhaps explaining the recent resurgence of right-wing thinking amongst a small group of young people).

Aimless dependents. Twenty-seven per cent of Busters fall into the aimless dependents category—a smaller proportion of this generation than of the Boomers. This cluster is comprised in large part of blue- and pink-collar workers, with almost half having some post-secondary education. On M.

Adams' (1997) sociocultural map, aimless dependents are both individual and traditional in their outlook. This group tends to approach life rationally but feels little control over their lives or connection to their communities. Their anxiety is a result of (and feeds) a lack of trust in traditional social institutions and values (although nothing has replaced these to give meaning and structure to their lives). Circumstance and predisposition (and possibly a lack of initiative) have conspired to create a relatively fearful and parochial group (although the degree to which these characteristics manifest themselves vary significantly).

Social hedonists. Roughly 15% of Busters fall into the social hedonist category—a group that is generally younger, less affluent, and less educated then the other Buster segments. On M. Adams' (1997) sociocultural map, social hedonists are both social and modern in their outlook. A desire for immediate gratification is this group's primary trait, but they also demonstrate a desire to be creative, active, and stimulated; they have a disinclination to analysis and solitude. They reveal a higher than average degree of trust in traditional authority and focus on social relationships.

New aquarians. The New aquarians (13% of the Buster cohort) appear to manifest values including egalitarianism, ecologism, experience seeking, and hedonism; they tend to be from more affluent families (although Adams notes a significant group of new aquarians in the lowest income category). On M. Adams' (1997) sociocultural map, new aquarians are both modern and social in their outlook. This group is most likely to reject mainstream western religions, some in favour of New Age spirituality. Despite their strong emphasis on individual decision making, they do not lack a community orientation—they simply define a community differently (e.g. global, voluntary, possibly electronic). In this way, they appear most like the Echo Boomers described in Tapscott's (1998) study of what he calls the Net Generation. The new aquarian's worldview has an aggressive edge; according to M. Adams (1997):

> They would agree with Nietzsche's observation that no creation is possible without some form of destruction. They have broken with tradition, so as to create a new. Whereas the aimless dependents feel alienated because the world is changing too quickly, the new aquarians often feel frustrated because things are too slow to change. (p. 115)

Autonomous post-materialists. Incorporating 20% of the Busters, this segment is relatively affluent, interested in personal autonomy and *disinterested* in being a part of the consumer culture. On M. Adams' (1997) sociocultural map, the autonomous post-materialists are both individual and

modern in their outlook. Extremely egalitarian, they fundamentally reject unearned authority and deference to tradition—a trait consistent with their rejection of both organized and unorganized religion. Alternative family structures and lifestyles receive strong support from this group—perhaps reflecting an interest in substance over style. At the same time, males appear to agree broadly with social Darwinist principles, accepting risk and disadvantage as a part of life.

The Impact of Environmental Forces on the Segments

The four environmental factors noted above loom large in shaping and differentiating each of M. Adams' (1997) five clusters. The impact of Reid's (1996) sink-or-swim ethos is reflected in the neo-liberal values of the thrill-seeking materialists as well as in the realization among autonomous post-materialists and aimless dependents that the sorting mechanisms in the world are much harsher (for better or for worse) than in the past. The post-materialists and aquarians appear to have taken this in stride (although perhaps not without some residual discomfort or bitterness) whereas the dependents' reaction has been much less empowered. This may be correlated with the degree of affluence and education within each group.

The media appears to have a role in shaping expectations and worldviews. Those most involved with emerging forms of media (aquarians) appear to have a better-developed ability to cope (and even thrive) with rapid change. This may be because the skills involved with interactive media (e.g. screening, synthesizing, revising expectations to accommodate new information) are similar to those necessary to cope with constant real-world change. A similar skill set may have emerged among the post-materialists, who have reformulated their world to accept divergent and shifting social *structures* as well as an absence of spirituality. The dependents (perhaps as a result of lower levels of affluence and education) appear to lack this ability which, in turn, decreases their sense of efficacy. Social hedonists and thrill-seeking materialists both appear very much swayed by the mass culture of the broadcast society and, possibly as a result, have failed to develop the critical thinking skills required to effectively question authority and the values Canada's consumption-based society propagates.

The disintegration of the family (with its attendant loss of traditional support systems) appears to have opened the possibility of alternative social structures for some (aquarians, post-materialists, and possibly hedonists) whereas aimless dependents react against this loss but with fear rather than

adaptation. The thrill-seeking materialists appear to have filled this gap by turning to their peers for support—a support based on a shared culture driven by consumption and status.

Finally, the extension of adolescence with its concomitant decline in living standards and increase in economic stratification based on age and education shapes each segment differently. Social hedonists are likely the least affected because of their preoccupation with immediate gratification, which may be a response to a lack of good, long-term opportunities. Thrill-seeking materialists—with their distaste for equity—choose to assign responsibility for economic success and failure to individuals rather than to examine the effects of underlying structures. This is consistent with their tendency to look for simple answers and the cluster's deference to traditional authority. Both aquarians and post-materialists are drawn to egalitarian values and alternative social structures. This may be in response to the long-term social and economic dependence that stem from the lack of opportunities presented to them by traditional structures. The betrayal of the social contract (i.e. obedience in exchange for clear direction) while the Busters were in their teens may also contribute to the aquarians' and post-materialists' critical approach to and rejection of authority and tradition. This same betrayal may also have impacted the dependents, who do not have the resources to challenge the effects of traditional structures on their lives.

Impact of the Baby Buster on Adult Education

The circumstances and characteristics of the Baby-Bust generation has an impact upon both their motives for participating in adult education and the resources they have with which to participate. This, in turn, has implications for educational programming and policy. As the eldest Baby Busters will be 31 years old in 1998, the importance of these implications will grow over the next decade.

Motives for Participation

As they enter the typical age range during which adults are most likely to participate, many Baby Busters will be motivated to participate in adult education for economic reasons. The pace of skill obsolescence within the work world (and possibly their initial disadvantage based on declining accessibility as tuition costs continue to rise) means that continuing education will be viewed as a route to greater employment and financial

security. The importance of this factor is already appearing in studies of high school and university students (Barnetson, 1997; Church & Gillingham, 1988; Office of Institutional Analysis, 1995; Stage & Williams, 1989) as traditional motivational factors (see Boshier, 1977) are overwhelmed by an economic imperative. At the same time, the insecurity and minimal compensation associated with the contract-work phenomenon noted by Rifkin (1995) is reducing the resources Busters will have to devote to upgrading their abilities and skills. This seems like a barrier to adapting to Sheehy's (1996) suggestion that economic security comes through flexibility (having multiple selves), which requires constant skill acquisition and upgrading.

Other motives for participating will differ by cluster. Aquarians and post-materialists are driven in part by seeking experiences and self-fulfillment, respectively. This may feed the growing increase in profit-driven adult education programming (including things like study tours, self-exploration workshops, etc.). Countervailing forces will work against the expansion of this type of adult education programming—for example, the limited resources Busters will be able to commit for non-essential items, their proclivity to work independently (thus managing their learning opportunities) and a general distrust of institutions. Thrill-seeking materialists, in contrast, may provide a market for the experiential, profit-making programs now being aimed at aging Baby Boomers, but only if the programs can market themselves as status items.

Social hedonists have less experience with formalized learning opportunities and, when combined with their desire for immediate gratification and stimulation, may shy away from structured learning opportunities (Statistics Canada, 1997). However, this group (as well as the aimless dependents) will most need the skills building that adult education can provide if these Busters are to prosper in the future. Developing the skills and motivation of these groups to examine the underlying causes of their limited economic prospects (hedonists) and insecurity/dependence (dependents) is a valuable contribution adult educators can make to improving their lives. The challenges of this group in the adult education classroom parallel many of the unkind generalizations leveled in the school system at the Busters: they have a short attention span, a disinclination to think critically, and a lack of goal-setting skills and coping strategies.

Shifting Emphases and Structures within the Adult Education System

Reid's (1996) sink-or-swim era has witnessed a decline in public support for education and has seen formal and adult education programming become increasingly upscale and profit driven (Selman and Dampier, 1991). At the same time, the normative pressure of credentialism is contributing to decreasing flexibility in adult education programming. As employers increasingly use credentials as a way of screening applicants, learners may feel an increasing pressure to validate the time (and money) they spend on self-improvement in the form of a credential. For example, employees are often better rewarded for taking a broad-based diploma, degree, or certificate program that may only superficially touch on their area of responsibility rather than completing some targeted reading, discussion with experts, and project-based learning.

Credentialing, however, generally requires some sort of organizational affiliation, a structured curriculum, an advisory panel, and a pool of instructors and administrators. This dramatically increases the overhead cost of learning opportunities and devalues informal learning. Further, formal programs often entail entrance requirements (which reinforces the formalization of learning opportunities and associated rising costs). As well, articulation with other programs can means a loss of responsiveness to learner needs. Running counter to this trend is an increase in self-employment, wherein networking and previous performance may be more important than formal credentials. Further, as Tapscott (1998) notes, some Busters and the privileged group of Echo Boomers that he observed are using digital technology to reformulate the way in which they learn. Rather than push-driven curriculum and programming, many are firmly pulling from existing resources the information, experiences, and skills they need to be successful. This seems more in keeping with adult education's grass-roots traditions and may signal the return swing of the pendulum.

The effectiveness of digital technology is predicated, however, upon both learner access and skills. This may be an appropriate solution for the shrinking group of socio-economically advantaged young people who operate comfortably within the knowledge economy. The technological panacea that current political leaders envision as revolutionizing education and training (similar to predictions for television in the 1960s) is largely for those who least need it (i.e. those with information-era skills who can upgrade on their own). Those without technological skills or access are becoming marginalized—unable to participate and to succeed in the educational programs they need.

Discussion of technology as a solution to shrinking educational funding consistently occurs at a cliche level. Putting courses on the world-wide web, although a laudable way to increase the breadth of learning styles that are accommodated, assumes students have both the skills and equipment necessary to access this information. It offloads an additional cost to students. Little discussion of pedagogical implications has occurred. What may be an excellent alternative for some students, and workable for most, may be anathema for many—it may limit their desire and ability to learn (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). Further, the institutional difficulties of this approach (in terms of acquiring and maintaining hardware and software, training faculty and students, modifying curricula, rising workloads for instructional and support staff, as well as dealing with issue of intellectual property) are generally ignored. A more realistic expectation of technology is as a supplemental tool that can be used to enhance instruction and learning opportunities rather than to replace traditional forms of instruction.

Suggested Solutions

The challenges posed by the Baby Bust generation require a re-evaluation both of public-education policy (specifically funding) and of how programming is structured and delivered.

Public policy. Decisions that reduce or freeze public funding for post-secondary and adult education result in a slow but consistent transfer of the cost of education from the state to the student. This transfer of costs illustrates one of the dysfunctions of a deregulated social marketplace: disadvantaged individuals (either through their inherited social position, some misfortune, or poor decision-making) continue to be disadvantaged. For example, in Alberta, at the same time as apprentices lost federal subsidies during their classroom training, the provincial government instituted a $400 tuition fee and a student-loan system (AECD, 1996). The government's reasoning for increasing the financial (tuition) and psychological (debt) barriers students face at the same time the province was faced with a projected shortage of skilled tradespeople is difficult to understand except as part of its ideological commitment to transfer the cost of education onto students and their families. A more appropriate response might have been, if not to replace the subsidy, then not to institute the additional cost of tuition. Unsurprisingly, policies like this lead to frustration and social disruption (including illiteracy, crime, addiction, etc.) by those who feel deprived. Adult education—from basic life-skills to advanced vocational training—coupled with appropriate social supports provides a

mechanism by which all Canadians can productively participate in society. Less ideologically threatening is simply harmonizing educational policy with these ends.

Programming. Adult education programmers need to remain mindful of the increasing untenability of one-size-fits-all programming. The significant differences in affluence, skills, and motives amongst the Busters will increase the already significant pressure programmers may feel to niche market. The widespread desire for customization that Tapscott (1998) notes amongst Echo Boomers is also a trait many Busters exhibit and mirrors the decline of the broadcast culture's mass market. This trend will be reinforced by the selectivity that is necessitated by the limited resources Busters will have to expend on education. For example, rather than signing up for entire programs, Busters may look for opportunities to acquire just-in-time training that meets some specific need they have identified.

This trend will have an impact on administrative approaches and curricular design. Just-in-time training of intense programming options (e.g., 3-day weekend sessions) in addition to traditional approaches (e.g., a weekly 3-hour session for 13 weeks) will be in demand. From a curricular perspective, the linear nature of most diploma, degree, and certificate programs will require reexamination. In a business-certificate program, for example, is it really necessary for a student to have picked up peripheral courses in economics and human-resource management in addition to the introductory course in accounting to take a more advanced accounting course? Busters looking for a particular skill are unlikely to accept essentially arbitrary curricular decisions. For instructors, this may result in a wider range of background skills and knowledge among students than a one-size-fits-all approach can accommodate.

This concern, however, is predicated upon a broadcast model of learning, whereby standardizing students' skills and the pace of instruction is a central issue. Tapscott's examination of Echo Boomers suggests that learner-driven education (whereby knowledge is pulled rather than pushed) is returning to vogue; the learners' starting point is less important than the opportunities they have to gather and to synthesize information, as well as to test their learning. This is consistent with many of the tenets of good practice in adult education; however, a conscious effort often is required to see the multiple, individualized routes through a subject. The traditional role of programmers in ensuring quality often takes third seat to self-evaluation and evaluation in the work world.

A greater focus on outcomes assessment will be one aspect of the more entrepreneurial relationships between programmers and the funding agencies, as well as the growing consumer relationship between learners and providers. Contracting for specific outcomes with government departments and companies appears to be increasing unabated; this provides one way for programmers to provide necessary programming to groups like the dependents and the hedonists at an affordable price. Articulating such programs with broader efforts to address specific social conditions will be necessary, however. In addition, demonstrating to learners the value of both an entire program and its component parts as well as explicitly linking them to outcomes will be necessary.

Conclusion

The Baby-Bust generation is bringing a series of substantial and diverse challenges to the adult education community. Declining personal and public resources, coupled with a rising need for lifelong education simply to maintain one's economic status, increase the pressure on programmers and policy makers to be creative their efforts. This is further complicated by the looming end to a mass, broadcast culture engendered by digital technology.

Adjusting planning and pedagogical approaches to a generation that is increasingly expecting individualized, just-in-time programming requires a rethinking of the role of instructors and the structuring of programs. The movement towards a pull-driven educational system will make obsolete many previously unquestioned elements of curriculum. For example, unless demonstrably useful, the foundations courses in many programs (which contextualize subsequent courses and introduce important themes that reoccur) will see fall-offs in enrollment. In an ever-expanding market, similar programs without such requirements for a credential may siphon off learners. This poses a significant challenge to programmers, who must explicitly justify the inclusion of such components to learners.

Other challenges include adopting and maximizing the value that information technology can provide. In addition to its political cachet, technology offers substantial flexibility to learners who may not have the opportunity to attend traditional learning activities or whose personal timetables are not met by those of scheduled courses. And, finally, the challenge of accurately assessing the outcomes of learning for sponsoring

organizations (and to attract other learners) will also become more complex as learning objectives are increasingly set by learners rather than instructors.

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