Adulthood Responsibility and Invitational Education

Jacobus C. Kok

Rand Afrikaans University
Republic of South Africa

First and third world values characterize the Republic of South Africa, and today its challenge is to integrate a diverse population into a unified and equitable society. Education, naturally, is a key element to attain this goal. To succeed in this regard, common aims and guidelines are needed to give direction to the educational system. The concept of "adulthood," which is considered to be the ultimate aim of education by leading theorists, provides a common denominator for education in the new South Africa. One problem, however, is finding a useful description of the essentials of adulthood—a description that reveals desirable and relevant elements of adulthood in today's society. The need for a clear and relevant profile of adulthood became the catalyst for establishing a research team to conduct an empirical survey to determine the facets of adulthood.

According to educational theory, every child is on his or her way to adulthood—adulthood as defined in a particular environment. An underlying belief of this study was that a description of adulthood could be used to determine the aims of education, the strategies, the curricula, the evaluation instruments, the pedagogical relationships, and the management considerations.

What is adulthood? What is its essence? What is the content of this concept? How is adulthood viewed in South Africa today? The idea of adulthood can be viewed as universal, but its form and content are specific to each particular culture and community. It is a broad and complex abstraction and no one is expected to fully comprehend it. According to Kok and Myburgh (1992), the following aspects of adulthood exist: a sense of responsibility, financial or material values, social obligations, family obligations, labor orientation, environmental responsibility, acceptance of accountability, self-concept, time orientation, civil responsibilities, a sense of religion. To answer the preceding questions and explore the concept of adulthood as it is perceived in South Africa, theories on adulthood were reviewed and an empirical inquiry was planned. In this article, the results from this study are presented and the

potential role for invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1984) is emphasized.

Design

Four questions were posed in this study:

1) Are all these aspects of adulthood present in the South African concept of adulthood?
2) Are all these aspects of equal importance?
3) How important is each one of them?
4) Is there a rank order of importance amongst them?

To find valid answers to these questions, an empirical study on a country-wide scale was conducted. The eleven aspects of adulthood mentioned above served as the basis on which the research instrument was designed.

Apart from biographical information, the questionnaire consisted of 88 items covering the eleven aspects of adulthood. Each respondent rated these 88 items on a nine point scale from "of little importance" to "very important." The respondents judged each item in terms of how important is it for an adult to be, or to do, certain things.

The questionnaire was sent to 1,945 people. Of these, 722 surveys were returned in a suitable condition for analysis. These 722 respondents consisted of 96 politicians, 253 businessmen and 368 teacher educators. The politicians were representative of the three houses of parliament and of the legislative assemblies of two of the self governing national states. The businessmen were randomly selected from the three major business chambers in the country. The teacher educators were faculty members of 14 teacher training institutions, i.e., colleges and universities. The questionnaires were sent and returned by mail.

An important feature of this group of respondents is that its members are reasonably representative of all the people of South Africa. A wide spectrum of language, cultural, ethnic, and religious groups is represented in this sample. The respondents also represent all the geographical regions of the country. Complete details about this study, the research instrument, and the results, are contained in a comprehensive report by Kok and Myburgh (1992). The data collected in this study were analyzed on computer by means of the BMDP 50 statistical package.

Validity and Reliability of the Survey Instrument

Statistical procedures used to validate the instrument included a first and second order factor analysis. The first order analysis consisted of a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) followed by a Principal Factor Analysis (PFA). Orthogonal axes and varimax rotation were applied in both cases. In the second order analysis the results from the first order analysis were used as input. In this case, again a PCA with orthogonal axes and varimax rotation was applied, followed by a PFA using the Doblimin procedure. The variables derived from the application of this factor analysis were, in the final phase, subjected to an investigation of reliability.

Structural and detailed analyses were executed by applying MANOVA, ANOVA and Scheffe for vectors consisting of three or more variables. In cases where two variables were probed simultaneously, Hotelling's T2-test, followed by the Student t-test, was applied. The X2 test in the detailed analyses was also applied to individual items whenever necessary. The independent variables were age, gender, marital status, income level, language, educational qualification, religious affiliation, and profession.

From the application of this factor analysis, two factors were found: 74 items loaded on the first factor and 14 on the second one. Factor 1 was identified as a sense Q responsibility, and factor 2 was a sense of religion. These two factors were subsequently probed for reliability. The Cronbach alpha- reliability coefficient was calculated by means of the NPSO program (1974). The correlation coefficient of .97 for factor 1 and .924 for factor 2 signified a reasonably high level of reliability. No item was rejected by the application of this procedure. On the basis of the theoretical considerations, as well as the above mentioned statistical analyses, these two factors were primary factors in the description of adulthood.

Results

The following differences were found when the independent variables were used to examine comparisons among respondents:

- Afrikaans speaking respondents, as well as respondents with a language other than English, valued a sense of responsibility more than English speaking respondents.
- Respondents with a language other than English valued a sense of religion more than English speakers.

- Respondents with a post graduate education valued a sense of religion less than other respondents.
- Teacher educators valued a sense of responsibility more than businessmen.
- Respondents living in rural areas valued a sense of religion more than respondents living in urban and semi-urban areas.
- Respondents with a religious affiliation valued a sense of religion more than respondents with no such affiliation.
- Christians valued a sense of religion and a sense of responsibility more than respondents of other religious orientations and those with no religious affiliation.
- Married respondents valued a sense of responsibility and a sense of religion more than respondents with another marital status.
- Respondents from lower income levels valued a sense of responsibility more than respondents from higher income levels.

Rank Order of the Aspects of Adulthood

One important question to be answered in this study was whether all eleven aspects of adulthood were of equal importance in South African society. The eleven factors were ranked according to the averages assigned to them based on respondents' ratings on the nine point scale. Table 1 presents the average ratings and the ranks of these eleven aspects of adulthood.

Table 1
Rankings and Average Ratings for Aspects of Adulthood

Rank	Aspects of Adulthood	Average Ratings
1	Personal responsibility	8.33
2	Family obligations	8.23
3	Positive self-concept	8.00
4	Responsibility for the environment	7.79
5	Attitude towards labor	7.47
6 (tied)	Accountability	7.23
6 (tied)	Social responsibility	7.23
6 (tied)	Financial responsibility	7.23
9	Civil responsibility	7.04
10	Sense of religion	6.82
11	Time perception	5.97

All aspects of adulthood received high ratings by the respondents in this study. The ratings ranged from 5.97 to 8.33 on the nine point scale. From these results, personal responsibility appears to be the highest ranked

aspect of adulthood. This isclosely followed by family obligations, a positive self-concept and care for the environment.

Discussion

This study indicates that the views of the respondents regarding adulthood revolve around two primary factors: a sense of responsibility and a sense of religion. These two factors are reflected in eleven aspects of adult behavior (Kok & Myburgh, 1992). When these eleven aspects, as distinguished in the literature and subsequently applied in this study, are subjected to closer inspection, clearly the golden thread that knits them together, is indeed a person's sense of responsibility: responsibility for oneself, one's family, one's fellowman, the environment, time, financial affairs, and so forth. It is also true that adulthood is associated with no other concept as strongly as with responsibility. This profile may be of value to educational theorists and curriculum planners.

With regard to the second factor, "sense of religion," these results indicate that it may be a separate factor. As such, a sense of religion does not seem to fit with or to be a part of the sense of responsibility. That is to say, the items of the instrument that have a bearing on a sense of religion referred to something other than a sense of responsibility. The question remains; is a sense of religion an integral factor of adulthood? Logically, it follows that a sense of religion is neither an essential ingredient of adulthood, nor does it need to be. By contrast, the findings of this study indicate that a sense of responsibility appears to be an essential aspect of adulthood. Children who are not adults and who are on their way to adulthood can have a sense of religion, and are often religious. Likewise, there are adults who manifest all the aspects of a sense of responsibility without being religious or without such an affiliation. Whether or not it is responsible to go through life without any religious orientation is a matter of one's outlook on life, and therefore is a debatable issue.

Implications for Invitational Theory and Practice

The findings of this study support the beliefs advanced by invitational theory and practice. For example, invitational theory assumes that every person is responsible, valuable and capable and should be treated accordingly. In that responsibility was found in this study to be the essence of adulthood, it follows that an educational paradigm advocating responsibility to oneself and others should be considered paramount.

Invitational theory offers an educational model that clearly embraces this stance. For this reason, as a result of this country-wide study, the invitational philosophy was proposed as a framework for the educational system in South Africa.

Responsibility is the essence of invitational theory and practice. It encompasses both value and ability. Consequently, it is contradictory to treat someone as responsible, yet not treat that person as valuable and as able. When a person is treated in a responsible manner and expected to behave likewise, this conveys to the individual that he or she is valuable and able to assume certain responsibilities.

In countries with diverse populations (the majority of nations fall into this category), it is imperative to find common values among the various languages and ethnic groups in order to prevent discrimination and hostility. Such a stance promotes cooperation, understanding and mutual acceptance. Invitational theory offers a paradigm that can bridge gaps between people, further cooperation, and develop the potential of all for the benefit of oneself and society as a whole. A country that sees adulthood as the product of its educational system, and views invitational theory and practice as the framework within which to deliver the desired product, has a fair chance to become a winning nation. That is the dream and an imperative goal for South Africa; to become a winning nation for all its peoples (Sunter, 1987).

References

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Jacobus C. Kok is professor of educational sciences at Rand Afrikaans University in South Africa.