LIBRARIES IN THE LEARNING SOCIETY

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I am delighted to be here in Dallas to talk about the learning society with a profession that recognized the importance of lifelong learning long before it had a catchy name. The doors of libraries have always been open to learners of all ages, and there has always been an assumption that learning in a library should be interesting as well as informative and that it should serve to enrich the quality of life.

That is not really such a startling educational concept, but now that it has been discovered by legislators and educators, you are going to find some interesting new partners in your educational endeavors, and you are going to find yourselves challenged to keep pace with the growing demands of the learning society.

The term lifelong learning is really meant to embrace learning from the cradle to the grave, but in practice most people talking about lifelong learning are primarily concerned with adult learning because adults present the new wrinkle in education. America has long provided well for the education of its young, but the formal educational system has generally accorded adult learning only peripheral attention. As librarians, you can legitimately feel a little smug because the services you provide are age-free,

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but the educational system has given little heed to the very real human need to continue learning throughout life. Gail Sheehy's bestselling book, Passages, traces the stages of adulthood that call for new adjustments and constant personal growth. The interest generated by the book is only a symptom of the escalating interest in lifelong learning. The tendency of states and relicensing agencies to mandate continuing education for professionals from accountants to veterinarians is another sign of the need for lifelong learning.

The adult learning force is potentially huge, and it is growing in size as well as interest. The explosive growth in the number of adult learners during this decade is the result of changing demographics as well as changing lifestyles, and it will affect libraries and all other providers of learning resources.

Demographically, the World War II baby bulge is moving into the adult years. Those born at the peak of the birth rate are now 22, and those born at the beginning of the birth explosion are almost 30. The high birth rate of the 1950s combined with the abnormally low birth rate of the 1960s produce statistics for the 1970s in which the number of 18 to 24 year olds in the population will grow a modest 8 percent, while 25 to 34 year olds will increase a whopping 44 percent. By the year 2000, says the National Center for Education Statistics, "The United States population will be dominated by persons in their middle years" (Golladay, 1976, p. 12). Adults then, just in terms of sheer numbers, constitute far and away the largest market for educational services.

But the interest of adults in seeking new learning experiences is growing even faster than their numbers in the population. During the first half of this decade, the number of adults participating in adult schools, employer-sponsored training programs, churches, community organizations and the like increased three times as fast as their numbers in the population.

Research on adult learning indicates that over three-fourths of the adults who are no longer full-time students in school say they would be interested in further learning, and an amazing one-third of the adult population actively participate each year in some form of organized instruction (Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974). Adult enrollments in classes, workshops, discussion groups and the like already exceed by a large margin the total number of students enrolled in all institutions of postsecondary education, and part-time adult learners make up the new majority on college campuses. The average age of the community college student these days is 28 and rising. Thus adult education is becoming big business for the educational establishment.

Although all providers of educational services are interested in adult learners today, much of the enthusiasm has been generated by colleges and universities, both because the traditional 18 year old college student is a diminishing commodity and because the greatest demand for further educational opportunity comes primarily from adults with at least a high school education--85 percent of today's active adult learners are high school graduates, and as such, are eligible for postsecondary education.

Despite that fact, colleges and universities provide only a little more than one-third of the organized instruction for adults. Industry enrolls one out of eight employees in various classes and courses of instruction, spending about two billion dollars a year on education (Lusterman, 1977). Community organizations, including libraries, museums, churches, senior citizens organizations, etc., provided instruction for nearly two million adults in 1975. The military services operate the largest educational system in the world.

But as librarians know, and educators are now publicly proclaiming, some of our richest learning experiences occur, not in organized classes but in self-directed learning that is pursued solely because the learner wants to know. Recent discussions about lifelong learning make a distinction between adult education as "organized instruction" and adult learning as self-directed "deliberate efforts to learn." Research indicates that over 80 percent of the adults in this country are self-directed learners, meaning that they carry out at least one learning project per year. A learning project is defined by the researchers as a series of related episodes adding up to at least seven hours in which the intent is to gain new knowledge or skills (Tough, 1971). Actually the average self-directed learner spends about 100 hours per learning project and takes on about five projects per year (Tough, 1978). That adds up to a very impressive 500 hours per year of self-directed learning for the average man or woman in the street--much of it done in, or through, the services of libraries.

The distinction between adult education and adult learning can be illustrated by the impact of the television program "Roots" on the learners of this nation. That television program stimulated increased enrollments in classes in history, to be sure, but it also resulted in a veritable rash of requests to libraries and records bureaus for help with self-directed learning projects. I suspect that some of you were involved in helping people from all walks of life locate materials to help answer their questions about history, slavery, or their own geneological roots.

One of the characteristics of the learning society is that learning from one source is quite likely to have a ripple effect in its demands on a wide variety of other learning resources. The more people know about almost any subject, the more they want to know. The movie "Turning Point" had a dramatic impact on interest in ballet; travel almost inevitably stimulates interest in other cultures just as learning about other cultures stimulates interest in travel, and so it goes. The interest in lifelong learning will escalate because learning is addictive; the more people know about something, the more they want to know.

Although research on adult learning clearly demonstrates an upsurge of interest in lifelong learning, it doesn't really take studies and statistics to convince sensitive observers of social trends that the learning society is either already here or on the way. Whether one looks at the "greying of the campus" caused by the heavy influx of adults into college classes or whether one talks about the much larger learning force utilizing an ever-widening variety of learning resources, the conclusion is the same:

Lifelong learning is a social phenomenon of great significance for museums and libraries, schools and colleges, television and radio, newspapers and magazines, employers and labor unions, government and community agencies.

In my privileged role of kicking off the discussion of the role of libraries in the learning society, I would like to set the stage for your later discussions by looking at the broader social context in which you will do your work. Along the way, I shall point to some of the challenges that I see for libraries in the learning society of the 1980s.

Let us look first at some of the social forces that are fueling--or maybe even fanning to white heat--the growth of the learning society. First on my list of causal factors is the ever-present drive for educational opportunity. Although some may associate educational opportunity with recent social movements such as civil rights, women's liberation, and attention to the needs of the elderly, expanded educational opportunity has been a national goal ever since elitist education was established. The unceasing pressures for expanded learning opportunities can be vividly and simply illustrated through the symbolism of what has been happening to the physical boundaries of the college campus. In the 18th Century, college campuses were small collegial communities in which students and faculty lived on or around the campus, their physical isolation a symbol of their removal from the worldly concerns of the masses. In the 19th Century the landgrant institutions came into being, expanding the classical curriculum to include applied subjects, serving a much larger audience of learners and creating huge,

albeit still largely residential, campuses. A century later, the community colleges began to change the concept of campus. In deliberate contrast to their predecessors, community colleges were usually located in the very centers of population, designed for commuting faculty and students whose lives were rooted as much in the community as on the campus. The community college movement introduced the concept of using the entire community as campus.

Finally the 21st Century, with its sophisticated technology and mass media, is destined to move beyond community as campus toward colleges-without-walls which regard the world as their campus. Indeed there are already in existence over 200 colleges-without-walls which enroll some 54,000 adults in associate and bachelor's degree programs without requiring the physical presence of the learner on a campus (Sosdian, 1978). One has only to note the increasing educational uses of satellites in space to picture moving beyond the constraints of world as campus to embrace the universe as the learning environment.

Clearly, education for adults 18 and over has burst explosively from its physical boundaries, and learning is now acknowledged to reside in the individual rather than in the buildings and professors of the ivied halls.

The notion that learning is not tied to a physical location is spreading to younger learners too. Millions of children have watched Sesame Street and Electric Company on television. Millions more are participating in formal and informal learning experiences planned by museums, libraries, and other community agencies.

And so lifelong learning is space-free, no longer tied to specific locations. That means that legitimate learning may take place in libraries as well as schools and in living rooms and mobile vans as well as in library buildings--in short in any location where the resources are present to stimulate learning. And, of course, as far as the space-free dimension of learning goes, libraries have always had and will continue to have a major advantage over any other provider of learning services in the portability of learning resources--whether books, records, art work, or prepackaged courses of instruction.

Perhaps the single most vigorous response to the rise of the learning society on the part of educational providers has been the decision to transport learning to students rather than insist on the traditional pattern wherein students are transported to the places of learning. The best-publicized innovations of our times are the new locations for learning--store-front colleges, television and newspaper courses delivered to the home, museum exhibits transported from city to city, courses for college credit taught on commuter trains. In all the excitement about formerly non-portable education being made semi-portable, we are likely to forget that the staple of libraries is a fully portable time-free, space-free learning offering an unparalleled breadth of curriculum.

A second characteristic of lifelong learning is that it is becoming increasingly free of the credentials of the provider. Once learning is perceived as a characteristic of the learner rather than an offering of the provider, it shifts attention from teaching to learning. That shift in emphasis has been strongly articulated even within the bastions of credentialism--the educational establishment. "Experiential learning" is the term that has come into being to reflect widespread agreement that when or where or from whom one learns is not nearly as important as what one learns. A majority of colleges in the country today grant academic credit if students can demonstrate on examinations that they have learned as much, through a method of their own choosing, as those attending class on campus. On many campuses, it is not even necessary to take a written examination; students are permitted to submit evidence of past learning in a variety of forms--from portfolios of accomplishments to letters from work supervisors.

Ironically, the decreased emphasis on the credentials of the provider seems to have led to an increased emphasis on the credentials of the learners. Many students now want credit for what they learn. Increasingly, you may be asked to help with student-generated learning projects, once undertaken in a spirit of curiosity, but now undertaken in a quest for credit. Most of you, whether in school, public, or academic libraries, have had considerable experience helping learners locate materials for school assignments. The task is fairly simple when the instructor provides a reading list; it calls for somewhat greater skill when only the topic is known; it requires more

skill yet when the assignment is student-generated. Increasingly, the trend is toward student-generated learning projects. Part of this is due to the inexorable pace of the knowledge explosion and part to the high visibility and numerical dominance of more mature learners.

A number of colleges catering to the maturity and experience of adults no longer start with a list of courses to be taken by the student, but rather with helping the student work out an individualized "learning contract" which spells out the goals of the learner, the learning activities designed to accomplish the goals, and methods to be used in the evaluation. Faculty in such institutions are more likely to play the role of learning facilitator than provider of information, as adults assume more active roles in designing their own programs of lifelong learning. The result is that schools and colleges are much more amenable than they once were to sharing the educational task with other professionals.

A third factor contributing to the emergence of the learning society is the recognition by citizens that lifelong learning is an essential and pleasurable aspect of life. No one needs to tell an audience as fully engaged in the knowledge business as this one is that our knowledge of the world is changing so rapidly now that lifelong learning is a coping skill necessary for survival. Every 40 minutes enough new information is generated to fill a 24-volume encyclopedia. Librarians of ancient times may have been able to engage in philosophical discussions about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but the more pressing reality today is, how many books can be stored in the head of a pin. Even the layman can empathize with the medical student's distinction between a generalist and a specialist.

"A general practitioner learns less and less about more and more until he eventually knows nothing about everything, while the specialist learns more and more about less and less until he eventually knows everything about nothing." Where all this will end, I can't possibly foresee, but the fact is that knowledge is more essential than ever before, and fortunately, more easily obtainable.

Increasingly adults are taking advantage of new learning opportunities--especially adults who are already well educated. One thing we know for sure from the recent research on adult learners is that the more formal education an adult has, the more likely he or she is to seek further opportunities for learning (Cross, 1979). A college graduate, for example, is about eight times as likely as a high school dropout to participate in adult education, and each year of additional education seems to add to the desire for further learning. And, of course, the level of educational attainment for the populace is rising with each generation. The average adult in the United States now has more than 12 years of formal schooling, and the growth in high school graduation from generation to generation has been nothing less than spectacular. Eighty four percent of today's young people between the ages of 20 and 24 have a high school education or more, compared with 66 percent of the parent generation and 45 percent of the grandparent generation (Bureau of the Census, 1977). Given the addictive nature of education, the rising educational attainment of the nation will almost certainly result in increased demand for adult learning opportunities and in increased participation in a wide variety of options.

The learning market is also being stimulated right now by a subtle but perceptable shift from what has been called a linear life plan to a blended life plan. By and large, advanced societies promote a linear life plan in which youth is spent in education, middle-age in work, and old age in enforced leisure. The increasingly pronounced separations between education, work, and leisure are due in part to the job shortage which is neither a recent nor temporary phenomenon. For the past 50 years society has been unable to provide jobs during peacetime for everyone willing and able to work. An analysis in a Federal policy paper observes that those in mid-life who are at their peak of political power and influence have reacted to the chronic job shortage by "pushing young persons back into schools and older persons into ever-earlier retirement" (Best and Stern, 1976, p. 6).

There seems to be growing dissatisfaction, however, on the part of almost everyone, with this solution to the problem. Sociologists are observing the rise of what has been called "rights consciousness" or the "psychology of entitlement." Today almost everyone feels entitled to a job. At the same time, almost everyone feels entitled to education and to full enjoyment of their leisure hours. Older people have insisted upon their right to work if they want to, and Congress has endorsed that right through a roll-back of mandatory retirement. Young people are showing increasing dissatisfaction with long years of uninterrupted schooling, especially when there is no guarantee of the well-paid and meaningful job to which they feel entitled, at the other end of the educational pipeline. There has been a steady increase in the number of students exercising their right to a job. The majority of

college students today are already in the labor market--all of which brings about the phenomenon of the part-time student, part-time worker, part-time vacationer. There is nothing very exceptional anymore about the individual who attends college, holds a job, and takes off for what would once have been considered extravagant leisure weekends of skiing or surfing.

It is not only young people who feel entitled to the good life as a blend of work, education, and leisure. Women, dissatisfied with unidimensional lives, are flooding into the labor market--and into education--in unprecedented numbers. Blue collar workers feel entitled, as never before, to a life beyond the factory. Labor unions are negotiating education and vacations into contracts. There is a rising desire on the part of the rank-and-file for benefits beyond mere wages--benefits that enhance the quality of life.

The point is that after a long human history of moving steadily toward a linear life plan which divides all life into three full-time phases with education for the young, work for the middle-aged, and enforced leisure for the elderly, people from all walks of life seem to be opting for a blended life plan which permits learning, work, and leisure to go on concurrently. Indeed it is hard to distinguish sometimes among the three basic activities of life; it is increasingly common, for example, to fill leisure hours with learning activities, or to take up a recreational activity that requires new learning, or to engage in learning during working hours.

At the same time that there is a blending of life activities for individuals, there is a blending of function among the organizations of society. Employers are increasingly into the education business, conducting on-the-job training, workshops for professionals, and think-tanks for executives.

Travel agencies are adding educational components to packaged tours at the same time that alumni offices and university extension services are adding packaged tours to credit-bearing courses. Libraries are not only providing learning resources, but many are providing counseling and instructional services as well--sometimes in cooperation with an educational institution or an instructor; sometimes on their own initiative. Increasingly, the learning society consists of a rich mixture of community learning resources, and no educational provider has any monopoly on the learning market.

The complementarity of today's learning resources can be illustrated through contrasting the special contributions of four of our foremost educational providers--libraries, museums, schools, and television.

Viewed along the dimension of time, schools and television are generally confined to "linear sequence" whereas libraries and museums offer the advantage of "random access." If I want to use television to learn about the weather, for example, I must first sit through the sportscast. Newspapers, in contrast, offer "random access;" I can skip sports and turn directly to weather at my convenience. Furthermore, if I am out of the room or my mind wanders just as the weather telecaster gives the prediction for Berkeley, California, I may have to wait an hour, three hours, or until morning for the next weather prediction. In the random access print medium of the daily newspaper, I can look up the weather whenever I'm ready to attend to the information.

One of the great advantages of libraries and museums over television and classrooms is that the learner has much more control over sequence and pacing. Libraries and museums offer random access learning, permitting people to spend hours on one topic, skipping others altogether if they wish.

Furthermore, libraries offer learners maximum flexibility in scheduling. They need not miss learning more about their current learning passion because they are unable to set aside the hours from eight to ten in the morning for class or eight to ten in the evening for the television special.

Viewed along the dimension of cognitive versus affective learning, new combinations appear. Libraries and schools might be paired and contrasted with television and museums. The cognitive-affective dimension is explored in some fascinating new research on the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. It is now believed that the left hemisphere handles learning that is linear, verbal, and rational whereas right brain function concentrates on learning that is simultaneous, visual, and affective. Schools and libraries exercise the left hemisphere of the brain with their emphasis on verbal symbolism and rational, sequential, logical thought. Television and museums, on the other hand, call on right hemisphere function with more simultaneous affective involvement in the learning experience. The learning society will be the richer for the diversity that is possible with multiple providers of learning services.

There is some pressure now for each educational provider to be all things to all people--for museums to provide portable exhibits, for schools to be as effective as television in developing affective learning, and for libraries to offer instruction and counseling beyond that related to the use of the library. Most of these efforts are exciting, and they enrich and enhance people's awareness of the potential of the learning society. But ultimately the fascinating potential in the learning society lies in cooperation and

and collaboration among the various providers, with each provider capitalizing on its own special strengths. Although the portability of the King Tut exhibit has been one of the great cultural phenomenons of the Century, museums can never compete with the portability of libraries as an enduring contribution to the learning society. Similarly, although I have been one of the staunchest advocates and promoters of individualized self-paced instruction in the schools, for the ultimate in self-paced instruction, nothing can compete with libraries. That doesn't mean that I want to discourage in any way the innovative efforts of any educational provider to engage fully and enthusiastically in the fun and excitement of the emerging learning society. Rather my plea is for greater awareness of opportunities for cooperation among the multiple providers of the learning society. Libraries are a unique national resource. They share some learning advantages with television, some with museums, some with schools; they supplement learning in some instances, and provide the only opportunity of their kind in other cases.

The exciting potential of the learning society lies in its capacity to surround us with learning options--credit or noncredit, cognitive or affective, linear sequence or random access, on campus or off, taught by the kindly Mr. Chips, schoolmaster of yesteryear, or Artoo-Detoo, technological tutor of tomorrow. The challenge to all of us as educators will be to develop the unique contribution of our particular medium to its highest form of excellence. May the discussions of The Round Table stimulate you to think about improving the old as well as developing new roles for libraries in the learning society.

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