

LIFELONG LEARNING: PURPOSES AND PRIORITIES

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Education for adults is as old as Aristotle and as new as today's conference activities. But in industrialized nations throughout the world, there is a renaissance of lifelong learning, a rebirth of the notion that learning is a lifetime activity, as important for adults as for children. Centuries ago, Aristotle, Jesus, Socrates, and the other great teachers of ancient times taught adults, not children. Their methods would be considered formal education in today's jargon, consisting largely of lectures or sermons, teacher-student dialogues, and adult discussion groups. Their curriculum, too, was one that we would associate with formal education, emphasizing not so much how to do things as how to think about things. The lessons of the ancient teachers were heavy with the abstractions of ideas and values and the life of the mind.

For a relatively short span of history--actually only a couple hundred years--civilization concentrated on formal schooling for the young, and adults were pretty much forgotten by educators. And so I call our times the renaissance of education for adults because it represents a rebirth of attention to the life of the mind that is as significant to the 21st Century as the original intellectual renaissance was to the 15th Century.

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Yet I'm afraid that those who spend much time reading about education these days are likely to conclude that we are experiencing something more akin to the dark ages than to the renaissance. Almost daily, we are treated to a one-sided picture of education in which test scores are declining, student enrollments are falling off, and school bond issues are failing with some regularity. Even the prestigious pro-education Carnegie Commission (1973) has added to the rhetoric of the times by referring to the 1950s and 1960s as the Golden Age of higher education and contrasting those years with the 1970s and '80s which are labeled Time of Troubles.

It seems to me that whether one predicts a renaissance or the dark ages for education depends largely on whether one is talking about institutions of education or the broader issue of the role of learning in the society. Institutionalized education may well be headed for Time of Troubles, whether permanently or temporarily, no one knows for sure, but education and learning are vital and alive and are pervading society as never before.

The signs of the learning renaissance are all around us. Researchers estimate that between 80 and 90 percent of the adult population carry out at least one self-directed learning project each year and that the typical adult spends about 500 hours per year learning new things from a variety of sources (Tough, 1977). In city after city, record breaking crowds are standing in line to obtain tickets to the King Tut exhibits. **Recently**, America's Number One magazine for the masses, The Reader's Digest (January, 1979) selected a book by the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for its book section. In the year just passed, millions remained glued to their television sets to try to understand human history as revealed in documentaries such as Roots

and Holocaust. An estimated one third of the huge and ever-expanding paperback book industry is devoted to teaching people how to do everything from fixing the plumbing to fixing a marriage. Those signs of our times look more like the renaissance than the dark ages if one is looking at the pervasive impact of learning on the society.

Visions of a learning renaissance are equally encouraging when we look at official counts of the number of adults participating in group or organized educational activities of one sort and another. National surveys estimate that between 17 million (Boaz, 1978) and 32 million (Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974) adults are currently participating in classes, workshops, job training, discussion groups, or some other form of organized instruction. My best guess is that one in every four American adults will join with others in some form of organized learning endeavor this year. That is a very substantial learning force with a head count two to three times as great as the total number of college students enrolled for degree credit.

There are a number of factors contributing to the growth of the Learning Society. The most obvious is the escalation of the rate of change itself. Margaret Mead once observed that the world in which we live is not the world we were born in nor is /^{that} the world in which we will die. In the world I was born into, the average citizen had no experience with television, credit cards, commercial airplane travel, computers, or frozen foods. It is quite clear now that no education will last a lifetime, and in many career fields, lessons once learned become obsolete in five to ten years.

The lifelong learning movement, however, is more than the recognition that continuous learning is a coping skill necessary for individual and

societal survival. The high visibility of lifelong learning today is largely attributable to the demographic fact that the United States is becoming a nation of adults. By the year 2000, says the National Center for Education Statistics (Golladay, 1976, p. 12), "The United States population will be dominated by persons in their middle years." For most of the years of this century, the United States population has been numerically dominated by young people. With the exception of the World War II years, children under the age of 15 have always been the largest single age group in the nation. By 1980, however, numerical dominance will shift to those between the ages of 15 and 29. By the year 2000, the largest age group will be 30 to 44 year olds, with a rapidly rising curve for 45 to 64 year olds. In 1970 the United States was basically a "youth culture" with people under the age of 29 constituting a majority (52 percent) of the population; by the year 2000, the United States will become an "adult culture" with those over 30 years of age constituting 57 percent of the population (Bureau of the Census, 1977).

The entrepreneurs of business are obviously aware of these changes in the marketplace. The makers of Johnson's Baby Shampoo, for example, are advertising their product for the personal use of 30 year olds, and Levi Strauss is promoting "fuller cut" blue jeans for the more mature figure. Educational entrepreneurs are not far behind. Some are using the baby shampoo approach, trying to convince adults that educational programs designed for 18 year olds are equally good for 30 - 80 year olds, while others are moving to the Levi Strauss approach and redesigning educational programs for the mature learner. Thus whether one would like to argue "for" or "against" increased public attention to education for adults, the simple political

reality is that any society attends to the needs of the predominant group in that society--which until the end of this century will be adults over the age of 25.

A related demographic factor lies in the historical events that produced the baby boom generation. Those born at the peak of the post-World War II baby boom are now 22 years of age and those born at the beginning of the birth explosion are almost 30. That means that the members of that unusually large generation are now finding themselves in fierce competition with one another for job promotion. The "promotion squeeze," that is the predictable result of a large upcoming generation competing for the relatively few leadership positions vacated by a smaller previous generation will have a number of ramifications for education.

- First, people whose promotion is blocked in one career line may decide on a mid-life career change. A recent study estimated that there are forty million Americans in a state of transition regarding their jobs or careers; 60 percent of them plan to seek additional education.(Arbiter, et al., 1978).
- A second option for people whose job promotion is blocked is to find satisfaction in other pursuits--perhaps through learning for its own sake or through leisure-time activities that require new learning. The greatest growth by subject area in adult education in recent years has been in social life and recreation, closely followed by personal and family living (Boaz, 1978).

- Third, the predicted job competition will probably encourage older people who are in the jobs and younger persons who want those jobs to gain a competitive edge through further education. This personal initiative, buttressed by the increasing tendency of states and occupational licensing agencies to mandate continuing education, will almost certainly heighten future demand for adult education.

For all these reasons, increased competition in the labor market is expected to increase participation in adult education. At the same time, competitive labor conditions may make people think twice about leaving their jobs for education. What in fact seems to be happening is that people are hanging onto their jobs and studying part-time--even younger students without families to support.

It looks as though American society is moving away from the "linear lifeplan" in which education is for the young, work for the middle aged, and enforced leisure for the elderly, toward a blended lifeplan in which education, work and leisure go on concurrently throughout life. So far in history, there has been a pronounced tendency to increase the separation between education, work, and leisure by keeping young people in school and off the labor market and by forcing older persons into ever-earlier retirement (Best & Stern, 1976). There seems to be growing dissatisfaction now, however, on the part of almost everyone, with this formula for protecting jobs for the middle years of life. 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 lifeplan, people from all walks of life seem to be opting for a blended lifeplan which permits learning, work, and leisure to go on concurrently.

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. Schools no longer have a monopoly on education, nor do businesses tend only to business. Employers are increasingly into education, 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. Although 85 percent of today's adult learners are high school graduates, colleges and universities provide only about a third of the organized instruction for adults. Increasingly, the Learning Society consists of a rich mixture of community learning resources and no educational provider has any monopoly on the learning market.

We can see how education has been blending into the life of the broader society by taking a historical look at what has been happening to the physical boundaries of college campuses in the 300 years since Harvard was founded. The first 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, building 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 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 accredited colleges-without-walls which enroll some 54,000 adults in associate and bachelor's degree programs (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. Once learning is perceived as a characteristic of the learner rather than an offering of the provider, attention is shifted from teaching to learning. It is that shift that will revolutionize traditional education, as it moves closer to the philosophy that has long characterized adult education.

Interestingly enough, however, the revolutionary implications of the lifelong learning movement got lost in the eagerness of colleges in this country to recruit adults to fill the seats left vacant by the declining 18-21 year old population. In the United States, we are likely to think of lifelong learning as synonymous with adult education. The Europeans define it differently. Listen to this definition adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1976:

"The term 'life-long education and learning', for its part, denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system; in such a scheme men and women are the agents of their own education. . . ."

That definition contains three basic ideas about the nature of lifelong learning: One is that the entire formal educational system from elementary school through graduate school should be restructured to produce lifelong learners. Second, the UNESCO statement makes clear that it is not just schools and colleges that are to serve as the targets for improved education. Rather, the world is full of people, organizations, and other learning resources that can be marshalled in behalf of lifelong learning. Third, this definition stresses the importance of helping people become self-directed learners, the active agents of their own education.

Contrast that definition with the much more limited view that generally prevails in the United States. Despite lip service to the idea that lifelong learning includes cradle to the grave learning, we rarely think of the lifelong learning movement as a call for the reform of elementary education. Yet, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the education of the lifelong learner must begin very early. We are quite unlikely to develop a lifelong learner through trying to entice an adult who hated school as a youngster back into the classroom.

One of the things we know for sure from the research about lifelong learning is that the more education people have, the more they want and the more they take advantage of the available opportunities. As a matter of fact, the lack of participation of the poorly educated in adult learning activities is becoming a serious problem. As the lifelong learning movement gains momentum, it is the already well educated who rush to take advantage of the new opportunities. The poorly educated stay away in droves, and the gap between the well educated and poorly educated is increasing.

The research is clear in documenting the fact that adult education, viewed as the sum total of all organized learning opportunities for adults, serves largely the privileged classes. As a group today's adult learners are disproportionately young, white, well-educated, and making good salaries.

The following populations are significantly underrepresented in organized learning activities for adults: Blacks, people with less than a high school education, those with annual family incomes under \$8,000, people aged 45 and older, and those living in the central city or on the farm (Boaz, 1978). There is probably more opportunity now for disadvantaged young people to gain access to college than for older disadvantaged adults to continue the kinds of education that would be useful to them.

Furthermore, the situation with respect to equal opportunity is becoming worse not better for all groups except women. The greatest increases in educational participation between 1969 and 1975 were made by white women with college degrees and family incomes of \$25,000 a year and over. The rate of growth for women was more than double that for men; adult learning activities for the college educated increased almost twice as fast as for high school graduates; and the participation for whites increased eight times as fast as that for blacks. As a matter of fact, the proportion of black people participating in adult learning activities has been decreasing over the past six years, in the face of steadily rising participation for whites (Boaz, 1978). Thus not only are white, well-educated people with good jobs already overrepresented on the adult education scene, but they are making much faster progress than their less well-educated peers, and the educational gap between the "haves" and "have nots" is increasing.

There are many things that can and should be done to encourage the participation of those who stand to gain the most from further education--better information about available opportunities, convenient and effective educational and career counseling for adults, equity in financial aid, and more job-relevant education--to cite a few of the more prominent proposals. While these steps may be desirable, they seem to me to ignore the fundamental importance of personal motivation. It is reasonable to suggest that the same factors that led to the early school leaving of the poorly educated are responsible for their reluctance to return. Children who are constantly told that they are below-average learners will be eager to leave school and reluctant to return, whereas those who do well will seek to remain in school as long as possible and eager to return to the scene of their former success.

Thus it seems to me that the UNESCO call for the reform of an educational system that condemns half of the school children to "below average" performance is a necessary ingredient of the lifelong learning movement.

The other two elements of the UNESCO definition of lifelong learning are equally important, and they too are in danger of being lost in the United States. The emphasis on the full utilization of the multiple learning resources of the community and the development of self-directed learners are long-standing values to adult educators. But in the headlong rush of colleges to recruit adults, there is a possibility that the needs of institutions for students may be given priority over the needs of adults for learning opportunities that are designed for them.

One of the early statements about lifelong learning in the United States was made by the Commission on Non-Traditional Study (1973, p. xv) when they said that it

". . . puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's need than the latter's convenience, encourages diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription, and deemphasizes time, space, and even course requirements in favor of competence and, where applicable, performance."

That seems to me an eloquent call for putting the learner at the center of the educational enterprise. But as the competition among colleges for the adult learning market heats up, there is a clear and ever-present danger that institutional survival rather than the creation of self-directed learners is the name of the game. I have seen more than a few efforts to convince adult learners that the quality of their learning is directly proportional to its similarity in form and content to traditional college courses.

Warren Ziegler (1977, pp. 15-16), an outspoken critic of the lifelong learning movement in the United States, deplores today's emphasis on what he sees as "a strong trend towards getting more and more citizens to conduct their learning activities within the organizational arrangements of the formal educational system." There is good news and bad news in that observation. The good news is that most of us think that college courses, wisely chosen, represent relatively high quality learning. The bad news is that we may be promoting lifelong schooling rather than lifelong learning, making adults increasingly dependent on someone else to tell them what, where, and how to learn.

It is for this reason that I suggest that one of the primary obligations of formal education should be the development of sophisticated consumers of lifelong learning. We should be spending more time introducing high school and college students to the learning options that will be available to them as adults and to helping them assess the relevance of various kinds of learning experiences to their needs.

I find some interesting parallels between the lifelong learning movement and the cooking and dining industry. Today's food consumer is faced with a staggering variety of choices. His problem is not really to get more options, but to select wisely those that best meet his needs with respect to taste, nutrition, and pocketbook. A prepackaged meal may be a good buy for the complete cooking novice or for the person who lacks the time or interest in creating a more distinctive meal. The sacrifice is that the prepackaged meal, like prepackaged courses in education, is designed for the mass market, and there is little opportunity for individual variation. Catering to personal tastes, however, is not the fundamental purpose of the prepackaged meal; providing basic sustenance is the purpose. If an educational consumer needs basic sustenance, a prepackaged program may be quite the best choice. But even the consumer of prepackaged meals or education should be knowledgeable about nourishment, cost, and the quality of the ingredients.

For the intermediate cook, the use of a recipe may be a bit more satisfying. Combining ingredients oneself permits greater flexibility and generally requires somewhat greater knowledge about cooking, ingredients, and end products than does the prepackaged meal. Furthermore, one may derive considerable pleasure from the act of creating the dish and perhaps from adding personal touches that express the interest of the cook. Nevertheless the recipe provides the basic guidelines which, if faithfully followed or knowledgeably adjusted, will result in the desired end product. Similarly, the intermediate adult learner should be given considerable say about the

ingredients of his or her learning program, and it should be our responsibility to teach students about ingredients, how to combine them for taste and nourishment, and how to derive satisfaction from the process of creating the learning program.

Finally, we come to the gourmet chef who relishes the creation of an original dish. The gourmet chef has a clear vision of the end product that is desired and knows enough about choices, ingredients, and methods to create a dish that uniquely satisfies the developed tastes of its creator. The gourmet learner is a designer and creator of good learning experiences as well as a sophisticated consumer.

When the cooking analogy is applied to the concept of lifelong learning, we can see its operation in school and out. The traditional school system follows the cooking analogy up to a certain point, especially in the consideration given to the skill and experience of the learner. Inexperienced learners in elementary schools are given few choices. Their curriculum and materials are largely prepackaged by the teacher on the grounds that the child is a novice in learning and has little experience in selecting learning resources from the environment and combining them into a nourishing learning program. That does not mean, however, that the school should increase the dependency of the child on the teacher or on prepacked materials. There should be a constant effort to help the learner become more self-directed and independent, even in elementary school.

By the time young people get to high school and college, they are offered educational programs comparable to recipes. They may select a major, for example, but the ingredients of the educational recipes are specified along with the amounts of each ingredient that will lead to a balanced program.

For adults the choices become wider, and the variability becomes much greater. The very sophisticated learner might create, from a wide variety of resources, a self-directed program of learning. Less experienced learners may use a variety of resources but need help in visualizing the desired end product as well as in selecting the appropriate ingredients. Still other adult learners will be satisfied with a simple product involving a limited variety of ingredients, and some of these ingredients may be comparable to premixed sauces.

For the true lifelong learner, learning is a lifelong experiment. Knowledge about new resources expands, tastes change, and aspirations rise as lifelong learners become connoisseurs of good learning experiences.

In using this analogy I do not mean to suggest that everyone should aspire to become a gourmet learner in all realms of education. Just as a gourmet pastry chef may wish, for reasons of time, interest, skill, or cost, to use a recipe for a casserole or a premixed salad dressing, so a learner may develop great skill and hard-to-satisfy tastes in one area of learning while being quite content to profit from programs created by others in areas less familiar or interesting. Generally speaking, however, the more experience and skill one has with cooking, the more discriminating one can be in satisfying individual needs, and the same is true of learning. Ultimately, I believe the role of educators is to help people of all ages develop a taste for good learning experiences and to choose from a wide variety of learning resources those which best meet their needs at the time.

Realistically, the gourmet learner will probably continue to be as rare as the gourmet chef for some years to come. But the gourmet cooking movement

has made a significant impact on American society. There is a rising demand for greater variety and higher quality in cookbooks; television programs, such as Julia Child, presumably produced for an elite band of gourmet cooks have attracted "mass" audiences; specialized magazines form a nationwide bond among those with common cooking interests; industry is busy producing evermore sophisticated cooking equipment; there is an unprecedented demand for classes and instruction in some of the more exotic forms of cooking. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that the development of more knowledgeable consumers of education will have a similar impact on the quality and variety of educational services across the spectrum of modern life.

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