

NEW YORK: WHERE LEARNING NEVER ENDS

by

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"New York: Where Learning Never Ends." That is the theme of this June celebration, and I hope it isn't a discouraging thought to those of you in this graduating class who are justifiably proud of having "wrapped it all up" and completed your studies for the Regents External Degree. Now that you are getting your degree, you are invited to this celebration where the major message is that you aren't through learning yet -- and probably never will be.

For the fact is that our society has become exceedingly dependent on education and adult learning, not just as the route to future progress, but as a necessity for survival in the world in which we now live. Change occurs so rapidly that without continuous learning -- in the rather formal sense of that word -- we cannot even keep the machinery of the society going, let alone hope to improve the quality of our lives through education.

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Margaret Mead once remarked that the world in which we were born is not the world in which we live nor is that the world in which we will die. I was born into a world without television, mass air travel, credit cards, frozen foods, or computers. My parents were born into a world without automobiles, radios, or refrigerators. That is a lot of change in a short span of time, but change has a way of escalating so that each new generation is coping with a faster rate of change than the preceeding generation.

The transportation industry serves as a good example of the escalating pace of change. For thousands of years, people transported themselves and their worldly goods by walking from place to place. With the taming of the horse, the distance travelled and the loads transported became a different order of magnitude. With the invention of trains and cars, another quantum leap occurred. Then airplanes increased the speed of travel, not just from 20 to 80 miles per hour as improvements in the car had done, but from 80 to 800 miles per hour. Now space ships move through space not just ten times faster than airplanes, but at the rate of 54 thousand miles per hour. Once the quantum leap occurs, the old transportation method may still exist, but trying to improve it to compete with the new proves frustrating and futile. No amount of careful breeding, attention to diet, or training can make the greatest horse even approach in efficiency the "transportation work" done by the most mediocre car.

Technological advance in the transportation industry has resulted not just in greater speed, but in a fundamentally different mode of transportation. Moreover, the time elapsing between inventions has grown shorter and shorter. Walking, as a means of transportation, served generation after generation; jet airplanes and space travel occurred within the timespan of a single generation.

The speed of change not only affects the lives of individuals, it changes the way society handles education. Instead of parents passing on what they have learned to their children, children today must learn lessons never known by their parents. *The generation gap in knowledge about computers is apparent in most homes today, but even more obvious is the fact that* It is the rare child who learns the skills for his or her livelihood from parents. ~~There is, for example, nothing that the horse breeder, as transportation magnate of his generation, can teach his son about horses that is at all relevant to the transportation industry once the quantum leap of the invention of the internal combustion engine has been made.~~

Quantum leaps in knowledge continue to occur with considerable regularity. Between 6,000 and 7,000 scientific articles are written each day, and information doubles every 5.5 years. The half-life of knowledge in medicine is now about five years, meaning that within five years of receiving the M.D., half of all a doctor's information is obsolete. ~~Professor Louis Smullen of M.I.T. was quoted in Time Magazine saying that without lifelong education, engineers are washed up by the time they are 35 or 40.~~ Continuous, lifelong learning is a necessity for most people right now. Yet we still talk about the Learning Society

as though it were somewhere off in the future, interesting to contemplate but without significant impact on our daily lives.

I submit that the Learning Society has arrived while we are still scanning the horizon to see how it will affect traditional forms of education. We wonder how new generations of educators will adjust to change without quite realizing that we are the new generation of educators, and among our ranks are television producers, library and museum educators, computer specialists, neighbors, employers, publishers of self-instructional materials, and weekend clinic directors. Teaching and learning take place on campus and off, in the home and on the subway, in union halls and professional offices. Teachers address millions of learners via television and Mark Hopkins lives on in the one-to-one relationship between mentors and learners.

What would happen to a society that actually fulfilled the stereotype of people "completing" their education by age twenty-two? If you stop to think about it, the wheels of change and progress are fueled almost exclusively by adults learning new ways to accomplish society's work. Formal education for young people, if it is good, lays the groundwork for lifelong learning, and it is of course basic and essential. But in the society in which we live, organized adult learning has also become indispensable. Ironically the more education one has and the better it is, the less likely it is to last a lifetime. Research shows clearly that college graduates are considerably more likely than high school graduates to be active in adult learning, and each additional year of schooling adds to the probability that

adults will participate in a variety of classes, workshops, and discussion groups.

Adult education is growing rapidly ^{in part} because the educational attainment of the nation is rising, but also because adults are seeing advantages to education for themselves in almost every facet of life, including career, leisure, family life, and personal development. Each year approximately one in every three American adults is engaged in some form of organized instruction. That does not include uncounted millions who are reading how-to-do-it books, watching educational programs on television, or engaged in a wide variety of self-directed learning projects.

The primary reason for adult participation in organized educational activities is work related -- to get a new job, a better job, a promotion, or to improve skills. In part because of the vastly improved job market for women, women constitute the most rapidly growing segment of the adult learning force, growing four times as fast as their numbers in the population. Perhaps the most spectacular indicator of what is going on in the Learning Society is the number of people, young and old, who are making education an important component of their lives along with jobs, family, and recreation. The formerly full-time worker is becoming a part-time college student almost as fast as the formerly full-time college student is becoming a part-time worker.

As recently as 1970, only one third of all college students were part-time students; today, part-time learners constitute the new majority nationwide as students combine their formal learning

with other adult responsibilities. Tilting the college population from a majority of young full-time students to a majority of part-time working adults is a change that affects the role of education in the society. ~~The Learning Society that we have been talking about has arrived, and it is a very different world from that in which most of us received our education.~~

One of the more significant changes is the expansion of choices for adult learners. Although 90 percent of the adults ^{learners} ~~engaged in organized instruction~~ today are high school graduates, and more than half have had some college work, colleges and universities provide less than half of the organized instruction for adults. ^{The remainder is provided by a wide variety of} ~~The Big Five in the provision of educational services -- in the order of numbers of adults served are -- schools, colleges and universities, community organizations, industry, and professional associations.~~

Industry has been called the "shadow educational system," although in terms of sheer size, industry casts a mighty long shadow. It is estimated that employers spend as much on ~~in-house~~ training and education as all 50 states combined appropriate for higher education. At least 45,000 full-time corporate employees devote all or most of their time to educational duties. Those duties range from skills training to education for cognitive and personal development. Their educational settings vary from the equivalent of the one-room schoolhouse to elaborate campuses to satellites bouncing educational programs into the offices and classrooms of vast multinational firms.

Professional associations too are becoming the builders of vast educational networks. Health professionals, accountants, lawyers, and business men and women are more likely than not to be participating in some form of continuing education offered through their professional associations. Last year, the American Management Association, for example, offered more than 3,000 business seminars and enrolled more than 100,000 learners. ~~But even the AMA's vast educational enterprise has no corner on the market for business education. It is estimated that 3000 different providers, many of them private entrepreneurs, are conducting some 40,000 public business seminars each year.~~

Museums and libraries are also important providers of educational programs. One-fourth of the nation's museums are now engaged in rather formal educational work, offering classes, workshops, and seminars in addition to their exhibits. The painting class for parents and children offered by the New York Metropolitan Museum symbolizes the true concept of lifelong learning which is, after all, far more than adult education. It means involving young children early in the experiences and attitudes that lead to a lifetime of learning.

I cite all of this evidence of growing numbers of educational options to demonstrate that education has moved from an isolated phenomenon, confined to certain years of life and certain institutions of society, to a pervasive influence throughout the society.

Until quite recently, there has been a pronounced tendency in industrialized nations to increase the separation between

education, work, and leisure. The result has been termed the "linear lifeplan" in which education is for the young, work for the middle aged, and leisure for the elderly. With the growing popularity of education for people of all ages, we are moving toward what might be called a "blended lifeplan," in which education, work, and leisure are concurrent throughout the lifespan. Instead of spending four years of full-time study on a college campus and then moving to forty years of full-time work, the blended lifeplan calls for a blend of work, study, and leisure throughout the 60 years of more of adulthood.

The blended lifeplan can address, not only the urgent demands for lifelong education for the work force, but it can also address personal and societal problems that are arising for youth, the elderly, two-career families, and mid-career executives. There are increasing demands from a variety of people for greater balance in their lives -- more job sharing, more part-time educational arrangements, and more leisure.

The trends are clear. Increasing numbers of adults are participating in some form of organized instruction. More college students are pursuing their studies part-time. More businesses and corporations are emphasizing the development of human resources through education and training. Knowledge continues to escalate. New technologies plus networks of advisers and educators are making it possible to deliver education to remote and previously unserved populations. And finally, education has expanded beyond traditional institutions of education to pervade the entire society. When most of

society's people are engaged in learning, and many of society's organizations are engaged in teaching, the Learning Society has arrived. But if the Learning Society is to serve us equitably and well, leadership and planning are needed on a scale not previously imagined.

We have all heard it said that the railroads failed, not because there was no longer a need for their services -- indeed, the need for transportation was growing at the time -- but because the tunnel vision of the railroad operators concentrated on running the railroad, instead of preparing for the expansion of the transportation industry. There is some chances that in our current enthusiasm for developing ~~presidential~~ managers who can "run the ^{Schools and} colleges," we will fail to develop leaders with the vision to see the developing education industry.

The New York Board of Regents, whose bicentennial we celebrate, is unique in that from the beginning, its responsibilities included not only schools and colleges, but the major public cultural and educational institutions of libraries and museums. Admittedly the State of New York got off to a strong start 200 years ago by interpreting the educational needs of its citizens broadly, but New York State has continued to set the pace nationally. A little over a decade ago, the New York Regents anticipated the Learning Society by launching the Regents External Degree, which takes as its operating premise that learning opportunities surround us and that what one knows is more important than where one learned it. If the college degree is to maintain its particular meaning, however, quality must be

assured by the degree-granting authority, and the Board of Regents has been careful to move toward dual goals of equality with quality.

The New York Board of Regents should be commended for continuing their leadership in educational planning. Most recently, the Regents adopted the far reaching set of "Goals for Adult Learning Services" which is a model of planning for the Learning Society in the Year 2000. It is nice to be 200 years old and surviving, but to be 200 years old and playing a major leadership role in the development of the Learning Society is just cause for pride and celebration.

A toast then to "New York. Where Learning Never Ends."