

ONE EYE ON THE FUTURE

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I am delighted to be here, and I would like to start by
thanking you for this honor. *I am deeply honored to receive an*
"outstanding service award" from a group of AE who should
recognize "outstanding service to AE from your own experience
~~I can't think of any title that would be much more important than "Adult Educator of the Year"--in this year, 1987, because I think 1987 marks in so many ways our growing awareness of the learning society, and "adult educator" because I see adult education as the new frontier in education. It is growing rapidly in stature as a professional field of study.~~

What should an "Adult Educator of the Year" say to a group such as this, representing an incredible array of interests, constituencies, experiences, and goals? In one way, the diversity of the organizations you represent symbolizes one of the greatest problems in adult education--namely, what is it? It covers every level of learning from literacy training to post-professional education in medicine and law. It covers every conceivable topic, from leisure time activities to learning that is essential to livelihood and survival. It applies to widely different developmental phases, from the career orientation of learners in their twenties and thirties to the reflective interests of those in their seventies and eighties. Its teaching faculties range from those who are barely one step ahead of their

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students, to hobbyists who are so steeped in their subject that their passion for teaching it to others verges on obsession. It includes traditional college faculty members exposed for the first time to the motivations and rich backgrounds of experience that adults bring to college classrooms, as well as corporate trainers who are re-educating workers to the changing work place. The "campuses" of adult educators range from store fronts to community college and university classrooms, to corporate headquarters, to student living rooms. How can anyone get a handle on adult education and make some general observations about its future? I am not really sure I know. But I suppose any analysis of the future has to start with the trends that we can see and identify in the present.

The most easily measured trend is the demographic march toward an aging society. ~~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).~~ In 1970, the United States was basically a youth culture, with people under the age of 29 constituting a majority (52%) of the population. By the year 2000, the United States will be an adult culture, with those over 30 years of age constituting 57% of the population (Bureau of the Census, 1977).

The case for lifelong learning, however, goes beyond the demographics of the birth rate to reflect changing needs and changing life styles. Society has changed from an industrial society to an information society in a very brief span of time. When I was in college, 17% of the jobs in America involved the processing of information; today more than half of all jobs

require the ability to deal with information. The personal and social tragedy of illiteracy has been brought dramatically to the attention of the American public recently. The message is brief and spells lifelong disappointment for millions of American adults. The individual who cannot read cannot make it in the information society. Perhaps not as tragic, but just as real, are the problems faced by the tax lawyer who does not engage in learning to keep up with the latest advances in her field, or the assembly line worker who lacks the attitudes toward learning that are necessary for re-training. Across the broad spectrum of jobs, continuous learning is fast becoming a necessity.

Unfortunately, not everyone is a participant in the emerging learning society. For those who are not, the future holds little promise, not even the faintly reassuring thought that they can retain their present position while the world changes about them. For what the world seems to be doing is leaving the poorly educated on the sidelines while the already well educated are taking the fast track to ever more education. One of the most consistent findings of all of the research in adult learning is that the more formal education people have, the more they want, and the more they participate in a wide variety of educational opportunities (Cross, 1981). A college graduate is seven times as likely as a high school drop-out to be participating in some form of organized learning, and the gap between the well educated and the poorly educated is widening rather than narrowing as the learning society picks up speed. The almost certain result is that as opportunities for education grow so will the gap between the educational "haves" and "have

notes."

The situation is far easier to understand than to remedy. Almost everything the college graduate does adds to the probability of further education while almost everything the high school drop-out does militates against it. The college graduate frequently enters an employee training program and works for a company or in an occupation that is likely, not only to support further education, but to require it. College graduates typically belong to social and professional groups that discuss educational opportunities; spouses and friends are supportive and admiring of educational accomplishments. And finally, those who continued in school long enough to graduate from college were usually happy and successful in school, and are familiar with the procedures and people that inhabit educational institutions.

The situation is exactly the reverse for the poorly educated. They enter low paying jobs with few educational requirements and no educational benefits. They consort with friends and family who know little about education and may even be hostile to it; they lack the information to know about opportunities and the skills to take advantage of them. They are on the downward spiral with respect to education, and they become the hard core under-educated, taking up life styles and values that spawn new generations of under-educated.

What I hope lies in the future of adult education, is a wider and more varied system of entrances into the learning society that will encourage participation from broader segments of the population. That means more flexibility and more cooperation among the multiple providers of the Learning Society.

Colleges and universities today provide a little over a third of the organized learning opportunities for adults; the remaining two-thirds is provided by a vast array of schools and non-collegiate providers, many of whom offer everything colleges do and more. They may offer credit, degrees, education leading to promotion, licensure, personal fulfillment, intellectual stimulation, and practical skills. Industry, for example, spends 30 billion dollars annually on the education and training of employees (Carnevale, 1986). That means that business currently allocates more money for education and training than all fifty states combined allocate for higher education (Lynton and Elman, 1987). Aetna, Xerox, IBM, and other corporate giants have built campuses with classrooms and residence halls that rival anything offered in our most exclusive and expensive colleges. Some corporations have the largest teaching forces in the nation. IBM employed 6,000 full-time instructors last year, and the banking industry offered 1.3 formal courses for every employee (Carnevale, 1986).

Professional associations, too, are becoming the builders of vast educational networks. The American Management Association conducts 3,200 programs annually, and enrolls 100,000 learners, but even they have no corner on the market for the most popular of all adult education courses---business. It is estimated that 3,000 different providers, many of them private entrepreneurs, conduct some 40,000 public business seminars each year.

Added to these providers are the military services, which provide education and learning for 4 million students, and government which claims 15 million workers, half of whom

undertake some form of organized instruction each year (Hodgkinson, 1985).

You know better than I the enormous range of learning activities provided by the member organizations of the Coalition. These multiple learning opportunities for adults represent the flowering of the Learning Society. But they also create a blurring of the roles of learning providers.

It used to be that colleges provided "education" while employers provided "training." But colleges today are heavily involved in training as well as in education, and the programs of many corporations contain as much emphasis on theory, research, and personal development as those of any college. Consider, for example, this description of IBM's Systems Research Institute:

The Institute's educational philosophy is in many ways that of a university. It stresses fundamental and conceptual education and allows students to choose those courses that will best nurture their own development. The intent is to stimulate and challenge, to teach the theoretical and the practical, to discuss and argue differing viewpoints, to broaden the individual, focusing on his or her special skills.

(IBM Systems, 1981, p. 6)

Contrast that broad educational philosophy with this course description taken from a college catalogue. The course is called Airline Reservations and carries three academic credits. The description reads as follows:

Prepares students for airline employment opportunities through a familiarization of the procedures involved in airline reservations, the use of official airline guides, and airline route structures.

If one were given a blind sample of course descriptions today, it would be hard to tell whether they came from industry,

colleges, museums, labor unions, or professional associations.

A related blurring of educational functions occurs in the distinction between credit and non-credit learning. Non-colleges are now beginning to offer not only fully legitimate credit courses, but full-scale degree programs. A 1985 study (Eurich, 1985) identified 18 corporation-founded institutions that have been accredited (or have applied for such status) and granted permission to give academic degrees. Most grant bachelors and masters degrees, but they range from Associate through Ph.D. The director of the study concluded that "it would not be too fanciful to foresee 100--if not hundreds--of corporate degree programs in the next fifty years."

While the image of academic degrees offered by these corporate colleges is still mildly sensational, the movement of collegiate institutions into the realm of non-credit instruction is now commonplace. Between 1968 and 1978 more than a thousand colleges began to develop non-credit programs. Today it is the norm rather than the exception for degree-granting colleges to be involved in non-degree instruction.

But whether a course was originally taken for credit is not especially important today. It is increasingly easy to convert non-credit learning into college degrees. Just a decade ago only about a third of American colleges granted credit if students could demonstrate on standardized examinations that they knew the material; today 93 percent of all colleges grant credit by examination, and 90 percent accept GED test scores as the equivalent of a high school diploma. Ten years ago, only 14 percent of the colleges would consider granting credit for

experiential learning; today more than one-third do (Stadtman, 1980; Hexter and Andersen, 1986).

Colleges are increasingly likely to grant credit for instruction offered outside the educational mainstream. More than three-quarters of all colleges grant credit for courses offered by the armed services, and 38 percent grant academic credit for courses conducted by business and industry (Hexter and Andersen, 1986). The American Council on Education's Office of Education Credit lists over 2,000 courses offered by more than 180 corporations and government agencies. Credit for these courses has been recommended by college faculty members making site visits.

Illustrations of the blurring of once distinctive functions for educational providers could be extended, but my point is that the educational frontier is very large. There are new obligations for educators to work with others to build a lifelong educational system that will meet the demands of the learning society. I suggest that the building of that educational system should receive high priority on the nation's agenda, as well as on the agenda of every state. New York already has the best start on planning for the learning society of any state in the nation. The goals for adult learning services adopted by the Regents in 1981 represent a far-sighted and creative piece of work. Their goals are stated as accomplishments of the Year 2000 and they provide perhaps the best glimpse possible of what would lie in the future if realistic planning were in place today. If New York realizes her goals, we would find these accomplishments by the Year 2000:

- Learning by adults is recognized, encouraged and supported as a matter of public policy.
- Learning occurs throughout the community in places and times convenient to adult learners.
- Providers of services collaborate to assure a full range of offerings and effective use of resources.
- New learning technologies are widely used at home and at work.
- All who need instruction in the core skills receive it free of charge.
- Information and guidance services are readily available.
- Informed consumer choice assures high quality services from all providers.
- Appropriate recognition for learning is provided, so that however achieved, educational accomplishment can be validated and used for occupational advancement, entry to advanced study, or other purposes.
- Adult learners and the private sector provide most of the support for learning opportunities.
- Public funding plays a key role in assuring the availability of learning services and access to them.

(New York State Education
Department, 1981).

These are comprehensive and enlightened goals, but alas, they are goals not accomplishments. And there are some significant stumbling blocks on the way to making them

accomplishments. Let me set before you three major issues that will have to be addressed if we are to enter the learning society envisioned by the planners in New York State.

1) What are we to do about the growing gap between the well-educated and the poorly educated? Adult education has a long tradition of being voluntary. But virtually every study undertaken to describe volunteer learners concludes that those most likely to volunteer are those whom policy makers are least interested in reaching. It is the well-educated who rush to take advantage of each new educational opportunity while the poorly educated stay away in droves. What if anything can we do about that? Do we preserve the right of free and individual choice or do we require certain people to participate, presumably for their own good as well as for the collective good? Educational requirements for young people have usually been enforced without controversy because in our collective wisdom, we have agreed that education is good and necessary for children. Now that we know that learning is also necessary for adults, do we have as much right to mandate continuing education for adults as we have to make education compulsory for school children? Education is being mandated in many professions by licensing agencies and state legislatures now. Do we like that trend or not?

2) My second issue is closely related to the first, but it involves the growing educational inequities among states and regions of this nation. In the absence of any overall policy regarding adult education, states with high levels of educational attainment will gradually pull away from states with a poorly educated populace. California already has one of the best-

educated adult populations in the nation, and a recent study showed that 42 percent of the adult population in California participated in some form of organized instruction last year.

The problem, if one chooses to call it that, is that adults with high levels of education are more interested in education than their less well-educated peers; they are more articulate and effective in expressing their demands for education; they create a climate of acceptance for adult learning that is contagious throughout the state, thereby driving up the participation which drives up the demand. Should the nation be concerned about the growing gap in the human resources of poor states versus rich? Should federal policy strive for some sort of equitable development of adult education?

I think it is fair to say that there is no federal policy regarding lifelong learning at this time. Some think there should not be (Green, Ericson, and Seidman, 1977; Ziegler, 1977; Fellenz, 1981), while others argue that "the federal government should assume a major role if not become the key leadership agency in adult education" (Moore, 1981, p.208). Arguments for federal involvement concern the usual issues of equity, money, and coordination. Arguments against revolve around the preservation of freedom and diversity and the history of ineffectiveness of federal coordination. Warren Ziegler (1977, p.17) sums up the objections to federal involvement in these words, "The history of public educational policy leads to the conclusion that to support means to define, curtail, render accountable, and ultimately govern. Lifelong learning should not be governed. It just should be." When adult educators come to Washington, if they come ,

what should they ask for--to be helped or to be let alone?

3) Finally, I don't know whether to call this third issue a "trend" or not, but there appears to be an increasing tendency for adults to seek formal recognition for their participation in educational activities. The Continuing Education Unit (CEU) is increasing in availability as well as in popularity. Some corporations, as I noted earlier, are seeking degree-granting authority. Most significant, perhaps, is the growing interest on the part of adults in traditional college credit. Folklore, bolstered by research, has long maintained that adults are "mature" learners, more interested in learning than in credit. Now it appears that adults are just as interested in credit as young people--a rude shock to those who held out hope that the Learning Society would help correct some of the faults of the credentialed society. Two factors, I suspect, are responsible for the rising interest in credit for adult learning: First, adults are beginning to use education in much the same way that youth use it--to enhance job qualifications. Second, obtaining college credit for adult learning has become a realistic expectation because colleges are interested in adult part-time learners and are giving their support and blessing to a great variety of efforts to convert non-collegiate education into college credits.

What is the appropriate role of credit in the Learning Society? Are we reschooling rather than deschooling society through the extension of the traditional trappings of schooling into the adult years? Do we need a common currency for lifelong learning; if so, is college credit an appropriate standard? If

the courses taught by industry are deemed equivalent to those taught by colleges, should industry be given degree-granting authority? If industry offers degrees, can professional associations be far behind? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I would like to see them placed on our agenda for discussion.

Most of the questions I have raised this morning are premised on my belief that the Learning Society is different in kind rather than different in degree from traditional education. Just as lifelong learning is something more than the extension of education into the adult years, so the Learning Society involves more than traditional schools and colleges. I am convinced that education will be playing a very different role in the Year 2000 that it plays today. I am not as confident that we know what we want or how to get there.

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