

ADULT EDUCATION: NEW DIMENSIONS

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The definition of adult education is gradually being changed to "the art and science of helping maturing human beings learn." Since most adults are part-time learners, learning opportunities must be made available to them at times and places that are convenient to them and that provide easy entry and exit.

UNTIL only two or three years ago, "lifelong education" was used in the literature interchangeably with "continuing education," "post-secondary education," and "adult education," although many writers (Hesburgh, 1973; Houle, 1964; Jessup, 1969) seemed to inject more of a flavor of continuity of learning than is necessarily contained in the other phrases. Clearly, "lifelong education" entered our lexicon as a description of the continuation of learning beyond youthful schooling.

But around 1972 the phrase began to be used with a new meaning, namely, continuous systematic education from birth to death. A prime cause of the change was the publication in that year of one of the most important educational documents of the century—the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education,

published by UNESCO under the title *Learning To Be*. The Commission found that the accelerating pace of change that will characterize the world of the future will require that education no longer be concerned primarily with transmitting what is known, but with engaging human beings in a process of inquiry throughout their lives. Its first recommendation was stated as follows: "We propose lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries" (UNESCO, 1972, p. 182).

A Lifelong Concept

Its suggestion that the implications of this concept for school curriculum should be explored was taken up immediately by the UNESCO Institute for Education, which convened a task force to plan a ten-year program of research and development. The first undertaking of the Institute was the identification of the "concept-characteristics" of lifelong education. A sampling of a few of the 20 concept-characteristics it identified will help to lay a foundation for the rest of this article:

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● Lifelong education is not confined to adult education but it encompasses and unifies all stages of education—pre-primary, primary, secondary, and so forth. Thus it seeks to view education in its totality.

● Lifelong education includes both formal and non-formal patterns of education, planned as well as incidental learning.

● The community plays an important role in the system of lifelong education from the time the child begins to interact with it, and continues its educative functions both in professional and general areas throughout life.

● The institutions of education like schools, universities, and training centers are, of course, important, but only as one of the agencies for lifelong education. They no longer enjoy the monopoly for educating people and can no longer exist in isolation from other educative agencies in society.

● Lifelong education is characterized by its flexibility and diversity in content, learning tools, techniques, and time of learning (Dave, 1973, pp. 14-24).

The thrust toward reorganizing all of education around the concept of lifelong learning which was launched by UNESCO in 1972 has spread across the world with surprising speed. There is wide recognition that what is involved is truly revolutionary—not just the grafting of additional programs for adults onto traditional schooling, but the redefinition of the purpose of schooling as being to produce self-directed lifelong learners and the creation of different kinds of resources for lifelong learners.

In our country, Phi Delta Kappa has created a Commission on Curriculum Models for Lifelong Education, the U.S. Office of Education has convened conferences on lifelong education, respectable journals (of which this issue of *Educational Leadership* is but one example) have devoted issues to the subject, and many educational institutions (especially community schools, non-traditional study programs, and external degree programs) have started experimenting with new curriculums designed to produce lifelong learners.



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In France, Germany, India, Japan, the Scandinavian countries, and in many other places, even greater excitement with the concept has been engendered. The depth and extensiveness of these developments in only a few years convinces me that we are talking here about a truly revolutionary movement, not just another fad.

Role of Adult Education

What is the role of adult education in all of this? In a nutshell, it has been at the heart of it and is one of its chief sources of energy. Why should this be so, when adult education for so long occupied such a peripheral position in the educational establishment? I think there are several reasons. For one thing, adult education has been working all along with voluntary learners, so when a new theory of self-directed lifelong learning was needed, it had a backlog of experience out of which one could be produced.

For another thing, adult education, because of its historically peripheral position, has been freer than traditional schooling from the constraints of academic rules and regulations (admissions standards, degree

credit, residence requirements, time limits), and so was able to experiment with more flexible, time-free, space-free ways of delivering educational services. Finally, the fact that the clientele of education has veered rapidly toward older, part-time, goal-oriented, easy-entry, easy-exit students in the past few years has put adult education in the position of being the best hope for economic survival of many educational institutions; and its respectability and credibility have soared.

So what are the contributions and new dimensions of adult education in this era of educational ferment?

In the first place, adult education is providing the theoretical framework for lifelong education. The traditional theories of learning, both behaviorist and cognitive, only explain how to instruct, not how to facilitate lifelong learning. Lifelong education requires a new theory that takes into account physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and occupational development through the life span; that explains learning as a process of inquiry and illuminates the competencies necessary to engage in this process; and that provides guidelines for performance of the new roles (for example, facilitators, resource persons, information managers) required to facilitate that process.

A theoretical formulation of the art and science of helping adults learn began taking shape in Europe in the early 1960's under the label "andragogy," to distinguish it from "pedagogy," the art and science of teaching children (Savicevic, 1968). The theoretical framework and label were introduced into this country in 1968 (Knowles, 1968) and there has been a growing body of research and theory on adult development (Goulet and Baltes, 1970; Kaluger and Kaluger, 1974; Maas and Kuypers, 1974) and adult learning (Bischof, 1969; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970 and 1973; Leagans, Copeland, and Kaiser, 1971; Long, 1971 and 1973; and Tough, 1971) in the ensuing years.

The core concepts of andragogical theory are that adults have a psychological need to be self-directing; that their richest resource for learning is the analysis of their own experience; that they become ready to learn as

they experience the need to learn in order to confront developmental tasks; and that their orientation toward learning is one of concern for immediate application. A related notion is that since most adults are part-time learners, learning opportunities must be made available to them at times and places that are convenient to them and must provide easy entry and exit.

"Helping Maturing Human Beings Learn"

Although andragogical theory was originally constructed out of experience with and studies of adult learners, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the assumptions about learning on which it is based have application in varying degrees to learners of all ages. Accordingly its definition is gradually being changed to "the art and science of helping maturing human beings learn."

The new dimension of the national educational enterprise in which "the adult education approach" is having its chief expression is the non-traditional study and external degree programs which have experienced such explosive growth in the last five years (Commission on Non-Traditional Study, 1973; Gould and Cross, 1972; Hall, 1974; Houle, 1973; Milton, 1973; Meyer, 1975; Vermilye, 1972 and 1974). Their chief characteristics are that they provide learning opportunities at times, places, and paces that are convenient to learners; they give academic credit for what individuals have learned on their own; and they engage the learner in a process of self-directed inquiry.

This last characteristic is the main hurdle that is holding up rapid progress at the moment. The fact is that most students have been so conditioned by their previous schooling to be dependent learners that they have not developed the attitudes and skills required to take responsibility for their own learning. A related hurdle that many non-traditional programs are facing is the fact that few teachers know how to serve as facilitators and resources to self-directed learners. Thus a new challenge has been

given to adult education: the massive retraining of teachers (of both youth and adults) to perform the new role of facilitator of learning and to design learning experiences which will give students the skills of self-directed learning. This is such a recent development that not much has appeared in the literature about it yet, but I can testify that an increasing amount of my own energy is going toward faculty retraining in school systems, community colleges, and universities; and some literature is beginning to appear to facilitate the process (Berte, 1975; Knowles, 1975).

Other new dimensions of adult education that perhaps should be mentioned as

having a relationship to "Education: The Lifelong Quest," although they have been on the scene for some time, include the extensive programs of adult basic education in the public schools and community colleges of the country; the explosive growth of continuing professional education (increasingly mandated by relicensure laws) in medicine, nursing, engineering, law, education, and other professions; the proliferation of multimedia learning systems; the mushrooming of community schools; the growth of staff development programs in business, government, and industry; and the spread of contract learning as the instrument of individualized program development.

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