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## ADULT EDUCATION—AN INROAD TO CHANGE

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TOM MAYES

In man's way of thinking, an elephant who has been taught to stand on his hind legs and do a two-step to the circus music, and a parakeet who has been taught to say, "That's a rank prank, Frank," are educated animals. However, it does not necessarily follow that a man who has been taught to splice telephone wires, operate a computer, or fill out an invoice is an educated man.

Yet too many of us have the smug assumption that enough training to equip us with the essentials of a livelihood is training enough for life in our world. If this were true, if education were so unimportant an ingredient in our social design, races would not riot, small children would not starve, and our jails would not be nearly as cramped and unaccommodating as they are now.

When we find that these faults are prevalent in our society even though billions of dollars are being spent yearly on education, then something is amiss in education and something is wrong with our society. The fact that the Federal government is intervening with education is in itself a devastating indictment, and can be regarded as a no-confidence vote on a free public's ability to deal directly and effectively with the demands made on our schools by business and industry, human relations, urban growth, international pressures. It hints darkly that public education, because of public neglect, has become somewhat obsolete.

The current scramble for answers, as reflected in the number of experimental programs sponsored by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, must be regarded as an awareness on the part of educators that change is in order. It might be that what this country really needs is a good five-cent hypothesis on how to develop a true education system and how to do away with the "scholastic establishments" from which over 30% of the youth in the United States drop out annually.

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Ironically, and by habit, people react strangely in a panic. We often rush madly in all directions seeking newfangled remedies to curb an epidemic, put out a fire, stem the tides of unemployment, crime, or corruption, while quite often overlooking good, solid answers right at our fingertips. In the search for guidelines out of our educational dilemma, one form of public learning—adult education—has been sadly overlooked for its novelty both in content and design. Because adult education is essentially education according to need, it has not yet fallen into any set pattern or fixed dimensions. It is always changing. Its very flexibility suggests a blueprint for other forms of organized education to follow.

Adult education is voluntary, not compulsory, education; yet more people are now enrolled in adult continuing education classes in the U. S. than in the kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools combined. It does not take a speculative turn of mind to realize that here we have one form of education which is selling itself on its own merits and its own appeal. Adult education does not exist exclusively to teach a man to earn a living, nor is it a hodgepodge of subjects cooked up to satisfy the neurotic fringe of our grown-up population. In any adult education classroom one will find people seriously bent on becoming better citizens, better parents, better homemakers. Adult education is something comparatively new, but it has arrived.

What makes it successful? Undoubtedly something is to be said for the greater amount of leisure time we now have and for an awareness that all of the important things we should understand cannot be adequately comprehended in our youth. On the other hand, something must also be said for adult education's holding power. What makes it attractive? What is so different about adult education which leaves it relatively unscrupled when considered alongside other forms of education? The answer lies in the fact that adult education offers the highest possible degree of the freedom to the people who work in the classroom. It gives them the right to experiment and to make their own mistakes. This freedom is a necessary characteristic if adult education is going to meet with the shifting needs of a changing society.

As a result of this creative freedom, adult education has become so "personalized" in its approach that perhaps no two classes anywhere are very much alike. But since interests, abilities and skills of adults range so widely, this is good, and it helps to explain why a program or a course which works well in San Diego may not be the answer to the needs of the people in Findlay, Ohio. The by-

word in adult education is "Stay loose! Try something that looks good and see what happens."

For deaf persons, adult education is the one form of schooling which offers them a chance to tailor their own programs and a right to plan their own destinies. It grants them almost full say on just what kind of learning is most needed and best for them. In no other form of education is this freedom so great. Moreover, the needs of deaf people, insofar as adult education can meet them, are not disproportionate with the needs of the public as a whole. What is disproportionate is the number of available programs in adult education for the deaf. Most existing programs, although sporadic and incidental nationally, are thriving. Rehabilitation workers can do much to start many more programs. They can do this by making adult education leaders aware of the need.

However, as is true with any new undertaking, teachers of adult classes for the deaf do not yet hold all the answers to all the needs of the deaf. None of us are very sure right now how deaf adults can best be helped to improve their English and grammar. Deaf people are not falling over themselves to upgrade their language skill although this skill admittedly is the key to broader social and vocational opportunities for many of them. A number of approaches are being used, cautiously and experimentally. In Wisconsin, a weekly newspaper, *News for You* (published by Laubach Literary, Inc., Box 131, Syracuse, N. Y. 13210), produced in easy English, is provided for each student. Classroom work deviates from the formal schooling approach by using drills in transformational-generative grammar. Another approach, used by Leonard Warshawsky in Chicago, incorporates high interest current events readings clipped from newspapers and magazines, carefully screened for vocabulary range. In our own project here in Flint, we have tried programmed reading, which, according to tests, has resulted in some gains, but has not shown the holding power necessary for a successful adult education program. As a result, we have switched emphasis toward classes which may give adults a greater desire to read, much in line with the hypothesis that people learn more if motivated toward a goal. For the past two years, Earl Jones, a veteran teacher at the Michigan School for the Deaf, has conducted an inspiring course in Current Affairs, using visiting speakers to supplement his own highly interesting talks on local, national and international issues. If such a class can give deaf adults a better understanding and interest in their community and the world about

them, they may be moved to read more, which after all may be the best language therapy there is.

Only three ideas have been mentioned, which leaves acres of room for enterprising teachers to try creative experimenting and research.

Another critical problem which adult education can and should meet is the up-grading of functionally retarded or multiply-handicapped deaf persons culturally and vocationally. What can we do in a truly constructive way to help these people after they have been exposed to all available formal schooling and are yet economically and socially dependent? In medium-size communities these people comprise too small a number to justify special programs. Dealing with them must be so individualistic that a costly one-and-one teaching situation may be the only answer. The Prevocational Program carried out in Lansing, Michigan, during 1963-65 by Stahl Butler and Edna Adler, and which is now centered at the Michigan Rehabilitation Institute, has provided some dramatic results. But can all communities do this? Can local school boards be persuaded to recognize the value of cloistered and costly programs when faced with routine needs of thousands of adults not so afflicted?

Two stumbling blocks curtailing the growth of such programs and, for that matter, all other adult education programs for the deaf, are shortages of financing and shortages of teachers skilled in the language of signs. It may take an old adult education hand to find all possible sources of funding. Adult education programs in large cities have growing budgets and at least 20 states provide some form of financial aid for adult education through the public schools. In addition, here are a few "hidden" sources, all coming from the federal government:

#### THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT (P. L. 89-750)

*Useful Work Training for Unemployed Adults (Title II, Section 205E)*. Appropriated for fiscal year 1967: \$36.5 million. This is a program of grants for work-training programs for chronically unemployed adults in such areas as conservation, neighborhood development, or management of natural resources and recreational areas. It includes basic literacy and occupational training, work training and employment programs for unemployed adults and low-income persons in subprofessional occupations in the fields of health, education, welfare, and public safety.

*Special Projects in Adult Basic Education (Title II, Section 211-3)*.

Appropriated for fiscal year 1967: \$7 million. This section provides grants for special projects in adult basic education for low-income individuals over 18 years of age. Projects must show promise of enabling persons receiving welfare payments to obtain employment and should take innovative approaches to solving this problem.

*Work Experience and Training Programs (Title V)*. Appropriated for fiscal year 1967: \$100 million. This program expands work experience and training programs for persons in farm families with less than \$1,200 net family income, unemployed heads of families, and other needy persons who are unable to support themselves or their families.

*National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (Funded by P.L. 88-579 and P.L. 89-209)*. Appropriated for fiscal year 1967: \$8 million. According to the law, there is no reason why grants could not be given to public adult schools. Funds are provided to complement and assist programs for advancement of the arts, develop wider audiences for the arts, and stimulate appreciation for the artist and his works. In the humanities, workshops are founded in modern and classical languages, literature, history, philosophy, archeology, criticism, theory and practice of the arts, and aspects of the social sciences with humanistic content. For information, write to the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, 1800 G St., N. W., Room 1126, Washington, D. C. 20506.

*Supplementary Educational Centers and Services (P.L. 89-750)*. Appropriated for fiscal year 1967: \$145 million. This is Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—Projects To Advance Creativity in Education (PACE). Grants are made to local public education agencies to improve existing programs, to add new ones, and to develop innovative programs to serve as models. Centers and services can be for adults. Funds can be used for comprehensive academic services, vocational guidance and counseling, and general adult education. Apply directly to the Division of Plans and Supplementary Centers, U. S. Office of Education, 400 Maryland Ave., S.W., Washington, D. C. 20201, for information and application forms.

*The Vocational Education Act (P.L. 88-210)*—Appropriated for fiscal year 1967: \$196.2 million. This Act, along with the Smith-Hughes Act, the George-Barden Act, and other occasional bills provides funds (approximately \$254 million have been appropriated) to state boards of vocational education for promotion and development of vocational training programs. There is no specific amount set aside for adult programs, but the intention of the Act is to

provide vocational training "for persons of all ages in all communities of the state." It applies to adults who need retraining and are not receiving it under MDTA. It also provides funds for teacher training, construction, and evaluation of materials. For further information, write to your state board of vocational education.

*The Older Americans Act (P.L. 89-73)* Title IV finances research and demonstration projects involving innovative approaches to teaching older citizens. The projects can relate to basic, vocational, and general adult education. Particularly encouraged are projects that would help older persons share more fully in community opportunities and services. These conceivably could be classes in which older citizens learn about community opportunities.

Teachers can be drawn from state schools for the deaf and from local day school programs. Extensive preparation of adult education teachers is not usually necessary since, in the first place, instructors will not know what the teaching problems will be until they meet their first classes. Here they are apt to find heterogeneous groups with varying skill levels. Veteran adult teachers can be especially effective when supplied with capable interpreters.

Experienced leaders in adult education have learned to forget the meaning of the word "frustration." They have come to realize that every newly initiated program is not going to be a landed success and that attendance may taper off after the first exciting exposure. However, this is not to be regarded as failure but as an invitation to improvise. Attendance is going to depend largely on the satisfied customer factor and a humanistic freshness of approach. Adult education which succeeds is the kind that provides an awakening to one's own nature and ground of being and all the exhilarating thoughts which that awareness brings.

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