

# Notes on Adult Education

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## (I)

On November 26, 1951, we visited Taft Youth and Adult Center in Bronx 57, New York City. It was Monday evening, I remember, and the scenes I found there were quite different from what I had expected. In the first class were the Spanish guitars being played, in the next people were playing chess and ping-pong, and then came dancing, sight-singing, oil-painting, woodwork, dressmaking, leathercraft, typing, bookkeeping, making home decorations, radio repair, English, etc. What impressed me most was that people looked so happy that I had to ask myself if it was school at all.

What would be "adult education"? Wilson and Kandel say that it is used "to refer in the main to the formal institutional provision of education for men and women who have left school and who seek to make up for deficiencies in their early education or to pursue some special cultural or practical interest."<sup>1)</sup> And Russell and Judd define it only as the following: "A group of educational activities which differ considerably from the ordinary services of the conventional school system are commonly referred to as adult education."<sup>2)</sup> Actually it may take any form we can think of.

## (II)

Then can the adult learn anything? The next quotation will answer the question.

Thorndike and others have shown, quite contrary to the general assumption, that the ability to learn does not decrease with adulthood, that it probably reaches its peak at about age twenty-five or thirty, and the decline thereafter is at a slow rate, probably not more than 1 per cent a year. These investigations indicate that, so far as capacity is concerned, the average adult is probably more able to learn than the average child in the elementary school.<sup>3)</sup>

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1) Wilson and Kandel, *Introduction to the Study of American Education*, p. 278.

2) Russell and Judd, *The American Educational System*, p. 363.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 364.

Therefore if the adults want to learn, they need not fear their age; they have only to start.

The adult education is useful, as can be imagined very easily, and even necessary to both the individual adults and the society. In our home country, Japan, some situations resemble those in the U. S. A., where "Adult education increased and became more systematized after World War.....Because the reduction of working hours necessitated education for leisure,"<sup>4)</sup> and it "advanced during the depression years (1929-1939)

- a. Because of the need of the unemployed and unsatisfactorily employed to improve their vocational chances.
- b. To provide 'relief jobs' for unemployed teachers."<sup>5)</sup>

Japan now holds these elements at the same time: there are many unemployed people, and even if employed, it is often so-called "half-unemployment," because workers are obliged to have leisure against their will, and teachers, too, want to work outside their regular professions, and of course some lucky people have enough time to spend as they choose but they do not know how to spend it. It is somewhat regretful, and only thinking of the unlucky, we feel the adult education should be much more promoted. The following information is helpful in that it suggests a solution at least in the problems concerned with teachers.

The most important single agency in the recent development of programs of adult education has been the Federal Government. ... the development of facilities for adult education proved to be an exceptionally good method of furnishing relief during the economic depression of the 1930's, because qualified persons on the relief rolls could be put to work teaching classes of adults who were clamoring for instruction along many lines. The teaching under such circumstances proved to be surprisingly effective; the teacher was assured of employment only so long as he could hold his class, and when he failed to maintain the interest and attendance of his class group, he was judged a failure at that type of work and was put into some other kind of relief employment.<sup>6)</sup>

### (III)

As defined in the first part of this paper, we know that the adult

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4) Linton and French, *Notes for Education 209M*, p. 145.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 146.

6) Russell and Judd, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

education is not necessarily given in a regular form and consequently not necessarily through school teachers. Linton and French give the scope and variety of agencies engaged in adult education in the U. S. A. as listed below :

- a. University and college summer schools.
- b. University extension classes.
- c. Public night (or evening) classes.
- d. Public continuation schools.
- e. Local, state, and national Parent-Teacher Associations.
- f. Public community centers.
- g. Adult education activities connected with Federal projects.
- h. Religious organizations.
- i. Public libraries.
- j. Newspapers.
- k. Books, magazines, movies, radio, and public museums.
- l. Educational programs sponsored by management groups in business and industry.
- m. Educational programs of labor unions.<sup>7)</sup>

I remember that the before mentioned Taft Youth and Adult Center was sponsored by the State of New York, admission being free except some small amount of money. In the present Japan, too, the help from national or local governments is most desired. Besides, the existing schools must be the handy facilities for this purpose. In the U. S. A. the predominant forms of agencies established by local and state school authorities for meeting the needs for adult education are as the following :

1. Night schools, especially for illiterates and for persons with deficient control of English as a spoken and written language. In such schools over one million persons were enrolled in 1930.
2. Part time and continuation vocational schools, most of them in connection with industrial schools for young people organized under the provisions of the Smith-Hughes Act.
3. Extension education.....This is almost the only public agency serving the agricultural and village population, and serve them exclusively. It has expected most of its effort on the production side of farming and on farm economics for men and upon home making for women. It does, however, stimulate local initiative which results indirectly in a more general type of education.
4. Vocational rehabilitation work, particularly for war veterans.
5. Citizenship schools, which like night schools, direct their major emphasis to language as a preparation of non-citizens for becom-

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7) Linton and French, *op. cit.*, pp. 146—148.

ing citizens.

6. Public lectures given in schools, libraries, museums, and churches.<sup>8)</sup>

While I stayed two or three times in a small village of Pennsylvania, the farmers' sons and daughters were observed to spend their evenings often doing nothing. But the Japanese youth do not need to imitate the richer nation. The first thing we can do is to get together at a nearest place and try to gain anything possible from anyone.

As it is known, Japanese people are not sociable, so first of all we should come out of our own families or at least try to talk about useful things even in our homes. Recently the summer schools or university extension courses have been served, but they are mainly for teachers who want higher status in their positions, and the public are left alone partly due to their indifference. Even the Parent-teachers Associations are stuck in a sort of mannerism and seem to be unaware of the possibility to increase parents' knowledge. In this point, the Walden school in New York City offers a good example of P. T. A. activities. Parents come to school in turn and learn something through their business besides understanding their children and educational matters. Moreover, under skillful guidance, they can learn, in practical ways, maintenance, child care, domestic economy and the like.<sup>9)</sup> Wilson and Kandel emphasize P. T. A., because this kind of open attitude leads to form "a nucleus for the formation of active groups seeking wide cultural opportunities"<sup>10)</sup> and social betterment.

One example of the simplest forms of getting together is suggested in *Recreation* magazine. Two people planned a bull session, which turned out a great success and stimulated promoting group activities in that community. The writer encourages readers assuring that it can take any form, any topics can be talked about, and that people will look for the next meeting eagerly.<sup>11)</sup> He shows the range of subjects in the list of speakers:

a Jewish rabbi, a fundamentalist pastor, a professor of economics, Republican and Democrat Congressional candidates, a technocrat, a world federalist, a geneticist, a professor of Chinese philosophy, a professor of the philosophy of aesthetics, a childpsychologist, a general

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8) Wilson and Kandel, *op. cit.*, pp. 287—288.

9) *Ibid* p. 289.

10) *Loc. cit.*

11) Hudson, "Bigger and Better Bull Sessions," *Recreation*, 44: 493-494, February 1951.

semanticist, an artist, a former diplomat and a representative of the American Medical Association speaking against socialized medicine. <sup>12)</sup>

I had the actual experience of this type while I stayed in Philadelphia for five days. Every night young people met for such purposes as: taking Chinese dishes and seeing TV; dinner and bowling; tea and listening to a christian missionary's table-talk, etc. These were always accompanied with bull sessions and prayers. People took their friends, who were known or unknown to the rest, and I met many different men and women, old and young, each time, and could get considerable amount of knowledge from those people. I was told that they usually met at their private parlors in turn, and I believe they meet still now just for the sake of their own pure pleasure. This is one of many things which I want to be done in our home towns, too. I cannot forget their expressiveness, their happy complexions, and the obvious educational effect upon the participants.

If the school and teachers are available, we can have "open forum"<sup>13)</sup> or "symposium,"<sup>14)</sup> or "lyceum"<sup>15)</sup> or "granges."<sup>16)</sup> As "the audience attitude is that of more or less passive receptivity,"<sup>17)</sup> we had better, especially in Japan, begin with lecture-type open forum and make people gradually get used to group discussion. Fansler enumerates the measures of success in group discussion as such:

1. Is there a mood of expectancy present?
2. Is a mood of good humor prevalent?
3. Is an attitude of helpful cooperation prevalent?
4. Are members of the group submissive toward authoritarianism?
5. Are traits of personality exhibited which tend to produce tensions and misunderstandings?<sup>18)</sup>

I am interested in this, because it is also the measure for our new democracy.

Another possible and important type of adult education, it seems to me, is that of trade Associations and of labor unions.<sup>19)</sup> Under the present conditions of Japan, the former is desired to take initiative, which sample is that which is found in the Central High School of

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12) *Ibid.*, p. 493.

13) Fansler, *Discussion Methods for Adult Groups*, p. 1.

14) *Ibid.*, p. 59.

15) Linton and French, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 145.

17) Fansler, *loc. cit.*

18) Fansler, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

19) Linton and French. *op. cit.*, p. 148.

Needle Trade, New York City. Though the primary motive in presenting programs for the particular industry can not be tested as educational, it is "educational if it results in improved workmanship, or in the development of personality, or if it makes any other contribution toward 'the goodlife.'" <sup>20)</sup>

#### (IV)

In the achievement of these adult education activities, the persons in charge should take the following items in consideration as measures of educational success:

1. An increase in the individual's store of knowledge.
2. The stimulation of a desire for further study.
3. The correlation of new knowledge and past learning or experience.
4. The development of the powers of observation.
5. The development of critical judgment.
6. Training in methods of study.
7. Training in skills, either creative or repetitive in kind.
8. The discovery of wholly new facts; that is, facts hitherto unknown to any one.
9. The testing of these newly discovered facts.
10. The critical analysis of self. <sup>21)</sup>

Such are along the general educational lines, and therefore the following principles can be drawn:

1. *Stick to education—not propaganda.*—... Some groups requiring help will be more interested in spreading a fixed answer to a problem than in true education. The cooperative search for truth, the right answer, and the best way should predominate.....
2. *Do not infringe on the autonomy of the group served.*—Each group has a right to retain its own full independence, its own purpose, its own program and direction, and to accept only as much professional assistance as it wishes. The relationship must be democratic .....
3. *Stay in the background as much as possible.*—Let volunteer members in the group rather than the paid professional workers have the credit and praise .....
4. *Tailor the educational service to fit the need.*—Skills in discerning the educational needs of groups are somewhat different from those ordinarily utilized by the teacher or the registrar of an evening

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20) Rowden, *Enlightened Self-Interest*, p. 10.

21) Fansler, *op. cit.*, pp. 141—142.

school, but they can be cultivated and improved. <sup>22)</sup>

But still remain many problems. For example, even in Taft Center, the students were from middle classes and supposed to have much of free time in the evenings. In Japan, people are often too tired after the day's work or must work late into night. And we have the problems of women who must take care of their many children and old parents all day long. We need to formulate some "coordinating committee," develop "adequate personnel for research" in this field, provide "funds" for the purpose, establish "general, technical, and semi-technical correspondence courses" <sup>23)</sup> and "experimental and demonstration programs," and plan more effective "library service," <sup>24)</sup> etc.

### (V)

I believe that adult education, after all, can be achieved through school-community cooperation. Of course, however, there are difficulties in the way. In order to solve this point, "Primarily.... teachers and citizens need to get acquainted personally well enough so that they feel they understand, like and respect one another." <sup>25)</sup> "Only as the public takes a more active part in the nation's free schools will the educational facilities become adequate for all the children." <sup>26)</sup> And when starting let us try not to forget Hudson's report: "A prime reason for the group's success is its complete informality." <sup>27)</sup>

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22) Kempfer and Wright, *Selected Approaches to Adult Education*, pp. 7—8.

23) Reeves, Fansler and Houle, *Adult Education*. p. 165.

24) *Ibid.*, p. 166.

25) Fine, "Pattern for the Cooperation of the School and Community Is Being Set in New York," *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1951, sec. 4, p. 11.

26) *Loc. cit.*

27) Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

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