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**Learning for a Lifetime: Education as an Adult Pursuit
by
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**RENO
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1. My interest in this subject goes a long way back: to the late thirties and the early forties.
 - A. A commencement address I first gave in 1940, in which I tried to explain to the graduating class that they were not educated and that, unless they continued learning after all their schooling had been completed, they never would become educated human beings.
 - B. HOW TO READ A BOOK, in 1940 which explained why no one could possibly read the great books well enough in college and why, unless they were read over and over again during the years of one's maturity, they would never be understood.

(My own, most fortunate, experience in this regard)
 - C. "What Every Schoolboy Doesn't Know"—published in 1944.
 - D. The establishment of the Great Books Foundation in the middle forties, for the purpose of promoting the one most important kind of continued learning for adults
 - E. My own conduct (with Mr. Hutchins and others) of great books seminars for adults, beginning in 1943 and continuing ever since.
 - F. The most comprehensive statement I could make of the necessity of continued learning for all, in an essay entitled "Adult Education," published in the *Journal of Higher Education* in 1952
 - G. The establishment, in the fifties, at the University of Chicago of the Basic Program of Liberal Education for adults: still in existence (I give a lecture to that group every year).
 - H. The establishment of the Executive Seminars at Aspen in 1952
2. To which I would like to add one personal, autobiographical note: I would say of myself that I became an educated human being only in the last twenty years, from the age of sixty on, though I would also say that I have long since forgotten most of the things I learned at school—retaining mainly the intellectual skills, the skills of learning, that I acquired there.
3. Against this background, let me now summarize for you the three basic and controlling insights that have been my guidelines since the fifties.
 - A. The reason why no one can ever become educated in school—at basic or advanced levels of schooling—even if that schooling were perfect, which it never is or ever can be hoped to be: *youth itself—immaturity—is the insuperable obstacle to becoming educated.*
 - B. It is indispensable to use words, that are generally loosely used, with requisite precision:

- (1) What goes on in school should not be called “education” because no one can be educated there. It is at best a preparation for becoming educated.
- (2) Only continued learning in adult life should be called education (without the adjective “adult” because education is only for adults, and so to say “adult education” is redundant).
- (3) What is sometimes wrongly called adult education is not truly continued learning after schooling has been completed. It is only remedial schooling, sought by persons whose schooling in youth was insufficient.

C. The two basic terms are (1) “schooling” to cover everything from kindergarten to the Ph.D., and (2) “education” to cover all forms of continued learning after all schooling has been completed, either the schooling one received in youth or the remedial schooling one was compelled to have recourse to in adult years because one’s schooling in youth was insufficient.

- (1) One or another phase of schooling can be terminal. There is no such thing as terminal education.
- (2) Each phase of schooling runs for a span of years. Education takes a whole lifetime.
- (3) The completion of each phase of schooling can be certified by a diploma or a degree. The only certificate that signifies the completion of education is a death certificate.

4. All of these points are an essential part of the Paideia proposal. Let me quote here from Chapter 2 in that book:

- (1) If all children are educable, all are justified in aspiring to become educated persons. But no one can become fully educated in school, no matter how long the schooling or how good it is. Our concern with education must go beyond schooling.
- (2) The schooling of a people does not complete their education. Not even if the quality of schooling were improved to the utmost for all; not even if all who completed twelve years of compulsory basic schooling went on to optional advanced schooling in our colleges and universities and profited by it.
- (3) The simple fact is that educational institutions, even at their best, cannot turn out fully educated men and women. The age at which most human beings attend school prevents that. Youth itself is the most serious impediment—in fact, youth is an insuperable obstacle to being an educated person.

- (4) No one can be an educated person while immature. It would be a travesty to regard the degrees awarded by our colleges and universities as certifying the completion of education. It is all the more true of the high school diploma.
- (5) Only through the trials of adult life, only with the range and depth of experience that makes for maturity, can human beings become educated persons. The mature may not be as trainable as the immature, but they are more educable by virtue of their maturity.
- (6) Education is a lifelong process of which schooling is only a small but necessary part. The various stages of schooling reach terminal points. Each can be completed in a definite term of years. Each can be completed in a definite term of years. But learning never reaches a terminal point. As long as one remains alive and healthy, learning can go on—and should. The body does not continue to grow after the first eighteen or twenty years of life. In fact, it starts to decline after that. But mental, moral, and spiritual growth can go on and should go on for a lifetime.
- (7) The ultimate goal of the educational process is to help human beings become educated persons. Schooling is the preparatory stage; it forms the habit of learning and provides the means for continuing to learn after all schooling is completed.
- (8) For some, this preparation ends with the completion of basic schooling, amounting to about twelve years. For others, it means the completion of advanced schooling, which may take another four years or more. For all, schooling completed means that education has been begun, but not finished. Schooling, basic or advanced, that does not prepare the individual for further learning has failed, no matter what else it succeeds in doing.
- (9) Basic schooling—the schooling compulsory for all—must do something other than prepare some young people for more schooling at advanced levels. It must prepare all of them for the continuation of learning in adult life, during their working years and beyond.
- (10) How? By imparting to them the skills of learning and giving them the stimulation that will motivate them to keep their minds actively engaged in learning. Schooling should open the doors to the world of learning and provide the guidelines for exploring it.
- (11) Basic schooling in America does not now achieve this fundamental objective. It used to do so for those who

completed high school at the beginning of this century. With the vastly increased numbers who enter high school now, our system may achieve this objective for a few, but it fails to do it for all. Yet doing it for all is precisely what we mean when we want the same quality of schooling for all.

- (12) The failure to serve all in this essential respect is one strike against basic schooling in its present deplorable condition. The reform we advocate seeks to remedy that condition. When that is done, the certificate which marks the completion of basic schooling at the end of twelve years will deserve once again to be called what it was called centuries ago—a baccalaureate diploma.
5. Of the three objectives of basic schooling—preparation for earning a living, preparation for the duties of citizenship, and preparation for continued learning in adult life—the last is by far the most important.
- A. This was not true in all the societies and economies that existed before the 20th century or even in the first thirty years of this century. Then a preponderant portion of the children who went to school for six years or a little more looked forward to a life of grinding toil with no free time for the pursuits of leisure, preeminent among which is continued learning in adult life, for the purpose of becoming at the end of life a truly educated human being.
- B. But, thanks to technological advances and political advances that have achieved a greater measure of economic justice, this is no longer true. Everyone who works for a living now can look forward to ample free time for the pursuits of leisure and for continued learning throughout life.
6. Let's suppose that the Paideia reform of basic schooling were generally adopted and let's suppose that, in consequence thereof, our colleges and universities were also greatly improved, would there still be a need for continued learning by all adults, no matter how much schooling they had completed and no matter how excellent in equality it was?
- A. The answer is emphatically affirmative, for reasons already given.
- B. But the affirmative answer also requires that everyone understand the difference between schooling and education, and that schooling at its best can only be a preparation for becoming educated.
7. What form should continued learning in adult life take (on the assumption that all of us recognize that the one form it should *not* take is remedial schooling)?
- A. To answer this question, let me remind you of the distinction made in the Paideia proposal between three kinds of learning.

- (1) *The acquirement of organized knowledge* in fields of basic subject-matter (assisted by didactic teaching)
 - (2) *The development of all the intellectual skills*, all of which are skills of learning (assisted by coaching)
 - (3) *The enhancement of the understanding of basic ideas and values* (assisted by Socratic teaching in seminars devoted to the discussion of important books [discussable books that are not textbooks] and other works of art)
- B. The first kind of learning should normally be completed in school; or, if not completed there, it should be regarded as remedial schooling, not continued learning in adult life.
- (The possible exceptions here are: learning another language, not learned in school; acquiring organized knowledge in some subject matter of special interest in adult years).
- C. The second kind of learning should be sufficiently completed in school for the habits there formed (which must be formed in youth) to serve as the indispensable tools or instruments of continued learning in adult life. Such continued learning should be able to improve and perfect the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening first developed in school.
- (That, by the way, does happen in the Aspen Executive Seminars, the participants in which have all been extensively schooled and are, for the most part, advanced in years).
- D. It is the third kind of learning which should be the principal substance of education in the mature years of one's life.
- (1) Though begun at the level of basic schooling and, one would hope, continued also at the level of advanced schooling, it can only be begun there and never completed there, for immaturity is the obstacle to its being completed there, as it is not the obstacle to the completion there of the first two kinds of learning.
 - (2) This kind of learning, which should go on throughout the years of adult life, can go on either *formally* and *informally*.
 - (a) *Formally*, as in adult seminars of the kind conducted at Aspen and elsewhere.
 - (b) *Informally*, through reading and discussion with one's friends and associates, or through travel and other experiences that one discussed with others.
 - (c) Discussion—two-way talk about important subjects—is the essential ingredient, whether that discussion is carried on formally or informally.

8. Finally, permit me to suggest a litmus paper test of whether an individual has entered upon that final stage in the process of learning at which he or she can regard himself or herself as an educated person.
 - A. Being comfortable and at home with all the great ideas that have been discussed in the course of Western civilization (the *Syntopicon* as one measure of this).
 - B. Being comfortable and at home with the main topics in all fields of organized knowledge—all fields of science and scholarship (the *Propaedia* as one measure of this).

THE END



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