

LIBRARY COOPERATION AND
THE LIFELONG LEARNING PROCESS

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I propose that lifelong learning is a major responsibility of public libraries, public and private schools, colleges and universities, and that it is currently a need that is recognized by the citizens of most communities.

Such a common major responsibility is a natural beginning point of cooperation among public libraries, schools educating in grades one through twelve, colleges and universities. Such a beginning point may ultimately be more productive than attempts at starting cooperation between types of libraries in library-type activities and responsibilities. Lifelong learning is a common touch-point for many other community organizations as well.

I will endeavor quickly to overview lifelong learning and its relevance to libraries and schools, as well as several projects that relate to Oklahoma City and Oklahoma County. It is my intent to afford you ideas, suggestions and possibilities concerning cooperation that may at least partially relate to your organization and your community.

For our purposes let us define lifelong learning as the "totality of learning that takes place during the life of an individual." It includes "incidental" learning as well as learning that an individual purposely pursues. While libraries certainly are a factor in the "incidental" learning process of many persons, we will neces-

sarily deal with the directed, purposeful learning efforts of individuals as our primary interest.

Lifelong learning, in our definition, encompasses other terms such as continuing education, independent learning, community education, adult education, and others. Our lifelong learning is of interest primarily to those persons who are age sixteen years or older, although those who are younger are included in some activities. It also emphasizes serving those persons who are not currently engaged in a formal learning program.

It includes all forms of formal as well as informal learning. It also includes learning for any purpose, whether the purpose is associated with advancement in an employment situation, career selection or career change, health, cultural understanding or enrichment, planning for retirement or any of the many reasons that individuals consciously seek to engage in learning.

A lifelong learning program will attempt to deliver the learning desired by the individuals, to be served at times and locations that are most convenient and comfortable for the learners. It will also attempt to deliver the desired learning at the least possible cost. The learning experiences will be structured to provide the specific learning desired by the learners and will maximize meeting the purposes of the learners above needs or constraints of the organizations or institutions providing the learning experiences.

Obstacles to participating in learning by potential learners will be recognized and efforts made to neutralize such obstacles by those organizations or institutions providing the learning experiences. Examples of such obstacles are: lack of transportation, fear of an institutional setting, lack of educational background, cultural inhibitions, need for counseling, need for child care while participating, need for financial aid. There are many others that could be listed.

When we speak of libraries being involved in the lifelong learning process, let's emphasize public, school and academic libraries as those libraries who have primary potentials and responsibilities for engaging in such programs. We should further recognize that we are seldom speaking of academic and school libraries as entities unto themselves as are public libraries. While public libraries are organizations that are established and funded solely for providing "library services" to an identified community or audience, school and academic libraries are a subpart of a larger organization whose major mission is developing and delivering educational programs. The school and academic libraries must first serve their assigned roles in accomplishing the missions of the organizations of which they are a part, whereas public libraries are organizational entities unto themselves and are charged solely with meeting the mission of providing "library services" to their legally or otherwise assigned communities.

This differentiation is important to our considering the possibilities of forming and conducting lifelong learning programs, in that quite often such programs will involve the totality of the organizations attempting the programs, rather than just libraries as such. It is highly probable and desirable that academic and school libraries act as catalysts to involve their institutions in a lifelong learning program. It is true that public, college or school libraries can and should be a significant cornerstone of such a program.

There are many reasons we can state for libraries, schools, colleges and other community service organizations combining into cooperative lifelong learning programs, such as avoiding duplication of services, gaining wider community recognition and support, reducing the cost per person served by all cooperating institutions, meeting current and developing community needs for service, and enriching the lives of the individuals in the community. Some of the reasons that have been stated in recent years by other sources relative to the

roles of colleges and universities are as follows:

In the publication titled Diversity by Design, written by the Commission on Non-Traditional Study, Samuel B. Gould, Chairman, and published by Jossey-Bass Publishers in 1974, the following observations and recommendations were made:

Recommendation #12: There should be continued experimentation with forms of non-traditional study which minimize the traditional rigidities of campus life: time (prescribed years of study); space (residence on campus); and systems of academic accounting (credits or honor points earned).

Recommendation #13: The distinctive patterns of non-traditional study in each of the major institutions of higher education -- such as the community college, the small private college, the land-grant college, or the single or multi-campus university -- should be further explored and defined.

To be truly non-traditional, the institution evolving out of the old junior college must become a fifty-year college, not a two-year college. It must in time have programs and sequences of programs of almost any length, with students attending as they are motivated.

Recommendation #20: Colleges and universities should put more emphasis on the avenues they open to learning for its own sake and less on the earning of degrees; adult education which is free of credit should be encouraged; and employers should be made to show clear and justifiable reasons for requiring diplomas or degrees as prerequisites to employment.

A better balance than exists presently must be found between the function of degree-granting and straight-forward, uncomplicated service to the learner. The degree, in and of itself, should continue to be a hallmark of accomplishment.

In the previously mentioned study, Diversity By Design, the following major recommendations and observations strongly encouraged that libraries have a role in lifelong learning for the community:

Recommendation #31: The public library should be strengthened to become a far more powerful instrument for non-traditional education than is now the case. This recommendation is directed not only to public officials and public librarians themselves but also to college and university faculty members and administrators...It is a free institution where the individual has open access to great quantities of information. It exists in great numbers, possesses the materials of knowledge, has a public service staff and is a referral point to other resources within the educational network.

The public library can be particularly supportive for people who are working for external degrees or other non-traditional credentials, as well as for those who are planning such programs.

Recommendation #38: Since public agencies have a special responsibility for coordination, educational agencies at all levels of government should coordinate their efforts more efficiently than at present.

At the local level the problem of coordination is very complex and must be solved, if it is to be solved, in many different ways. As suggested previously, the public library, which already provides some coordination by trying to meet the resource needs of other agencies could take on other coordinating functions. Another possible community institution for this work is the local extension office of the land-grant university, although retraining its workers to fulfill this function would be a major task. Still another institution, which would have the same need for staff training, is the community college.

Lifelong Learning in Oklahoma City

I would like to review briefly three different lifelong learning cooperative endeavors in Oklahoma City and Oklahoma County.

We should start with the Open Access Satellite Education Services (OASES) project, as this was the beginning point and catalyst for the other efforts coming into being. For a number of years the Metropolitan Library System has recognized lifelong learning as a major responsibility of the library to the community and has informally cooperated with other organizations in attempting to fulfill this responsibility. About 1972 the library system began exploring the possibilities of a formal cooperative alliance with the local South Oklahoma City Junior College in providing a targeted, comprehensive lifelong learning program for the citizens of the metropolitan area. After three years of designing and seeking funds for conducting a pilot project, OASES began in July 1976, through partial funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

The two-year pilot was established in a branch public library and its primary target audience was those persons who resided within a three-mile radius of that library. During its two years as a pilot project, OASES was measured and evaluated exhaustively. At the end of the two years, OASES had met or exceeded most of its objectives and was highly successful. The project continues to this date in the same mode, but on a scale that is reduced since the ending of federal funding. Current funding is entirely local and the project is self-sustaining.

There were some problems in the OASES project, and they were mostly related to governance and communications between the library system and the junior college. Most of these problems have since been resolved. Were we able to start over, I suspect that both institutions would insist on explicit, written understandings concerning such things as the meaning of cost-effectiveness, how policies of both organizations would be applied to the joint project, administrative responsibilities and others.

During the first two years of OASES the library system and the junior college involved many citizens and other community organizations in the project. The project was also highly publicized. Late in 1978 the Oklahoma City Public School System approached the college and the library concerning the possibility of building a comprehensive lifelong learning consortium of many organizations that would serve the urban/suburban/rural areas of the metroplex. These discussions led to a first meeting of approximately forty different community organizations who were interested and/or involved in lifelong learning. Representatives from state agencies were also involved.

As the process began and continued, it was decided that the development of the consortium should consist of three phases. The three phases were as follows:

PHASE I:

1. Identify and attempt to involve all organizations with an interest or involvement in lifelong learning for the community.
2. In the first few meetings define the meaning and purpose of lifelong learning, proposed purposes of the consortium, vested interests and problems of the various organizations in considering participation in the consortium, and the positive possibilities of cooperation.
3. By an agreed date complete a written formal agreement. It was assumed that those organizations that could not agree to the specifics set forth in the written document would drop out of the consortium.

PHASE II:

Executive officers of those organizations who were still interested in participating in the consortium, based on the results of the drafted formal agreement from Phase I, would meet. In these meetings any additions, changes or deletions found necessary to the

existing written formal agreement will be made by the executive officers.

PHASE III:

The resulting final written agreement will be taken to the governing bodies of the respective organizations and formally adopted. Soon after such adoption the formally organized consortium will plan and begin its first pilot project(s).

At this point in time (early October 1979) the consortium process has just completed Phase I, and Phase II is scheduled to begin by the first week of November. About twelve-fourteen organizations were interested enough in the consortium to participate in Phase II; these include the public library system, the junior college, Oklahoma City Public School System, City of Oklahoma City, Areawide Aging Agency, Community Council, Community Action Program and others. Phase II is anticipated to end by December 31, 1979.

Another lifelong learning project in the Oklahoma City area, in which the Metropolitan Library System is involved, came as a direct result of the activities of OASES. Late in 1978 the University for Man project personnel, from Kansas State University, contacted the library system concerning a possible joint project that would include the library system and institutions in three other states. The proposed project would replicate the proven lifelong learning program of the University for Man in the four state areas. The University for Man concept essentially involves a parent body institution establishing lifelong learning projects in rural communities. Once established, these projects are financed by local community funds and operated by residents of the community. The basis of the concept is that learning experiences produced in a given community are in response to identified community needs and interests, are usually not connected with formal education credits unless desired or necessary, and are taught by community residents most of the time.

The Metropolitan Library System agreed to join the University for Man and the organizations from three states other than Oklahoma and Kansas in seeking funding for this pilot project. The library system proposed that the two-year project would establish lifelong learning, community-based projects in the fifteen or so rural communities within Oklahoma County. The funding proposal was made to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

The library system was notified in August 1979, that the project had been funded through FIPSE. As of October 1, 1979, the project has already begun in Oklahoma. We were fortunate in securing the services of a former employee of the OASES project to direct the project.

Cooperation between organizations can be a difficult political and financial problem that may take longer to solve than we might prefer. The organizations who would cooperate have vested interests and constraints that must be dealt with in the beginning if a cooperative endeavor is to be successful. In attempting a cooperative endeavor between two or more organizations we should operate from the premise that cooperating entities will expect that any proposed cooperation will allow them to protect their "turf" in the community and that their benefits from participating will at least equal the value of various resources that they share.

Perhaps the question of cost of cooperation would be better examined as to whether or not it is cost-effective. The question of cost or cost savings of cooperation usually arises. In our efforts to date, we have found that formulating and beginning a joint venture does cost additional resources. Once ventures are established, however, we attempt to examine them as to their cost-effectiveness. This is achieved by projecting and measuring such things as actual net cost per person served by the cooperative effort as compared to what the same cost would be if only a single institution were providing the services, and predicting a break-even point of activities at which there are zero additional costs for the cooperating institutions.

A number of factors can be identified that may predictably have a bearing on the cost-effectiveness of a cooperative venture. Among these are:

1. Whether or not the activities of the cooperative generate new income;
2. Whether or not the mission is a new, expanding role for any of the institutions involved;
3. The extent to which the institutions can accomplish the cooperation by reallocating existing resources that previously were under-utilized or were involved in other functions; and
4. The extent to which participating organizations are able to adapt their policies and procedures to accommodate the cooperative structure as an integral part of their organization and activities.

Lifelong learning is a major mission that is common to colleges and universities, public schools and public libraries, and many other organizations that may exist in your community. It is a current and growing need that presents possibilities for immediate cooperative efforts among learning-oriented institutions.