

## A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

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Rural libraries have a unique role to play in the achievement of lifelong learning among their clients; in order to discuss that role, two goals must be considered:

1. The increased awareness of rural libraries as to their role in the provision of a program of service to the lifelong learner, and
2. An increased awareness by the personnel and policy makers of rural libraries as to the continuing education opportunities that are or should be available to help them provide better library service to their communities.

In order to try to realize these goals, I have set five objectives for this discussion:

1. To identify the lifelong learners, their needs, and the barriers they face, and to discuss the responsibilities of libraries regardless of their geographic setting for meeting their needs.
2. To describe briefly some on-going programs that libraries are providing for lifelong learners, including possible resources that libraries might tap.
3. To identify the continuing education needs of rural library personnel and some of the barriers to meeting these needs.
4. To identify some of the providers of library related continuing education and the opportunities they make available.
5. To explore ways in which more or improved opportunities for continuing education might be provided.

My emphasis will be on the public library role, but school and academic libraries may well have to provide the initiative and the leadership in some areas.

### WHO ARE THE LIFELONG LEARNERS?

They are individuals from all age groups, from all walks of life and from all geographic areas who are actively pursuing knowledge to

cope with a rapidly changing world. They may be individuals with an avid interest in how to do it projects, such as car repair or simple building projects; or crafts, such as quilting or needlework; or people who are armchair travelers and enjoy film presentations on other countries and cultures.

Schools are exploring and developing ways for their students to be better equipped to be lifelong learners through programs such as Project 81. This is a process involving the community and the school which hopefully will ensure that all public school students who receive diplomas will be competent to begin handling the demands of adult life in their communities. The real test of Project 81 will be in its conclusion, if the students have acquired the competencies and become lifelong learners. Project 81 is one aspect of an educational program that nation-wide is placing more emphasis on pre-school and early childhood education and on community education to develop and increase interaction between school and community, and attempt to coordinate interaction of community resources as just part of its total thrust.

According to a recent study, four out of every five American adults plan and carry out one or more independent learning projects each year. [1] Most of these projects are self-initiated and very individualistic.

#### WHY DO THEY STUDY?

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education surveyed sixty-six adults and found that their independent learning projects fell into six broad categories: preparation for an occupation and then keeping up; learning specific tasks and problems on the job; learning for home and personal responsibilities; improving some broad areas of competence; learning for interest or leisure; and exploring a subject out of curiosity. [2] No one spent less than 13 hours on a learning project. Print, non-print and human resources were identified as those used most by the independent learners, and librarians were recognized as one often-used human resource in planning a program of study. From

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this we can conclude that independent learners are pursuing many varieties of subjects and that their study often takes place outside of the formal school and academic community, utilizing resources usually available from public libraries.

Eleanor Smith, a former HEW regional program officer for libraries, presented an overview of the topic to Pennsylvania District Library Center administrators and consultant librarians in March 1978. She cited a pamphlet issued by HEW entitled "Life-long Learning in the Nation's Third Century" that compares lifelong learning to walking which begins in infancy, develops to a high degree throughout youth and just when it has been thoroughly mastered the individual begins to grow old and has to slow down. [3] In both walking and in learning, clear routes have to be marked, and if barriers exist, they must be removed so that speed and skill will no longer be hampered.

#### WHAT ARE THESE OBSTACLES TO LEARNING?

They may be institutional, personal and social. Whether adults are enrolled in formal programs or pursuing independent programs, they are usually short changed in regard to counseling and are apt to encounter institutional indifference to their requirements for parking, transportation, food services, health care and access to bookstores and to libraries. (How many school libraries are open or even provide materials to their school's adult education program? How many public librarians know what is being offered in the way of adult education in their communities?) Personal barriers to adult learning may include lack of money, lack of education, lack of access to resources other than a school, particularly in rural areas, and lack of motivation. [3] Social barriers to adult learning are usually the informal kind represented by society's attitude to adult participation in learning programs. A greater barrier is the lack of legislative support for programs that provide for adult learning, again a consequence of societal indifference or a lack of leadership on the part of the profession.

## WHO ARE THE PROVIDERS OF ADULT LEARNING?

Again the HEW publication lists them in the order of greatest users. [3] 1. Mass Media; 2. Employers and Work Settings; 3. Proprietary Schools; 4. Higher Education; 5. Cooperative and Extension Services; 6. Public Schools; and 7. Other Agencies. (Mentioned among these "other" agencies are libraries.)

Libraries are only given passing mention, perhaps justifiably, or perhaps because the formal adult educators want to keep us from invading their turf. Given the proper methods of operation and accessibility however, the library has the potential to use its resources to be one of the major providers of adult learning, whether formal or independent and whether alone or in cooperation with other agencies. It is the library that has the capacity "to expand communication skills, develop flexibility to change, improve human relationships, facilitate participation in society and assist personal growth." [3] This should be the aim of all providers of adult learning.

## HOW THEN CAN RURAL LIBRARIES MEET THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE LIFELONG LEARNER?

They might continue to view their mission as the conservative and traditional one of providing basic services through having available selective materials that meet the individual's request for information. Access to more in-depth materials would then be provided through resource centers such as schools and community colleges in close proximity, county library headquarters and district library centers.

Hopefully some rural libraries will view their mission as more liberal and provide a collaborative approach to independent learning programs. Such collaboration (1) would require a conscious preparation of staff with information and skills to carry out the library's collaborative work, (2) would make the public library a source of information on independent-study opportunities throughout

the community and a first point of contact for its users, (3) would refer interested adults to a school or academic institution for counseling, (4) would involve stocking the library with materials recommended for use in the independent-study programs (books, programmed texts, tapes, learning packages), and (5) would require the use of the library's information network and inter-library loan system for special explorations developed by students in the course of their study. In short, the collaborative approach represents the public library's commitment to a specific program of service to independent study as an equal partner with the school or academic institution but with a distinctive role. [2]

An even more liberal approach would be for the rural library to establish an independent community learning center, providing staff and materials to stock the center and guide the independent learner in a one to one or group situation. It may well be that the above approaches can be phases or steps in the library's developing program in support of independent learning. They all require commitment on the part of libraries to the provision of and access to materials and staff beyond that presently offered by most rural libraries. This means that the responsibility for planning, implementing and securing funds for support rests with the personnel and trustees of the library and to the community at large.

#### WHAT PROGRAMS OF THIS TYPE ARE PRESENTLY BEING PROVIDED BY LIBRARIES?

Many of you may have read Michael Kelly's recent article in the PLA Bulletin of March 1977 in which he describes programs in Pennsylvania. [4]

Lifelong learning centers or educational brokerages as they are referred to by the Pennsylvania Department of Education have been established at the Reading Public Library and the Free Library of Philadelphia. Their primary functions are career counseling and education referral to programs ranging from adult basic education to post secondary degree programs, including such nontraditional offerings

as the external degree. The Reader Development program of the Free Library provides high interest, low vocabulary materials to complement this program. The Schlow Library in State College and the Adult Education Division of Pennsylvania State University are planning in collaboration for the establishment of a learning center in the public library. The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has established an educational information center at the main library in Oakland and in cooperation with Allegheny County officials has established information centers on county government staffed by volunteer senior citizens at some of their branches. More of the educational information centers are planned for areas in Pennsylvania. Joseph Bard of the Pennsylvania Department of Education has the responsibility for the development of these centers.

Librarians, trained as learner's advisors under a program developed at the College Entrance Examination Board, help individuals sharpen their educational goals, plan study projects, find resources, and evaluate their own learning. Outgrowths of this program can now be found in at least 15 library systems across the country.

Kenneth Fischer in an article entitled "National Resources for Learning" describes some of the resources which are presently available. [5] He cites legislation and individuals that would be helpful to contact to learn more about on-going programs and funding sources.

There are many more programs that are being planned and tried throughout the country. Much remains to be done in rural areas however.

WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBLE WAYS THAT THE  
RURAL LIBRARY CAN BEGIN TO PROVIDE  
PROGRAMS OF SERVICE FOR LIFELONG LEARNERS?

They can begin by talking and planning together with other public libraries in their county and with school and academic libraries in their communities to provide some basic materials and referral services to their patrons. The rural library, unless liberally endowed (and there are few of these around any more), must of necessity develop its program in cooperation with other libraries and other community

agencies. Those located in community centers are particularly well situated to begin a modest program.

A community resource file already mentioned along with an information file on educational opportunities available through school and vocational adult education programs, academic institutions and through community agencies such as the extension service can be a modest but valuable beginning. Providing a minimum level program is not necessarily in conflict with good service. Reading guidance can be provided by prepackaged reading study guides and the school system might provide some of these. A good referral service from the library to a school or academic institution for counseling may provide the adult learner with some needed guidance. Informal assistance in the use of library resources and effective promotion and use of inter-library loan are on-going services in most libraries and can always be improved and promoted to serve better the adult learner. Knowledge of and referral to other agencies for assistance, such as the district library center and the school intermediate unit, are again services that are usually provided by most libraries.

Most rural libraries can provide some kind of programming for adults. Again this might be in cooperation with another agency. Programs on topics such as coping with metric might be in a series sponsored by the library, given by a faculty member from a local school or community college and backed up with resources from both agencies.

Film programs and discussions are tried and true but are a form of lifelong learning. District library centers can provide a host of suggested topics and help with setting up such programs.

A more elaborate program in cooperation with another institution might involve the provision of trained staff to provide reading guidance and academic counseling, group seminars or workshops on library and study skills as well as topics of mutual learner interest.

Even the smallest public library can do some if not all of the above. But what is critical to accomplishing this or any program of service is knowledgeable personnel.



This leads into another aspect, i.e., the need for continuing education opportunities for rural library personnel and their policy makers, for without training programs, lifelong learning would be difficult to implement in any format.

#### WHAT IS CONTINUING EDUCATION?

There are many definitions but for our purposes it is the process of learning beyond the entry level position in libraries whether as a library clerk, a reference librarian, the bookkeeper or the trustee who comes new to the board.

#### WHAT DOES CONTINUING EDUCATION INCLUDE?

Organized activities such as formal courses, extension classes, inservice seminars and training sessions, workshops, conferences, lectures, institutes, colloquia, group discussions, meetings, and symposia are part of continuing education activities. Special formats such as video tapes, cassettes and training packages are also included in continuing education.

#### WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO SEE THAT CONTINUING EDUCATION IS PROVIDED?

The administrator and board of trustees of the public library share the responsibility for providing opportunities for staff development and training as do the administrator and board for the school and academic library, and they need to include budget items for this purpose. Individuals also have responsibility in planning their own continuing education and convincing their employers that their plan will ultimately provide improved library services to their clientele. Others such as system headquarters, district library centers, the Intermediate Units, and other state agencies are also charged with this responsibility.

#### HOW ARE CONTINUING EDUCATION NEEDS IDENTIFIED?

Surveys conducted by the vendors of continuing education programs, by individuals initiating an expression of their desires

and needs for training programs, by head librarians and their staff looking at their mission of service and identifying weaknesses and offering continuing education programs to strengthen the library service provided all contribute to the identification of continuing education needs.

#### WHO ARE THESE VENDORS?

The State Library of Pennsylvania provides a number of workshops in one or more regions of the commonwealth on various topics each year, such as, copyright, affirmative action, trustee roles and responsibilities, and library services to special groups. The Division of School Libraries provides training sessions at their examination centers located around the state on the selection and evaluation of materials as well as workshop sessions on developing grant proposals for federal funds. The district library centers, system and county headquarters units and the intermediate units all provide workshops and training sessions for the local libraries and school districts in their respective areas. State professional associations such as Pennsylvania Library Association, Pennsylvania School Library Association, Pennsylvania Learning Resources Association, and Pennsylvania Association for Adult Education through regional meetings and conferences also provide opportunities for continuing education by attendance at and participation in the many special interest sessions. On the national scene, the American Library Association and other library and media related groups provide such opportunities.

Library education institutions and other institutions also provide opportunities for continuing education through institutes, seminars, workshops and symposia. Commercial vendors also promote instructional packages and workshops on topics of special interest.

Many of the above-mentioned groups also send out information of a continuing education nature through their periodicals and newsletters (Iowa is doing a home study course via their newsletter). The trustee handbook recently developed by the Pennsylvania Library Association Trustee Division and the State Library provides a form

of continuing education for trustees, as did a video cassette on trustee guidelines that was taped by the Altoona Public Library Media Center as part of a trustees workshop held there. This workshop was sponsored by the State Library and the Pennsylvania Library Association. Copies of the cassettes were then provided to the District Library Centers.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS FOR RURAL  
LIBRARIES PARTICIPATING IN  
CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

Lack of information about what is available and limited coordination of continuing education activities are the major barriers. Lack of knowledge of need for programs by administrators and policy makers seem to be increasingly true, especially for school librarians. Lack of staff to provide coverage for library activities while other staff engage in continuing education opportunities is another problem.

Still other barriers are the limited number of programs available or the variety of needs of all levels of personnel, lack of money to pay for individual registration, transportation and other expenses or for substitutes in their absence.

Distance for travel is too great for more staff participation in programs offered and in northern Pennsylvania particularly travel is very difficult in the winter. Lack of motivation or reward (salaries in public libraries are extremely low and are usually not increased because of attendance or participation in a program unless for formal credit and sometimes not even then) can also negate interest in continuing education.

HOW CAN THESE BARRIERS BE LOWERED OR REMOVED?

Energetic and imaginative librarians at the local level can provide the leadership to the trustees and to their colleagues to turn this around to a more positive picture, through cooperative programs at system, district and multi-district level. In some rural areas the school librarian is often the only person with library education, and they must exercise this leadership. Finding

a different way to deliver the information or program, such as the newsletter mini courses mentioned above, telephone conference calls for meetings, cable television for programs (cable TV was developed for rural areas in Pennsylvania and we need to use and expand its capabilities; satellites are being used in some rural areas for continuing education), can be an asset to continuing education efforts.

At the state level, one of the current developments is a one year project to develop a plan for coordination of continuing education programs to meet the needs of Pennsylvania's library/information/media personnel.

On the national scene, the Continuing Library Education Network Exchange, or CLENE as it is called, is trying to provide coordination and promote development of continuing education.

In attempting to meet my objectives, I have raised some questions and posed some answers regarding the implications of lifelong learning for rural libraries and the kinds of continuing education opportunities needed by their personnel and policy makers. You may have other questions and some better answers.

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