Lifelong Learning and the World of Work

Ivan Charner
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In 1933 an editorial appeared in the Ladies Home Journal about a relief education program initiated during the depression. The editorial described the program, its objectives, and its participants. To help set the theme for my comments, I would like to present parts of that editorial.

In recent years we have heard a great deal of talk about adult education, but we have seen very little of it in practice. Now, however, an action demonstration is underway, and it has already proved the truth of the assertion that "an adult can learn anything at any stage of life provided there is a definite desire.

The free classes for adults in vocational and cultural subjects that have been set up by the New York State Temporary Emergency Relief Administration are for grown-ups who are fitting themselves for better things in better times. Go to any of the twenty-one centers and you will see men and women, some young, some middle-aged, concentrating as you never saw a group of students concentrate before. They are struggling to improve their skill in office work, in journalism, in commercial law, in foreign language, in purchasing and selling, or in mechanical industry, so that they will be better prepared to fight the economic battle. Homemaking courses, too, have been set up in many centers. But the work is not all utilitarian. Some fifteen percent of the registrants are studying sculpture, painting, drawing, music, jewelry designing, pottery and so forth for the sheer joy of discovering a latent talent or a new cultural interest. (August 1933)

This editorial answers three basic questions about the relief education program. Why

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the program is important?, how the program operates? and who participates in the program? A similar editorial could be written today about the growing number of learning opportunities available to workers and the growing number of participants in such programs. This essay represents such an effort. Although in more breadth and in more detail than the 1933 editorial, I will focus on the same basic questions. First, why should lifelong learning for workers be advanced? Second, how have opportunities for learning been made available to working adults? and Third, who are the adult participants in learning activities and what are the reasons for participation or non-participation? My goal is to provide a comprehensive picture of the objectives, programs and patterns of learning activities for workers which will serve as the basis for a program and policy agenda to meet the needs of workers for the lifelong learning which I will propose.

I. Why Advance Lifelong Learning for Workers

The adult workforce, through their numbers, labor, and taxes are clearly one of the cornerstones of our society. They should have the opportunity to grow in their work, and in their cultural and social roles. Learning opportunities would seem to provide one means for such growth. From a social perspective then, one could argue that we have a moral obligation to support lifelong learning for workers. Rather than explore the pros and cons of such a position I would like to examine some of the possible consequences of lifelong learning for the worker and the society. That is, instead of suggesting that we advance lifelong learning for workers because we owe it to them, I will look at some of the specific benefits of learning as the basis for a rationale advancing lifelong learning for workers.

For the worker learning is important for career and individual growth. At a very basic level, learning a job, advancing on a job, keeping pace with changing technologies or preparing for a new job are all dependent on learning. Without opportunities for learning, or more specifically, training, workers would be unable to grow in their work roles.

The growth of the middle-age cohort and the concurrent tightening of the labor market, however, has resulted in limiting the opportunities for upward mobility. There is a need for new responses from the public and private sectors to facilitate horizontal mobility for workers. New programs and approaches need to be explored which consider alternatives to existing career patterns and the design and initiation of individual career development planning which consider new options for individual mobility and growth. Lifelong learning can provide workers with the skills and knowledge to avail themselves of such opportunities. By learning new skills or adapting existing skills to new situations workers can move horizontally to new positions at parallel levels in the workforce. Such movement would seem to have considerable implications for the satisfaction and productivity of workers and the flexibility of the workforce.

Mobility between institutions is a second alternative. Offering educational leaves or sabbaticals would allow workers to move horizontally from one system (work) to another system (education) and then back again to work. Again, such a process would seem to affect satisfaction, productivity and flexibility by enabling the worker to change roles and be mobile.

While learning is clearly important from a workplace perspective to qualify workers for new, different or better jobs, or to increase satisfaction productivity and flexibility, learning also, and perhaps more importantly, fosters individual growth and self-development. More specifically, the likely benefits of learning to the worker’s individual growth include:
• literacy or basic skills (for some workers)
• skills and knowledge as consumers, as parents, as spouses, and as participants in politics (national, state, and local);
• general information; particularly about options available for education, work, community and social roles;
• increased self-esteem and self-worth;
• changes in social attitudes and values;
• for older workers, planning for retirement and post-retirement activities;
• leisure time pursuits (cultural, artistic, esthetic); and
• credentials

Participation in learning activities then can provide opportunities for workers to grow in their work roles and in their personal development. For these reasons alone it would seem to be advantageous to advance lifelong learning for workers. These benefits to the individual worker, however, have parallel or related benefits which accrue to the society as a whole, which provide added support for advancing lifelong learning. At the most basic levels the society benefits by having a literate population (reading, writing, verbal communication, math skills). In addition, a generally knowledgeable workforce provides informed and skilled citizens vis a vis the family, the marketplace and politics. Related to the economic side of the society, lifelong learning can increase the availability of trained human resources, increase productivity and revenues, and maintain a flexible workforce that can rapidly respond to technological changes. Finally, at a social level advancing lifelong learning for workers may reduce welfare dependency, improve general health, and provide a more equitable distribution of wealth and other life annuities.

It is my belief that lifelong learning for workers should be advanced. It can provide workers with an opportunity to grow as a worker, a consumer, a citizen and as an individual which may in turn, improve the general well-being of the society, socially and economically.

II. How Are Learning Opportunities Made Available to Workers?

Learning opportunities are being made available to workers through a large number of diverse channels. While we know that more and more adult workers are participating in learning activities being offered by or through educational institutions, employers, and unions, the landscape of these opportunities has not been completely surveyed. Such a task may be impossible; I would like, however, to put together a mosaic of the present structure of learning opportunities. Despite the growing number of adults engaged in informal learning and the increased awareness of the potential acceptance of such activities, I will focus here on the more formal modes of delivery of learning to adult workers—formal education institutions, employer provided learning, and union supported programs.

Formal education institutions offer learning activities to adults of all levels of prior educational experience. Adult education programs offered by local school districts are aimed primarily at adult workers who have not completed 12 years of schooling and who wish to earn a high school degree by passing the General Education Development (GED) test. Also offered at this level are adult basic education courses for basic literacy, English-as-a-second language course and a variety of occupational skill courses, most of which are at a basic level.

For adults with at least 12 years of schooling or an equivalent, post-secondary schools are more appropriate. At these levels, there are three primary institutional sponsors of programs for adult workers: non-collegiate vocational, trade or business schools; 2-year
colleges and technical schools; and 4-year colleges and universities.

Non-collegiate vocational, trade and business schools offer programs to adult workers for career preparation or for leisure pursuits or personal interests. Such programs do offer certificates or diplomas but they are usually not degree-granting institutions and this can affect the outcome of such programs for participants. That is, many employers use degrees as screening devices and this can affect placement. Despite this, the rapid changes in the labor market has resulted in an expansion of these schools which is expected to continue into the decade of the 80s.

Two-year post-secondary institutions for adults generally fall into one of four categories: (1) the junior college—a two-year institution offering a liberal arts program or occupational/career training in specific job areas; (2) the branch campus—a two-year institution offering a program acceptable toward the B.A. and directly affiliated with a state university; (3) the technical institute—a two-year institution requiring a high school diploma or equivalency for admission and emphasizing occupational programs; and (4) vocational-technical center—a school which offers occupational programs almost exclusively and does not require a high school diploma for entrance.

While many of these programs are for younger traditional age participants, a number of institutions offer part-time programs which attract older adult workers. Community and junior colleges also offer courses in career retraining and skill upgrading for adult workers and will often provide special courses to meet the needs of industry or unions in a local area.

Four-year colleges and universities are increasingly drawing from older cohorts of individuals. While a growing number of adults are participating in traditional full-time programs, the long established continuing and extension programs and the newer non-traditional programs are more attractive to most adult workers. Most colleges and universities operate continuing education or extension programs offering a wide range of courses, usually not for credit.

At the same time that such programs are growing, so are the more non-traditional programs for adults. Some of the modifications being made to accommodate adult non-traditional students include:

1. Scheduling classes at times other than during the morning or afternoon, when the majority of adults are at work. More classes are now being held at night or even on weekends.
2. Offering classes at locations other than just the main campus. Courses are being given at regional campus centers as well as in libraries, employment sites, union halls, and even on commuter trains!
3. Using the media to transmit courses, lectures, and reading materials. A number of courses are being given through local newspapers; others are televised and are shown, through the use of cable TV, several times during the week. Another use of television involves taping lectures so that students may come in and view the tapes at times convenient to their schedules.
4. Easing admissions requirements and formal entry qualifications for certain courses of study, including the granting of credit for life experience.
5. Encouraging greater use of independent study which may be more challenging and appropriate to the needs of adult learners.

From basic skills to advanced skill training or career preparation, then, the formal education establishment has tried to provide a wide array of learning opportunities to working adults. (Fraser, 1979, provides a more detailed discussion of this.)

At the same time that opportunities for lifelong learning have increased at educational institutions, employer-provided education and training has grown. In fact, employer-provided learning represents the largest portion of the opportunities available to adult
workers. It has been estimated that industry spends between $2.2 billion and $100 billion annually for the education and training of workers. These estimates differ so drastically because the first includes only direct expenditures while the second includes lost time, staff time, and other cost factors. Regardless, it is obvious that industry spends a great deal on learning activities for workers.

There are two primary reasons for industries' investment in such efforts. First, new employees need to learn how to adapt previously acquired skills and knowledge to their current position. This often includes an orientation to the policies, rules and structure of the organization and its operating units as well as the more specific task of learning how existing skills are to be used to undertake the routines of the job. Second, present employees often need to complete the process of skill acquisition, to make up for deficiencies or to keep pace with changes in technologies related to their jobs.

Generally, there are four types of learning programs offered to workers by employers: informal training, on-the-job training, internal education and external education. By far, the largest and least specified of these is informal training. Little is known about such programs because of their informal nature and any discussion of them would be speculative at best. It should be noted, however, that most workers learn their jobs by doing them and informal training is therefore a critical element in employer-provided learning and one which should be better understood. Formal on-the-job training programs are a second means by which employers train workers. These programs, like informal training, usually teach workers the specific skills that are needed to perform the tasks of a job. On-the-job learning often involves employees being taken through discrete and formal learning steps while performing the duties of their job.

In addition to informal and on-the-job training there are internal and external education programs offered to workers by their employers, both during working hours and after hours. By combining the type of program (internal or external) with when it is offered (during or after hours), four circumstances of formal employer-provided learning occur: after-hours external, during hours external, after-hours internal, and during hours internal (Lusterman, 1977).

Under after-hours, external education are tuition aid programs where the employee chooses a program of study and financing is made available by the company as a tuition advance or reimbursement. Such plans, however, account for only 10% of the corporate dollar spent on education. An additional 10% is spent on external during-hours programs. Under these programs, employees, usually from managerial or professional ranks, are allowed time off to take classes, participate in workshops or attend conferences for educational or learning purposes.

The remaining 80% of corporate expenditures goes to internal programs, both during and after hours. These funds pay for full-time training and development personnel and the services and materials related to internal training for employees. Most internal training takes place during hours and is geared to managers/supervisors or technical skill upgrading. However, a growing number of internal courses are concerned with the occupational health and safety of workers.

Employer-provided learning, then, is different from the more traditional adult education in the following ways. First, employer education and training is usually job or work related in that it trains workers to adapt skills to work situations, socializes the worker to the company or organization and helps workers keep pace with changing technologies. Second, with employer-provided learning, the learning and doing usually take place in the same setting (the workplace). Finally, employer-provided learning is pragmatic, used as a means of increasing productivity and as a tool for recruiting and maintaining a competent workforce.

Employer-provided learning is a large and growing component of the lifelong learning
system for workers. At the same time organized labor has a long standing interest in the education of their members. Whether as a desire for vocational training, as a vehicle for social change, as a means of developing more effective unionists, or as an aid in the development of the individual, unions have and continue to support learning activities for other workers. While actual figures are unavailable, it has been estimated that unions spend millions of dollars annually for education and training programs at the national, regional, and local levels. Through union education departments and as fringe benefits provided through collective bargaining agreements, financial resources and educational programs are made available to union members.

Unions make educational programs available to workers through arrangements with colleges or universities or through their own education departments. The most obvious and widespread example of this is the university or college labor studies program. These are generally of two types: degree programs and “tool” courses. Currently, there are forty-seven institutions of higher education that offer a major or concentration in labor studies. In addition, there are many part-time degree programs that have been developed in cooperation with unions. Most of these degree programs have the following commonalities: (1) the target population is adult union members; (2) unions are active in sponsoring or advising the programs; (3) liberal arts courses are combined with labor-related subjects; and (4) admission policies are “open.” It is important to note, however, that within this broad framework, the programs vary in structure, content, and focus. (Gray, 1977).

In addition to degree programs, most labor studies centers conduct short courses, conferences, workshops and resident schools to provide “tool” courses to unionists. These tool courses are usually developed at the request of and subsidized by local unions. Thousands of workers participate in such courses every year.

A second example is the union-run labor studies center. These centers, sponsored by unions for their members, offer tool courses and degree programs. The degree programs are either in labor studies or liberal arts with an emphasis on labor-related issues and are made possible through affiliations with accredited institutions of higher education. Most courses are tuition-free and focus on areas of study which can provide the skills and knowledge required for effective union functioning.

A third example is courses made available by union education departments independent of any school or center. Courses and “institutes” are subsidized and conducted through the education departments of national and international unions to help unionists in their roles as stewards, committee people, fiscal officers, parliamentarians and officers of local unions. These institutes and programs provide workers with opportunities for increased knowledge and understanding of economic, social, and political issues.

A final example involves cultural programs offered to workers through their unions which can offer many learning experiences to workers. The bread and roses program of district 1199 of the Hospital and Health Care Employees in NYC offers musical performances, shows, art exhibitions, oral histories and other cultural programs to its members and their families. (Charner, 1979, presents a more detailed discussion of union programs.)

In addition to these specific education, training, and learning programs, unions, through collective bargaining agreements, have made financial assistance available to workers. The most obvious examples of this are negotiated tuition-aid plans which offer workers financial assistance to pursue educational activities through loans and scholarships, education leave plans or tuition advancement/reimbursement plans. Unions, employers and educational institutions offer a wide array of learning programs and services to adult workers. The question is who participates?
III. Who Participates and What Are the Reasons?

In the last twenty years, the United States has witnessed a significant growth in the participation of adults in education and learning experiences. The demographic and social reasons for this growth are multiple. First, the adult population is larger than it has ever been. In 1976, almost 137 million people were age 21 or older. By the year 2000, the median age of the U.S. Citizenry will be 34.8, with an estimated 187 million people age 21 or older. This demographic shift to an older citizenry has already impacted the educational system which has witnessed a growth in the number of adults participating at all levels. A second reason is the changing role of women in society over the past decade. The increasing numbers of women re-entering the "paid" labor force or desiring to do so has resulted in an increase in educational participation to help ease this transition.

The declining enrollments of traditional college-age students combined with ever growing fiscal crises is a third reason. Institutions of higher education are seeking out new clients and the adult learner represents a new market for these institutions. A fourth reason may be increased amounts of available leisure time. With more free time, educational and learning activities become an option for more adults. The higher levels of education attained by the adult population will also cause increases in educational participation. Education appears to be addictive, with those having more wanting more. Finally, the tightening of the labor market results in mobility patterns that are horizontal rather than vertical. That is, rather than being able to move up on a job or in a career, workers will have to change careers, which will require, in many instances, additional education or training.

Estimates of the total level of adult participation in learning activities vary depending on the nature of the activity being studied. When adult learning is looked at, which includes informal or unorganized as well as formal or organized activity, estimates range as high as 32 million adult participants. When the informal/unorganized activities are excluded and only adult education participants studied, the estimate is 11 million or 11.6 percent of the adult population. While the numbers are quite striking, the demographic patterns suggest that participation in adult education suffers from inequality. Specifically:

- Younger adults participate at higher rates than older adults with those 24-34 participating in education at a rate of 20.6 percent and the rate decreasing steadily to a rate of 2.3 percent for those 65 or older. (Boaz, 1978)
- Blacks participate in education at a considerably lower rate than whites—6.9 percent versus 12.1 percent. "Other" racial groups (Hispanics and Asian Americans) participate at the highest rate (13.4%) and the increase in their participation has been the greatest over the past decade. (Boaz, 1978)
- There are no real differences in participation rates between men and women. This is, however, a recent phenomenon with women increasing their rates steadily over the last 10 years. Most of these gains, however, were for white women and not for black women. (Boaz, 1978)
- Prior educational attainment is most closely related to participation in education. With every increment in education, participation increases from 3.3 percent for those adults with less than a high school diploma to 28.3 percent for those with 4 or more years of college. (Boaz, 1978). Adults with post-secondary education are twice as likely to participate in learning than those without such education. (Carp et al., 1976)
- Employed adults are more likely to participate in education and learning than unemployed adults or adults keeping house (15.4% for those employed, 10.8% for those unemployed, and 7.7% for homemakers). (Boaz, 1978)
• As income level increases, there is a marked increase in participation rates with 5.0 percent of those earning less than $5,000 participating compared to 17.7 percent for the $25,000 or more group. (Boaz, 1978)

• Professional, technical, and managerial workers participate at higher rates than other occupational groups. The more highly paid, highly skilled, highly educated occupational groups have higher rates than those groups which are lower paid, less skilled, and less educated. (Boaz, 1978)

Generally, then, younger, white, well-educated, higher income, higher occupational status adults currently have the highest rates of participation in education and learning activities. By looking at the reasons for participation and non-participation we can begin to understand the basis for these patterns.

The reasons given by workers for participation are numerous but generally fall into four broad categories: job or career related; for personal development or general information; social or recreational; and political or community. Job and career related reasons (53.3%) followed by personal/general information (41.4%) are given by the largest percentage of adults who participate in education. Social/recreational and community/political are given as reasons by considerably fewer participants: 7.8 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively. (Boaz, 1978)

Within the job or career related category, mobility (horizontal, vertical, and within job) is an important reason for participating. Learning new skills to meet the changing technology is also a primary objective within this category. Some differences between groups of workers are evident. As level of education increases, the percentage participating for career or job reasons increases while the percentage participating for personal or general information decreases. Blacks participate to get new jobs more often than whites. Men have higher percentages than women for job or career related reasons while women had higher percentages for general information reasons.

As with reasons for participation, there are many reasons for non-participation. These barriers are classified under the headings situational, social-psychological and structural (Cross, 1978). Situational barriers are those factors which arise out of one's position in a family, the workplace or social group at a given time. Such factors are most often reported as barriers and within this category costs, lack of time, age and level of education, head the list. When demographic differences are looked at, the following factors emerge. Costs are problems for women, younger workers, Blacks, and those with less education. Lack of time, on the other hand, is a problem for men, middle-age workers, whites, and workers with higher levels of educational attainment.

Social-psychological barriers are those factors related to the attitudes and self-perceptions one has to the influence of significant others (family, friends, etc.) on the actions of the individual. Only small proportions of workers report such factors as barriers to their participation in educational or learning activities (5.20%). Included in this category are lack of confidence in ability, feeling of being too old, lack of interest, and lack of support from family or friends. Only minor differences between groups of workers are reported for these factors.

Institutional barriers are policies and practices of organizations that overtly or subtly exclude or discourage workers from participating in learning activities. These factors fall between situational and social-psychological barriers in the proportion of workers reporting such factors as deterring their participation.

The array of structural factors can be grouped under the following areas: Scheduling problems (course and work); Location and Transportation problems; Lack of courses or relevancy of courses; Procedural problems (red tape, credit, admissions, full-time); and Information/counseling problems. Of these factors location, scheduling, and lack of courses are most often mentioned as barriers. Information was also cited as a major
problem but is probably more critical than reported because many of the other structural problems may ultimately be due to lack of information about the options that do exist.

What do the reasons for participation and non-participation suggest about the inequality in the patterns of participation discussed earlier? It is clear that many of the reasons for non-participation are related to socio-economic status and prior educational attainments (particularly those of costs; fears; motivation; and to some extent, information). At the same time, the main reasons for participating are most often related to occupational mobility or personal development. If those who do participate meet their objectives, then the gap between the “haves” (who tend to be the participants) and the “have nots” (who tend not to be the participants) will widen.

IV An Agenda for Change

In the preceding discussion I have outlined the array of opportunities available to workers for lifelong learning, detailed the patterns of adult participation in learning activities, and examined the reasons for and barriers to participation by adults. The picture that emerges is, on the one hand, optimistic when we look at the growing number of learning opportunities available to workers through their employers, unions, and educational institutions and the relatively large and increasing population of adults participating in such activities. Yet, on the other hand, there is cause for pessimism when we look at the demographic patterns of participation which suggest a growing elitism in adult learning, and when we examine the factors that act as barriers to participation in learning activities for many workers. The agenda for change which I am proposing tries to take the optimism and pessimism surrounding lifelong learning for adult workers into account. The agenda has three major components: Data Needs, Policy Considerations, and Program Initiatives.

Data Needs

Under data needs, my first recommendation revolves around the general need for a better and more comprehensive data base broadly related to lifelong learning for adult workers.

Currently, there does not exist a single data base which examines patterns of participation in adult education and learning, industry, and union-sponsored education and training; reasons for participation; and barriers to participation. Such a data set on a large number of workers from all sectors of the workforce is clearly needed. Because of their growing numbers in the workforce and their unique sets of problems, care should be taken to include adequate representation of women and minorities in developing the sampling plan for such an effort. With such a data set, a more complete picture of the attitudes, plans and behaviors of adults vis à vis learning could be developed. In planning such a study, thought should be given to adding a longitudinal component which would emphasize patterns of occupational mobility; attitudinal and behavioral change; and patterns of learning, education, and training. This type of longitudinal information could provide valuable insights on a) tracking patterns of adult participation in learning activities, b) assessing the long- and short-term nature of barriers to participation, c) the impact of different learning experiences on mobility, attitudes, and behavior, and d) the affect of institutional, as well as local, state and federal initiatives that have been developed to increase the learning opportunities for adults.

Related to this first recommendation is the need for alternative methods of data collection, particularly with regard to the measurement of barriers. The traditional
survey approach suffers from what has been termed response bias due to social acceptability or unacceptability of certain responses. That is, the nature of the factor reported as a barrier may affect the responses by adults. Many situational factors may represent socially acceptable responses to “why a person does not participate in educational activities” while social psychological factors may be less socially acceptable. Specifically, lack of time or money, which are situational factors, are more acceptable socially as reasons not to participate than would be lack of interest or lack of self-confidence. In addition, some of the situational, social-psychological and institutional factors that are reported as barriers may ultimately be due to lack of information about the options that do exist. These problems suggest that alternative approaches are needed to better assess the social-psychological, situational and institutional reasons for non-participation in learning by adults. Small scale studies with intensive interviews can be used to begin to better understand these problems. From this new survey instruments can be developed which better assess the “real” reasons for non-participation in learning activities by adult workers.

A final recommendation related to data needs is proposed. Case studies of different adult learning, industry-provided, union-sponsored, and support service programs should be undertaken. These case studies could help to identify and document those components that respond to the learning needs or eliminate barriers of different groups of adults. The National Manpower Institute has used this approach to study three very successful tuition-aid programs: Kimberly-Clark’s Educational Opportunities Plan (see Rosow, 1979); Polaroid’s Tuition Assistance Plan (see Knox, 1979); and D.C. 37 of AFSCME Education Fund (see Shore, 1979). In each instance, the case study uncovered a number of critical factors which are related to the high rates of worker participation in education at these three organizations. For example, the 40% participation rate at Kimberly Clark, which considerably outdistances the national average of 5%, was found to be a direct consequence of upper level managements’ support and encouragement, a built-in counseling program, and a plan that is flexible and adaptable to individual employee needs. D.C. 37 has a branch of the College of New Rochelle in their Union Hall. Decision-makers in educational institutions, business or government can use information from these case studies for the development of new programs or the modification of existing programs to enable them to better meet the needs of adults for learning.

Policy Considerations

Many proposals in the policy arena, related to lifelong learning and the world of work, could be put forth which would involve significant federal expenditures. I have chosen to focus my remarks here on three policy options which are modest in the amount of resources required but which could have significant consequences for expanding the learning opportunities available to workers and for increasing the rate of participation of workers in learning activities.

The first policy proposal emerges from the need for continued experimentation at the local level to find solutions to many of the problems associated with lifelong learning for workers. The proposal is for a worker education experimentation and demonstration projects act (Barton, 1979 a ). The act would support the development, on a broad front, of innovative projects in adult education, adult counseling, service delivery, financing, and work-learning transitions. The aim would be to encourage private initiatives which could be continued after initial federal support for development subsidies. An example of this type of program is already operating for youth. The Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977 uses this method to enhance the future employability
of youth through a wide variety of locally oriented initiatives. The adaptation of this legislation to a new population and problem (that of adults and education) would seem feasible and beneficial.

A second policy proposal is for the initiation of a new federal loan program. While there are a number of education grant and loan programs currently in operation, there is a need for a revolving tuition-aid loan fund for individual workers. (Barton, 1979 b) Most large and many small companies offer tuition-aid benefits to workers. Most of these plans offer reimbursements for tuition costs which are provided after course completion. At the same time, many workers report that they are unable to pay in advance for their tuition. A revolving loan fund could be set up to provide low or no interest loans for workers who have applied and been accepted for tuition-aid benefits from companies. A variation on this proposal which entails no government interaction would be for educational institutions to defer tuition payments or accept “chits” or offer forms of IOU’s for workers covered under tuition-aid provisions. Wayne State University has worked out such an arrangement with the United Auto Workers.

My final recommendation here is for a countercyclical education and training policy to deal with recessions (Barton, 1979 c). This proposal has two separate elements which have relevance for adult workers. The first would give individuals an option of learning while drawing unemployment insurance. On a case-by-case basis, unemployment insurance claimants would be permitted to enroll as students in a wide range of secondary and post-secondary institutions while continuing to draw all or part of their unemployment insurance benefits. Since many unemployment insurance claimants “are not likely to be re-employed during recessions with their existing skill and education levels” (Barton, 1979 c), this would allow them to develop new skills, upgrade skill levels or improve their educational credentials.

The second element involves the use of education and learning as an alternative to layoffs. During periods of reduced operation, workers would be transferred to education or training status. Employers would be required to identify skill needs and workers could choose learning as an alternative to layoff. Workers would be paid a stipend, the costs of which would be shared by the employer and the government. The costs to the government, under this approach, would be less than outlays for unemployment insurance and related costs of food stamps, medical, and welfare costs. For employers, costs for stipends and training would be offset by savings in unemployment insurance taxes and future benefits including:

- maintaining an experienced workforce which would otherwise have to be reassembled and trained,
- enlarging the productive capacity of their workers, and
- increasing the loyalty of employees who may recognize the effort to avoid unemployment.

Program Initiatives

The final items on my agenda are a series of program initiatives for lifelong learning and the world of work. The first initiative involves improved linkages between institutions and between worker and learning opportunities. Unless a system of linkages is developed, the alternative, which is already operating, is for the major new education user institutions of labor and industry to develop their own educational delivery system. From my earlier discussion, it is clear that industry and, to a lesser extent, unions have developed and supported their own education and training programs to meet the needs of workers, the workplace, and the union. While much of this education and training can
be considered legitimate and necessary functions of business and unions, there is obvious overlap with the traditional educational institutions and an inefficiency in terms of delivery and costs. A new system of linkages needs to be developed between industry and labor on the one hand and education suppliers on the other to examine their roles and responsibilities for providing learning opportunities to workers.

One of the problems for many workers is a lack of understanding of the higher education system and what educational opportunities are available. As part of an improved linkage system, education institutions should consider ways of improving the delivery of educational information to workers. Included should be information about educational benefit programs available through companies, unions, educational institutions and the government, program and course offerings, and available education and training institutions. In addition to this factual information about educational opportunities, there should be information on career ladders and progressions, the consequences of technology for specific jobs or occupations and more general information on education for leisure, for retirement, and for "learning's sake."

The Educational Information Centers authorized under the Higher Education Amendments of 1976 and Educational Brokering Centers represent a potential means for supplying these services to workers. Institutions of higher education must work closely with these centers in terms of outreach, information provided, and methods of delivery. Outreach programs should be developed that reach diverse groups of workers at the workplace or in their communities. Information must be appropriate to the needs of workers, and methods of delivery should be appropriate for the type of information and the audience of workers receiving the information.

Related to this lack of understanding of the higher education system by workers is a problem with the ability of educational institutions to respond to the needs of industry and to the needs of workers as students, particularly with regard to program content and delivery.

The educational establishment, in large part, is uninformed about the training needs of industry and the learning needs of adult workers. While some higher education institutions have developed programs and methods to respond to the needs of workers and industry, many others have tried to fit this new student population into the existing system, which is geared to a full-time, younger student body. For the worker, new courses and programs need to be developed and scheduling and location of courses altered. Innovative part-time programs, like The Weekend College of Wayne State University, need to be made available to enable workers to pursue education while remaining full-time in the labor force. In some instances, tutoring or remedial assistance may be required for those workers who lack proficiency in certain skill areas. Credentialing requirements may also need to be reviewed and credit for knowledge acquired through experiences and accomplishments considered. For industry, courses and programs need to be developed which respond to the specific training and skill needs of employers.

The solution to many of these problems may be found through an improved linkage system which could assist educational institutions in responding to the needs of workers, unions, and industry. A critical element of such a system are work-education councils or other local collaborative efforts. Work-Education Councils operate at a community level with no direct institutional affiliation. Through a collaborative process, the Work-Education Council, comprised of representatives from industry, education, labor, and community organizations, can develop policies which improve the linkage between educational institutions and workers (Barton, 1976). To accomplish this, the Councils can undertake a number of activities, including the development of:
• an inventory system of education and training opportunities available to workers;
• an inventory of financial assistance programs available to workers through employers, unions, government, and education institutions;
• dialogues between industry, unions, and education providers on needs, services, financing, delivery and outreach to enhance the learning opportunities for workers;
• a program to help determine the educational interests and needs of workers and to communicate them to educational suppliers;
• an educational information/brokering service for adult workers; and
• support services (child care, counseling, tutoring, etc.) for workers interested in pursuing education.

A second program initiative involves improving the support services for adult workers. Perhaps the most critical need is for information and brokering services and these were discussed under improving linkages. Another needed service is related to time. For many workers, lack of time is reported as a major situational factor for their non-participation in learning activities. For women, the time factor is often related to home or child responsibilities, while for men it is more often related to job responsibilities. These findings suggest on the one hand, the importance of expanding the availability of good child care services to enhance the opportunities for women to participate more fully in educational activities and on the other, experiments on educational leave (paid and unpaid). Both approaches could free up more time for workers to participate in learning activities.

A third support service which may be important for many workers is closely linked to improved information and brokering. Personal counseling may be critical for many workers. Low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and other personal factors are preventing many workers from pursuing learning activities. Through group and peer counseling approaches, services can be made available to a large portion of workers to help them overcome some of these psychological barriers to learning.

Instruction, related to adult learners, is the area of my last set of program initiatives. Many of these were discussed earlier so I will only review them here. Among the more significant structural reasons given by workers for non-participation in education are scheduling and location problems. Despite the fact that scheduling and location changes are the oldest and most common response of education institutions, these are still cited as problems for many adult workers. Educational institutions need to experiment with delivery in new places (community agencies, work site, union hall) and with scheduling which is convenient to workers.

Other areas related to instruction which need to be rethought are admissions and certification. Open admissions policies seems to be critical for many adult workers who have been away from the educational establishment for a long time. By opening admissions, more diverse opportunities can be made available to adult workers. Credit and non-credit options must also be increased to broaden the opportunities for workers. Credit for experience and external degree programs seem to be approaches which many workers could benefit from. New degree programs, in areas that are relevant to working adults, need to be explored. These may include programs in labor studies, consumerism, or parenting, but relevance to everyday situations is very important. Finally, there is a need to examine the learning styles of adults to determine if current pedagogical approaches are appropriate or if modifications are necessary.

These program initiatives, policy considerations, and data needs are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they represent a modest set of proposals related to lifelong learning and the world of work.

In recent years, adult participation in learning activities has been increasing. At the same time, opportunities for lifelong learning through traditional education institutions,
employer-provided programs, and union initiatives have been growing. Lifelong learning for workers can affect the personal development of the worker, the quality of the workplace, and the educational system. Success is dependent on the ability of industry, labor, government, and education to cooperate and to work together toward increasing the participation of workers in learning activities by overcoming the barriers faced by workers and by better responding to the diverse learning needs of workers. How lifelong learning for workers will affect the educational establishment and how lifelong learning programs will impact the lives of those workers who participate in them will continue to remain an open question as the directions that these programs take continue to change.

In 1933, as the editorial on relief education from the Ladies Home Journal concluded, the hope was for so successful an experiment in adult education not to be allowed to pass with the emergency. Forty-six years later, the hope is that the growing number of experiments and programs in adult learning be successfully passed on to workers to enrich or benefit them economically and personally.

REFERENCES


