THE MEANING OF ADULT EDUCATION

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My title is intended to raise two different but related questions. The first concerns the nature of adult education and the way in which our definition of this concept has recently changed. The second concerns the significance of the interest in adult education which is now evident throughout the world.

Let us look first at the question of definition. It is interesting to note that of the plethora of official commissions and reports on education published in this country during the present century, only two have been concerned with adult education: the final report of the Adult Education Commission of the Ministry of Reconstruction presented in 1919, and the Russell Report of 1973. Both of these reports suffered from their terms of reference, which perpetuated the fallacious distinction from which we have suffered so much in the past, and are still suffering, between training and education, with its accompanying distinctions between work and leisure, between the vocational and technical and the liberal, between the practical and the theoretical, between the useful and the useless. In each of these categories it is the second that has carried esteem. This deeply entrenched assumption that real education has nothing to do with the harsh realities of the world in which we spend the greater part of our lives, but is concerned only with the margins of life, with those habitual times when we are free to do what we please, has had an incalculably damaging effect on British life.

This assumption is, of course, by no means restricted to adult education but has for many years permeated much of our educational system. Traditional practice has been to preserve the schools for a general non-vocational education, the directly

1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester on Wednesday, 16 January 1980.
vocational teaching taking place outside the confines of the school system. At the same time the humane subjects have always carried the main prestige within schools and for the most part still do. While the pure sciences have struggled with some success to raise their position in the hierarchy of subjects, the technical subjects have been remarkably unsuccessful not only in our schools but in our universities and polytechnics, where many empty places in departments of engineering bear witness to the lack of interested and well-qualified candidates to enter these industrially related departments. The concern of the DES Consultative Document of 1977, *Education in Schools*,\(^1\) for improving the relationship between school and work bore witness to a widespread belief that the relationship between school and industry was not a healthy one. In response to the Prime Minister's special emphasis on the contribution that education should make to the nation's industrial and commercial well-being, it was said that pupils left school with little or no understanding of the workings, or importance, of the wealth-producing sector of our economy.\(^2\)

In 1919 the formal educational system was even more closely insulated from contact with the technical and the vocational.

Thus the terms of reference of the 1919 Committee were 'to consider the provision for, and possibilities of, Adult Education (other than technical or vocational) in Great Britain, and to make recommendations', and those of the Russell Report were 'to assess the need for and to review the provision of non-vocational adult education in England and Wales'. In each case the assumption is made that education naturally excludes the technical and the vocational.

The Chairman of the 1919 Committee was A. L. Smith, whose name does not occur in the list of Members of the Committee in the original report. Instead, in capital letters at least twice the size of those for the other committee members, appears the title THE MASTER OF BALLIOL (CHAIRMAN). As Professor Waller remarked in his 1956 edition of the Report '[Smith's] eminence and prestige made it possible for many bold claims to be made in the Report which otherwise might not have been so readily accepted

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\(^1\) D.E.S. *Education in Schools*. HMSO, 1977.

\(^2\) Ibid. p. 34.
by the Committee'. One Master of Balliol is worth a thousand arguments. To refer to the Committee, as was general practice, as the 'Master of Balliol's Committee' placed the subject of Adult Education in the uplifting context of dreaming spires; you couldn't get much further from the technical and vocational in 1919 than Balliol College, Oxford.

Such a comment should not be allowed to obscure the very real merits of the Report itself. Like so many of the harbingers of social progress such as those remarkable outcomes of a later war, the Beveridge Report and the 1944 Education Act, this Report was a product of the ferment of a destructive war in which the whole population of the nation was involved and which produced a great deal of introspection about the purpose of individual life and the structure which would best express the aims for which Britain was making such a vast sacrifice. 'Our world has changed, and we are alive', wrote Basil Yeaxlee at the outset of what was in effect a popular account of the Report—An Educated Nation—(its cover bearing the legend 'With a Preface by the Master of Balliol'). 'In five years we have seen changes greater than those which mark the passing of a generation or even a century. A revolution has occurred, and it is of such a kind that no counter-revolution is possible. It is not so much reconstruction as creation that is demanded of us in these days'.

The brave new world, then, can only be created by renewed individuals, their characters, capacities, and vision transformed by education, and dedicated to the service of the community. The Final Report put it this way in a passage which expresses its central philosophy: The adult education movement is inextricably woven with the whole of the organized life of the community. Whilst on the one hand it originates in a desire among individuals for adequate opportunities for self-expression and the cultivation of their personal powers and interests, it is, on the other hand, rooted in the social aspirations of the democratic movements of the country. In other words, it rests upon the twin principles of personal development and social service. It aims at satisfying the needs of the individual and at the attainment of new

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standards of citizenship and a better social order. In some cases the personal motive predominates. In perhaps the greater majority of cases the dynamic character of adult education is due to its social nature.¹

It goes without saying that to a committee of which Albert Mansbridge was a member the University Tutorial Class would be taken as the main tool for the higher education of the working man. These classes, as every adult educator knows, were pioneered by Mansbridge and R. H. Tawney in the North of England in the first decade of our present century. They were a serious attempt to provide, for those who had not been able to gain access to a university, a taste of what serious academic study was like. A tutorial class normally extended for three years, during which the students attended classes for at least two hours a week and undertook both reading and written assignments under the tuition of a university teacher, often a scholar of real distinction. The work done in these classes reached a remarkably high standard, many tutors commenting that the motivation of the students, the standard of work done, and indeed the ability of the students themselves, were higher than were found within the normal intra-mural classes of the university. The university tutorial class therefore expected a real commitment from those attending, often achieved a transformation in the outlook and potential of the students, and in due course gained a secure and affectionate place within the mythology of adult education. Even in 1923 Yeaxlee retails with persuasive enthusiasm a typically romantic description, by one tutor of his own class: ‘Last night I met a class of twenty-one adults, men and women, chiefly factory workers, all in their second year of attendance. They walked varying distances up to eight miles to meet in class, and during over ten meetings since the commencement of the session only two absent marks were recorded in the register.’²

The authors of the final report were already developing an interesting and influential theory of adult education. In his chapter on ‘The Range of Adult Education’, Yeaxlee outlines the following points as being vital to the conduct of adult education:³

¹ Ministry of Reconstruction, op. cit. p. 168.
² Yeaxlee, op. cit. p. 32.
(1) In adult education the pupil must enjoy himself.
(2) The average man is ready for all that justifies us in calling a subject 'humane'.
(3) Wise and sympathetic guidance is needed and adult students never fail to appreciate and respond to it.

This chapter begins with the sensible axiom that 'the scope of adult education shall be as wide as the interests of the men and women to whom it makes its appeal'. It notes that one of these interests is bound to be the work in which men and women spend the greater part of their lives and that work must therefore be one of the subjects with which adult education should legitimately deal, but it is not the nature of the work itself, the refinement and development of working skills and knowledge, which form the appropriate content of further study, but rather the larger theoretical issues about the place of work in society. The Master of Balliol's blessing on such studies is given as follows: '[Education] must show him [i.e. the adult] the reasons that underlie his daily work, the way in which that work has come to be arranged as it is, and how it can be arranged better, the relation of his work to that of others, and its place in the economies of the nation and the world.'

We feel that we are getting a little closer to the heart of the matter when we read of a class on horses attended on two successive winters by a hundred-and-twenty carters belonging to a carters' and lorrymens' trade union. There is clearly an uneasy feeling, however, that we are approaching too near to the vocational brink. By a quick piece of footwork the example is described as 'quaint', the 'humane' element in adult education is stressed, and two pages later in a short discussion of the 'problem of combining education with recreation' we are told that 'from [mass games] to the rapid spread of the folk-dance movement is a short stage'. From the care of cart-horses to folk-dancing in a few short pages!

It is not this rapid transition from work to leisure, from cart-horses to mass folk-dancing, that we would criticize today. Reaching back to the cultural roots of the people has become a major preoccupation in many societies, especially those which

1Ibid. pp. 30f.  
2Ibid. p. 35.
have recently attained independence, and an understanding of the continuity of cultural traditions contributes to the healthy recovery of a sense of identity in local, regional and national communities. What we would criticize is the assumption that the cultural is of more importance to the development of the individual than the working life which is a substantial part of his ‘culture’. And the culture to which the workers are summoned is a culture which has been defined by the educators themselves who in this case, for example, had been excited by the rediscovery of our rich folk music traditions. There seems to be a touch of condescension in a great deal of what is said about the ‘average man’ who is ‘ready for all that justifies us in calling a subject “humane”.’ It is for us, the educated elite, sympathetically to guide this average man with wisdom along the path which he should take, to explain to him what is humane and cultural and what is not, and to show him why his work is as it is, and how that work is related to the whole economic fabric of the nation.

The authors of the report and those who thought like them understood the necessity for social change, yet they did not foresee the radical nature of the change which was required. They were slow to understand the consequences of the decolonization of the labouring classes to which the early adult educators had provided a key through the formation in the nineteenth century of the Sunday and adult schools, the mechanics’ institutes, the trade-union movement, and later the people’s colleges. Ruskin College, Oxford, was founded in 1891 ‘to equip students in such a way as to increase their usefulness to the Labour Movement in general, and to the Society who sent them to the College in particular’, and the WEA was founded in 1903. The original title of the movement, in the resolution to set it up, was ‘An Association for promoting the Higher Education of the Working Class’. This rather restricted aim it achieved predominantly by the organization of university tutorial classes.

The authors of the 1919 Final Report were entirely correct in noting the importance of the provision of work of university level for those who were denied a university education by birth and station. Their recommendations for the increase of university effort in adult education and the stressing of the importance of
Local Education Authority provision were highly influential parts of the report. We do well to remind ourselves that the proportion of the population which went on to higher education was far smaller than it is today, that wealth and social status were of critical importance in selection for university entry and that consequently there were very large numbers of people in the country who had the ability to profit from a university education but had not had the opportunity to do so. The provision of a form of university education was therefore seen by many of those who attended the university tutorial classes as being the first step on the road to changing the system so that their own children would have a better opportunity for obtaining the higher education which they had been denied.

It is interesting to note the parallel in the independence struggle in colonized countries in more recent times. In many newly independent countries the first leaders were people like Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Banda, and so on, men who had secured a university degree, often a doctorate, in an overseas university because there were no universities at home, as a preliminary stage in the struggle which was to lead to the generalization of education and the formation of universities in their own countries. It was a misfortune that their degrees were, in most cases, in the 'liberal' subjects and that partly in consequence the education which developed in post-colonial days was out-of-tune with the real development needs of their countries.

Although the Final Report, then, was right to aim for the highest form of education which was known, the explicit omission of the technical and vocational from the terms of reference and the lack of fundamental criticism of a society which debarred a large proportion of its population from a worthwhile education, made much of the adult education which was recommended seem peripheral to the real needs of the population which the writers of the report were trying to serve.

The world in which the Russell Committee was established fifty years after the publication of the Final Report in 1919, was a very different one. The optimistic social, educational and international aims of the period immediately following the First World War had proved largely illusory and the task of creating a world fit for
heroes to live in had been too difficult of accomplishment. The twenty-five years between the end of the Second World War and the commissioning of the Russell Report had brought a social and educational revolution undreamed of by the Master of Balliol's committee. Nevertheless the terms of reference still excluded vocational adult education from consideration.

These terms of reference are worth quoting in full: 'To assess the need for and to review the provision of non-vocational adult education in England and Wales; to consider the appropriateness of existing educational, administrative, and financial policies; and to make recommendations with a view to obtaining the most effective and economical deployment of available resources to enable adult education to make its proper contribution to the national system of education conceived of as a process continuing through life.' There are some distinctly modern touches in this statement; the emphasis on the most effective deployment of available resources has a familiarly chilling ring. For our purpose, however, in attempting to reach an understanding of the nature of adult education, the last few lines are the most important, for they view adult education in a way which would now be considered as essential, as one part of a life-long educational process beginning in school and continuing through the rest of life. In view of the extent of current writing about life-long education, it is salutary to note that this is no new invention. Indeed, the Master of Balliol himself had written in his introductory letter to the Final Report, 'Adult Education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.' Interestingly enough, it was this phrase 'lifelong education' which so much appealed to The Times that it used it as the title of its article which commented on the Report's appearance on the 15 November 1919, while Basil Yeaxlee in his turn used the same

1D.E.S. (1973), op. cit. p. v.
2Ministry of Reconstruction, op. cit. p. 5. This paragraph was regarded as being of such importance that it was printed entirely in upper case.
phrase as the title of a popular booklet which he published in 1929.

By the time the Russell Report was published it was generally accepted that adult education could not be discussed except in terms of the integration of school and post-school education into a single continuous process. Thus the Russell Report speaks of adult education as being 'a comprehensive and flexible service of adult education broad enough to meet the whole range of educational needs of the adult in a society. It must therefore be integrated with all the other sections of the educational system but at the same time firmly rooted in the active life of local communities; and it must be readily accessible to all who need it, whatever their means or circumstances. Only in such terms can we conceive of education "as a process continuing through life".' ¹ We shall have to return briefly to this extraordinarily influential concept of lifelong education and its relationship to adult education later.

It is hardly germane to our purpose of understanding the nature of adult education to deal in full measure with the recommendations of the Russell Report. Its central aim was to increase the number of adult students from two to four millions in a five to seven year period with a constant per capita cost and a consequent increase in total expenditure from about £16 millions to £38 millions, at an average net cost per student of £10 per annum (all at 1968/9 prices). It is obvious that the Committee went to great lengths to make its proposals attractive and acceptable: all in vain. Even this modest increase in expenditure failed to commend itself either to the Conservative Government which received the Report, or to the Labour Government which succeeded it, and the opportunities for adults to receive education have deteriorated to a marked extent in the seven years since its publication. While resisting the temptation to deal at length with the many excellent features of the Russell Report, it will nevertheless be of interest to indicate three major contributions which it made to our thinking on adult education. The first of these is the recognition that many adults are primarily interested in compensating

by a period of adult education for the inadequacies of their school progress. 'There are many adults,' says the report, 'who would welcome the chance to improve their capacity for study and their general education by part-time day or evening work, with the long term intention of following more formal courses leading eventually to professional or other qualifications. We regard such work as a valid and important part of adult education.' It has, of course, for long been an admirable aspect of the British educational system that it has been possible to compensate through our further education colleges for deficiencies in initial education. Now, at last, the Russell Report recognized that the satisfaction of these aspirations was a legitimate task of adult education.

That such a demand exists and is as yet unsatisfied at a time when eleven years of education is compulsory, remains one of the surprising and encouraging facts of our time. There is still a great demand for Open University courses, though it remains to be seen whether the ever-increasing OU fees will soon meet customer resistance. Many universities, including the University of Manchester, are convinced that many adults in their areas would like to take their university degree by the more traditional university methods of face-to-face teaching and are studying ways of making this possible. Innovations such as the 'open college' scheme, being pioneered by Lancaster University, attract widespread interest and a host of students. Secondly, the Report emphasizes the importance of adult education for the disadvantaged: 'When we speak of a comprehensive service [of adult education] we mean one that caters for all the people including those hitherto untouched by adult education. Many of them are handicapped or disadvantaged in various ways, discouraged from participating in existing provision by their own limitations and circumstances, by unsuitable premises, by a sense of their own inadequacy, by the fear of an unwelcoming bureaucracy in the administrative arrangements, or simply by the language we commonly use in describing the service.' This is helpfully amplified in a later passage of the report 'We give a wide interpretation to the term "disadvantaged" and include in it the physically and mentally handicapped as well as those who, on account of

\[1\] Ibid. p. 96.  \[2\] Ibid. p. 61.
their limited educational background, present cultural or social environment, age, location, occupational status, cannot easily take part in adult education as normally provided.¹

These reminders of the necessity of providing adult education for the disadvantaged received welcome reinforcement from the Report of the Warnock Commission in 1978, and its recommendation that ‘opportunities in further education [for young workers with special needs] should be increased and a coherent pattern of provision developed’.² Important, too, in the valuable chapter 10 of Warnock on ‘The Transition from School to Adult Life’, was the recommendation that ‘every establishment of further education should designate a member of staff as responsible for the welfare of students with special needs in the college and for briefing other members of staff on their special needs’.³ It is unfortunate that little has yet been done to give effect to the recommendations of the Russell and Warnock reports in this respect.

The remarks on the necessity of better public relations in adult education, however, fell on more receptive ears. In perhaps the majority of cases the arrangements for publicizing adult classes and for registering students, and the premises in which the classes take place, are all intimidating to those whose own educational experiences in childhood have not been happy. Indeed, the problem of bringing the very existence of classes to the attention of those who can benefit from them is one of the major obstacles for adult educators to overcome. Partly as a result of the Russell Report a number of attempts have been made to set up information centres in centrally-placed shopping areas where they are likely, by attractive and lively displays, to interest those clients who would be unlikely to see handbills displayed in public libraries and notice boards outside school premises. The Advisory Council on Adult and Continuing Education in its recent discussion paper ‘Towards Continuing Education’ has also drawn attention to the necessity for ‘a network of information, advice and counselling services for adults to help people make best use of the opportunities and to channel their views and demands to the

¹Ibid. p. 92.
³Ibid. p. 175.
teachers and administrators'. Unfortunately, in the present financial climate the danger is that even those successful experiments which have so far been started will be discontinued.

The third major contribution of the Russell Report is the specific reference it makes to adult education in relation to industry. Since the Report is restricted by its terms of reference from dealing fully with this topic it produces the following justification of its interest in industry; ‘It is widely recognized that in a period of radical and rapid change the economic health of the nation will depend as much upon the perception and satisfaction of the “non-vocational” needs, including those thrown up in the course of employment, as upon an adequate provision of technical education.’ It nevertheless goes on to deal with management education, trade-union education, technical and scientific courses, education for occupational change and for retirement, before settling at more length on the topic of education in industrial relations, which seems more readily to lend itself to the description of non-vocational.

The Russell Report can be said, therefore, to recognize the fact that the definition of adult education which it had been given was one which was in large measure outmoded and provided an old and weakened wine skin for the new wine which was necessary if the health of the nation was to be renewed. It will, I am sure, be regarded by future historians of education and, indeed, of the nation, as being a great misfortune that the far-reaching yet sober recommendations of the Russell Report were treated with contempt by successive Governments.

Three years after the Russell Report was published Unesco, after a long period of international discussion, adopted a draft recommendation on the development of adult education. Placing adult education firmly in the context of lifelong education, the draft notes that adults should be able to choose from among a variety of forms of educational activity the objectives and content of which have been defined with their collaboration, those forms which meet their needs most closely and are most directly

2 D.E.S. (1973), op. cit. p. 89.
related to their interests.' In this way it recognizes the primacy of the learner and indicates that both form and content of the educational process should be determined by the learner's needs. Indeed, it could be said that the most important feature of adult education during the last ten years has been the rediscovery of this fundamental principle to which lip service has been paid throughout the history of adult education, but which has been remarkably elusive in practice.

The definition of adult education adopted by Unesco is as follows: 'The term "adult education" denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges, and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.' The comprehensive nature of this definition is emphasized by another statement which links adult education to school education. 'Education and learning, far from being limited to the period of attendance at school, should extend through life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means, and give the opportunity to all people for full development of the personality.'

This definition lets a welcome breath of fresh air into the discussion of adult education. The last few years have seen a curious obfuscation of terminology, especially among British adult educators. Some of them, including distinguished authorities, have been fighting a rearguard action to protect the hallowed notion of adult education as liberal, humane, non-vocational studies, and have attempted to do this by appropriating the term 'adult education' especially for that activity. As it became less and less reasonable to deny the description 'education' to the great variety of the learning interests of adult students, an attempt was made to

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2 Ibid. p. 2.
3 Ibid. p. 2.
distinguish between ‘adult education’ in this historical sense, and all other forms of adult learning for which the title ‘the education of adults’ was coined. This extremely unhelpful distinction, which did little to help in the provision of a worthwhile educational service for adults, has now happily been largely abandoned.

It will be noted that the definition adopted by Unesco and its associated paragraphs, contains the following implications:

(1) Adult education is one part of the total education of each individual.

(2) To develop adult education effectively requires an examination of the existing educational system with a view to its possible restructuring.

(3) Adult education may be both formal and non-formal in its structure and techniques.

(4) Adult education should aim at employing ‘the entire educational potential outside the educational system’ as well as the formal system itself.

(5) Literacy is based at the very centre of adult education.

(6) Adults might wish to study in order to prolong or even replace initial education at all levels from the primary to the university.

(7) Adult education is linked firmly to the world of work as well as to the world of leisure.

(8) The dual perspective must be maintained of full personal development and participation in balanced social, economic and cultural development.

It is clear that this document reflects nothing less than a revolution in our view of education. Instead of regarding education as a predominantly school-based activity with high capital cost, a high degree of professionalization, and a severe restriction to the years of childhood, it is viewed as a lifelong activity using both formal and informal methods, high and low cost means, a high or low degree of professionalization, and relating both to vocational/professional and personal development. The main differentiation within this comprehensive definition is between those who are children and those who are ‘regarded as adult by the society to which they belong’.
This distinction between the child and the adult in terms of their status, motivation, personality development, and learning methods, is universally recognized and forms the basis for meaningful study and practice within the educational field. Perhaps I may be permitted, in this University Library, to claim that the definition of adult education in the UNESCO document is one which has been both advocated and practised by the Department of Adult and Higher Education in the University of Manchester for well over a decade, and that the distinction between the education of children and the education of adults, as fundamental to study and practice in education, formed the foundation of the reorganization of our Faculty of Education which took place in 1976, as the conclusion of a long-term period of policy change.

The UNESCO definition is also a liberating one; no longer is it necessary to consider for example whether a person who is taking an OU degree is engaging in adult education, nor whether the judgement will be different if he is studying a predominantly humanities programme, from that if he is studying applied science. Is a man who is struggling to become literate, or an apprentice plumber attending technical college to improve his skills, engaged in adult education? Under the UNESCO definition all doubts are removed.

The universal declaration of human rights guarantees the right of everyone to education and to full participation in cultural, artistic and scientific life. It is the function of adult education to make available to every adult the means to this education and to full participation in society.

This emphasis on the availability of adult education to all is one evidence of the concern for egalitarianism in education which has been, in my view, the single most influential concept of the 1970s. In 1978, for example, the World Bank appointed an external advisory panel of international experts to advise it on the future education policy to be adopted by the Bank. At the very outset of their report these experts, who came from Brazil, Holland, Cameroon, India, Thailand, and Zambia, stated 'in the last decade, the most important new element that has been introduced into the world's thinking about development is the concept—now widely accepted, if not widely acted upon—that more attention
should be paid to equity in access to development opportunities and in the diffusion of the benefits of development. . . In the case of education, equity and national economic development goals are to a considerable extent mutually consistent. Similarly, a group of European experts reporting to the OECD in 1977 on educational policies and trends also identified the achievement of greater equality of educational opportunity as being one of two new policy objectives which arose in Europe during the expansion of the 1960s, the other being the satisfaction of the demand for qualified manpower.¹

The ACACE Report to which we have already referred, notes three major barriers to equality of access to post-initial education, namely geography, finance, and educational qualifications, the last referring to the barriers of formal educational qualifications which are often demanded for entry to courses of further and higher education: it indicates that 'equality of educational opportunity for adults will require paid educational leave for those in work and adequate financial support for their dependents. There will also need to be financial support for other groups such as the unemployed, the housewife, the retired person, and the adult planning a change of career.'²

Even European countries have found to their dismay that a spread of, and an extension of, traditional education has done little to remedy the inequalities in society or to meet the needs of society for a better educated and more sophisticated population. In less developed countries the inefficiencies of existing educational models are even more conspicuous. The World Bank experts speak of 'concerns about the relevance of models inherited from colonial regimes in the past, or more recently imported through technical assistance; grave budgetary constraints on the financing of further expansion at present unit costs; high failure and dropout rates; poor technology and under-prepared teachers; disparity of access between rich and poor, rural and urban, male and female pupils; analytical and managerial deficiencies in the

designing, conduct, and assessment of educational programmes, systems and institutions; discontinuities between traditional values and usages (including local languages) and school curricula; and many others.'

It is largely as an outcome of this concern for greater equality that the concepts of basic education and lifelong education have been developed. Unfortunately, space does not permit an adequate discussion of these important and far-ranging concepts here. Perhaps, however, I may be permitted to make one observation about each of them. Firstly, we should not assume that basic education is a concept which is of value only to less developed countries. Indeed, one of the most important documents produced by the ACACE during its first period of three years was entitled 'A Strategy for the Basic Education of Adults' (while the National Institute of Adult Education published a study of adult literacy). The report speaks of 'the existence of a substantial population who are severely limited by lack of basic educational skills. The social, technological, occupational, and economic changes of the next decade will exacerbate the disadvantage of these people and add to their number.' The report goes on to propose a strategy for the basic education of adults in a document which is of the greatest significance for the future well-being of our country.

With regard to lifelong education I would simply attempt to correct one common misconception. In Britain it is easy to imagine that lifelong education simply involves the extension for adults of the existing educational structures. This is far from being the case. Financial considerations alone would prevent any large-scale expansion of present educational structures for the foreseeable future, while, as we have already noted, there has been a growing unease about the effectiveness of our present educational models. To attempt to make educational opportunities more effectively available to all, some redistribution of effort and finance is unavoidable as is an examination of the real aims of education and an attempt to maximize its efficiency. Moreover,

as Ettore Gelpi, among others, has indicated, to spread effective education more widely may well have unforeseen and unwelcome consequences. 'Lifelong education,' says Gelpi, 'can call into question economic, educational, cultural and political power due to the permanent enlargement of knowledge and the practical application of that knowledge.'

One of the tensions inherent in all genuine education is that if we are successful in teaching individuals to think for themselves we might not agree with the results of their reflection.

The other way in which lifelong education shatters the bounds of existing educational structures is by seeking teaching skills wherever they are to be found within the community, outside schools and colleges as well as inside. The adequate utilization of the vast learning resources in the community is one of the keys to the extension of educational opportunity to all, though the methodologies for doing this have so far proved difficult to master.

It will not have escaped your attention that we have already strayed across the thin borderline which distinguishes our study of the nature of adult education from our study of its significance. 'The value of adult education', says the Russell Report, 'is not solely to be measured by direct increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other materialistic yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large.'

Three important aims of adult education are alluded to in this sentence. Firstly, we have the vocationally directed aim of fitting an individual for productive work and maintaining and improving his earning power; secondly, the improvement of the quality of life of the individual, and finally, the improvement of the quality of life of society as a whole. Each of these aims requires substantial further definition of a kind which we are unable to give in a single lecture. We must, however, note that they are very closely


2 The British Adult Literacy Campaign was outstandingly successful in this respect. See Jones and Charnley, op. cit., especially ch. 5.
related to each other and that it is this fact which gives adult education its peculiar political emphasis; as Freire has indicated on many occasions, a desire to change society is a powerful motive force for oppressed illiterates to master literacy skills.

Some western writers, especially those whom we sometimes lump together as ‘de-schoolers’, have attempted to devalue literacy. We might, for example, recall Goodman’s statement in his *Compulsory Mis-education*; ‘Perhaps in the present dispensation we should be as well off if it were socially acceptable for large numbers not to read. It would be harder to regiment people if they were not so well “informed” . . . With less literacy, there would be more folk culture.’¹ I think we should just regard this as a *jeu d’esprit* and affirm that literacy should have absolute priority in our efforts, as it has in those countries with a high level of illiteracy.

Even in our own country many people have been astonished to discover the extent of illiteracy in spite of our long established compulsory education. The recent large scale literacy education project produced remarkable results, summarized in a recent study as follows; ‘Over 100,000 adults who, by definition will have had minimal contact with education since leaving school, have been given the opportunity to learn; and something like half of these have remained in tuition long enough to improve their skills and their confidence in themselves. Over 60,000 volunteers have offered help, thereby showing what vast reserves there are in our communities, not only of good intentions but of potential for informal educational development. About 40,000 of these have worked with students over a substantial period of time and have thus contributed significantly to the nation’s educational service. The estimated 20,000 school-teachers who have taken part in the schemes, have gained new insights into the general problems of teaching reading and writing, and into the context of adult life for which their pupils need preparation.’² Thus, as so often happens in adult education programmes, those who start out to teach often learn as much as those under instruction.

Nevertheless, in spite of the success of this programme, the

² Jones and Charnley, op. cit. p. 12.
researchers estimated that the campaign brought in only about one in thirteen of those who have problems of reading and writing.\(^1\) Illiteracy remains a major problem throughout our country. In countries where literacy is normal, the escape from illiteracy brings with it an enhanced self-confidence and new possibilities for individual growth and an increased contribution towards society. In countries where illiteracy is normal, the spread of literacy helps to increase prosperity and self-determination, and may itself become a means of the social and political transformation of the country.

In a society such as our own, the three aims of adult education to which I have drawn attention, the vocational aim, and the aims of improving the quality of life of the individual and of society, are all of great significance. We need more efficient ways of training people for increasingly complex work tasks and for re-training them as the nature of their work alters under the pressure of technological change, or as one type of job disappears and another is created. Administrators and managers are finding their tasks changing dramatically and feel the need to learn new ways of dealing with human organization. Fundamental to all problems of employment, however, is the nature of the society which provides the context for employment and the part which each individual plays in the determination of that society.

It has always been regarded as axiomatic that the democratic form of government requires an educated citizenry capable of understanding the nature of society and the process of government, and of forming conclusions about the desirable and undesirable in human life. One would have thought that at no period in the past had an investment in adult education been more worthwhile than at the present period of rapid technological and social change, yet in fact the nation's investment in this aspect of education has been falling steadily. Even in 1973 the Russell Committee believed that adult education as defined by that Committee received only about 1 per cent of the total national expenditure on education.\(^2\) Now we are told in the midst of a period of draconian severity and an unprecedented need for the services which adult education can provide, that the Secretary

\(^1\)Ibid. p. 3.  
of State for Education and Science considers it likely that the Advisory Council on Adult and Continuing Education will have completed its work by 1983, and is to cut the contribution for Adult Education allocated to the Rate Support Grant by 25 per cent of planned expenditure, or 33 per cent of actual expenditure.

In developing societies the importance of adult education is perhaps more easily seen. The cheapest way of improving the wealth of any nation is to enable someone, who is already working, to produce more crops or goods of higher quality through improved knowledge and skill. To spend money on agricultural extension and on training to improve efficiency in the industrial sector is a sure way of increasing a country’s wealth. Where money is scarce the utilization of community effort through community development projects may be the only possible way of raising the standard of living of large proportions of the population. The spread of literacy and of information about birth control methods, community health and improved agricultural methods, are essential for the achievement of an improved life-style. Such countries therefore place a high priority on adult education.

Yet in spite of the clear instrumental value of adult education in such a community, where it is necessary quickly to develop knowledge and skills, develop innovative ability, and re-order society, the process value of such education is also clearly recognized. In the words of Malcolm Adiseshiah, an Indian educator, formerly Deputy Director General of Unesco, ‘Education is also desired for its own sake and not only for what it can produce. It has its own vocation and its own calling. Its contribution to development does not exhaust its dimensions. Its vocation is man, in whom there are both heights and depths which development cannot reach. Its calling is towards truths which must be pursued in spite of all barriers and beyond all bounds, including those of development.’ ¹ Education is a part of growth; when education stops growth stops.

This is why adult education is both a task and a vision, both product-oriented and process-oriented. Without a continuous re-learning of difficult skills, without constant innovation in productive techniques, and discoveries in science and technology,

without a continual re-assessment of the form of human society and government, without continuous re-appraisal and deeper understanding of international relationships, who can confidently anticipate the continuing survival of the human race?

Yet the most important effect of adult education on the scale necessary for the solution of contemporary problems will be the development of the potential of the individuals themselves, a deepening of their knowledge, the extension of their innovative capacity, the growth of their cultural interests. As Adiseshiah puts it, '[man] struggles to add time to his life, but it is in adding as much life as he can to the time he has on earth that he will find the key to his happiness'.

I have attempted in this brief lecture to explain how our concept of adult education has changed during the recent past, and to indicate the significance of adult education for the last decades of the twentieth century. I have tried to show that the narrow definition of adult education which has been habitual in this country, though not throughout the world, has been recognized as a strait-jacket from which it is necessary to escape. We now see the necessity of regarding adult education as an integral part of the total education of each person contributing to his development as an individual, a member of a family group, and a productive member of society. I have also tried to show that the significance of adult education as I have re-defined it lies in the contribution it must make towards the solution of the massive problems facing mankind today, not only by raising the skill and knowledge level of the community as a whole, but by giving each individual man and woman an opportunity to grow to full potential.

In view of the nature of their work all those who are involved in any way in the education of adults need to study the nature of their task. It is encouraging that the necessity of this is being grasped by many British adult educators, whether they are teachers in technical colleges, polytechnics and universities, tutors in schools of nursing, doctors, whether in general practice or specialists in great hospitals, who are beginning to understand the importance of clear and informative communication with their patients, animateurs in community development, agricul-
ture, or rural health projects, trade union officials, industrial trainers, and many others the prime nature of whose work is fundamentally educative. It is encouraging, too, to note the widespread recognition that adult education is not concerned primarily with the didactic but with facilitating, with enabling those who wish to learn to do so in their own way and at their own speed. How ironic, then, to have to revert to the fact that adult education retains its unenviable position as the most poverty stricken sector of educational provision. Viewing adult education internationally Adiseshiah says ‘Adult education finds itself today in the world in rags. It is the poverty pocket in every educational system.’ At a time when the study of adult education and training in its methodology should be a priority area, it is instead the first and inevitable target when cuts in national expenditure have to be made.

Nevertheless, my own conclusion must be an optimistic one. The Unesco declaration to which I have already referred is only one sign of a world-wide concern with the nature of education and with its re-orientation towards meeting the real needs of the whole community. The emphasis on the educational enfranchisement of disadvantaged groups, the communications revolution which is sweeping the globe and the emphasis on the reform of channels of news communication, the call for a new international economic order, the search for new means of energy, the revolutionizing of industry through the micro-processor and the accompanying revolution in employment prospects, the creative use of retirement and other phases of unemployment, are phenomena too striking to be ignored and all of them require access by adults to educational opportunity. Within the context of lifelong education, we may hope that adult education will at last receive its due recognition. If this happens we will in truth, as the Faure Report put it, be on the way to homo concors—not just homo sapiens, the rational man, nor homo faber, industrial man, nor a combination of the two, but a man who feels in harmony with himself and with others.

1Ibid. p. 168.
2E. Faure et al., Learning To Be, Unesco, 1972.