

An Overture

Learning as a Lifelong Pursuit, Part II

As indicated in last month's editorial, this editorial will address the benefits of lifelong learning for the students. Informally, and to the extent that we profit from our experience, all of us are lifelong learners. However, trends described in the earlier editorial indicate that many learners are formally enrolled as part-time students. In my judgment, these trends will accelerate over the next decades.

Some time ago, I was invited to participate in the College Board's National Forum on Learning in the American Future. Participants answered questions designed to determine what societal trends will have the most impact on life in America from 1980 to 2000 and what societal, institutional, and personal needs should be given high priority as goals for the future of adult learning. A total of 120 goal statements organized into 17 categories were included in the study.

Of those categories, respondents indicated seven that should have high priority now and in the future: lifelong learning; problems of the disadvantaged; problems of senior citizens and of aging; alternative life styles; employment, counseling, and training; upgrading the skills of professionals, and liberal education. Five categories were judged to have moderate priority: psychological health; women, work, and family; new faculty roles; citizen participation; and media learning. The remaining five categories were judged to have low priority: leisure; financing lifelong learning; minorities; military service; and religious values.

The sample of individuals chosen to receive the questionnaires may have influenced the assignment of priorities. The intent of the College Board was to select a sample that would represent the nation's leadership, especially those concerned with education. The sample included leaders in politics, business, military, and a variety of educational and nonprofit organizations. The largest single category of respondents, presidents of colleges and universities, comprised 10% of the sample. Two-thirds of the respondents were between 40 and 60 years of age, 87% held an advanced degree, 56% were Protestants, 80% were men, and 90% were white. Though the sample probably met the established criterion, it did not adequately represent women and minorities. (Women and minorities are, of course, still underrepresented in the nation's leadership.) These characteristics of the respondents probably contributed significantly to the moderate priority assigned to women, work, and family, and to the low priority assigned to minorities.

Certain goals statements within the high priority categories received especially high present or future priority ratings. "Ensuring that every adult is able to read, write, and speak English with sufficient fluency to function competently as a worker, consumer, and citizen" is the goal that received the highest priority for both the present and the future. Other very high priority goals were as follows:

- To offer educational and employment opportunities solely on the basis of the qualifications of each applicant, i.e., without regard to race, sex, age.
- To increase the ability of adults to read, think, write, and speak effectively.
- To ensure that professionals keep current with changing knowledge and technology in their fields.
- To help the handicapped lead self-sufficient, productive, and satisfying lives.
- To help senior citizens prepare themselves for successful retirement.
- To help adults understand, respect, and tolerate the diversity of cultures and human values that must coexist in a global society.
- To enable homeowners to convert their homes and change their lifestyles to conserve energy.

These goals can be achieved if we continue to increase the quality and quantity of lifelong learning opportunities. In a rapidly changing society an education acquired in youth simply will not suffice for life.

Joan G. Creager, *editor*

Reference

GLOVER, R. 1979. *Future needs and goals for adult learning*. New York: The College Board.