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ABSTRACT

A study of the federal role in the advancement of lifelong learning focused on the probable impact of a federally supported lifelong learning system and the existing educational system on one another. The conditions and parameters of the following claim were examined: any lifelong learning enterprise initially funded by the federal government outside of the existing educational system as nonsequential, nonselective and noncertificatory will be transformed into a system that is sequenced, selective, and certificatory. The conclusions were that (1) any effort to determine federal policy in the case of lifelong learning by the conduct of small-scale experiments is likely to be maximally misleading, (2) there are many opportunities for a small-scale federal role to be quite successful by attaching an increase of lifelong learning opportunities to already existing federal programs, (3) any new initiative in lifelong learning should constitute a rapid expansion of those institutions that are free, accessible, and open to all Americans without discrimination, and (4) some subsidies should be made available for existing institutions to serve new populations. (Much of this report is devoted to showing how a federally supported expansion of lifelong learning opportunities will develop into a system much like the existing educational system, and how that will affect the existing educational system.) (EM)

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LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM:  
EXPANSION OR REFORM?

A Report Prepared at  
The Center for a Human Future, Inc.  
for  
The Task-Force on Lifelong Learning,  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is addressed to only one question: What should be the Federal role in the advancement of lifelong learning? We believe that this question should be answered only with a clear understanding of the difference that is made by the scale of that role and by the scale of the total lifelong learning enterprise. We believe that if the Federal Government supports a large-scale expansion of lifelong learning opportunities, then what is likely to emerge is something that can be described as a lifelong learning system. By this we mean simply that in a large scale Federally supported expansion of lifelong learning opportunities, those opportunities will become structured into a system, and that that system, moreover, will contain most of the elements already present in the existing educational system, including those features that the advocates of lifelong learning find most objectionable in the existing system of formal education.

We try to show how this development is likely to occur, how it is likely to affect the existing educational system and what trade-offs will have to be confronted between a small enterprise and a large one. In general, we feel that any effort to produce a large-scale expansion of lifelong learning, though beginning in an effort to provide alternatives to existing arrangements, will end simply by creating an expansion of existing arrangements. Either this will happen or the scope and size of the lifelong learning enterprise will remain small and will require no substantial Federal role at all.

We think, however, that even if a "lifelong learning system" accomplishes nothing more than an expansion of existing arrangements, still, such an effort may have positive reforming effects upon the existing educational system.

The report concludes with a brief presentation of conclusions and recommendations:

1. Because of the importance of scale in determining the consequences of any program, we think that any effort to determine Federal policy in the case of lifelong learning by the conduct of small-scale experiments is likely to be maximally misleading.

2. There are many opportunities for a small-scale Federal role to be quite successful by attaching an increase of lifelong learning opportunities to already existing Federal programs. We provide examples drawn from existing programs in FHA and the Small Business Administration.

3. We think that any large and new initiative in lifelong learning should constitute a rapid expansion of those institutions in American life that are (1) free, (2) of easy access to all, and (3) open to all members of American society without discrimination. Those institutions, we believe, would be the growing and improving systems of (a) libraries, (b) museums, and (c) the educational media. We believe that such institutions might indeed become more aggressive centers for the identification of learning needs, for the development of means for meeting those needs, and for the creation of centers for advisement, guidance and "educational brokering."

4. We recommend that, only in conjunction with some mix of these other recommendations, some subsidies be made available for existing institutions to expand their efforts to serve new populations not now served well by the existing arrangements for learning.

## INTRODUCTION: THE TERMS OF INQUIRY

Supporters of the movement usually understand the goal of lifelong learning to be the enhancement and expansion of learning opportunities for all social groups and ages in American society. They speak of lifelong learning as a desirable way to reform the general arrangements for education, a way of creating alternatives to the learning opportunities already available through the existing educational system. In other words, lifelong learning is not ordinarily conceived as merely a vehicle for expanding the existing educational system. On the contrary, it is seen as a way of providing learning opportunities that are not currently provided by the existing educational system and for persons who are not currently well served by that system.

Nonetheless, it is our thesis that if the Federal Government supports a large-scale expansion of lifelong learning opportunities, then what is likely to emerge is something that can be described as a lifelong learning system. By this we mean simply that in a large scale expansion of lifelong learning opportunities, those opportunities will become structured into a system. That system, furthermore, will contain most of the elements already present in the existing educational system, and is likely to include just those features that the advocates of lifelong learning find objectionable in the existing educational system.

Our thesis, furthermore, is that such a lifelong learning system might eventually be absorbed by the existing educational system, might modify that system, or might remain a competitor of that system for constituents and for public funds. These alternatives should be studied carefully and early in the formation of any Federal role in respect to lifelong learning. The implications for the dimensions of the Federal role and the funding of that role are very different depending on whether the course of action is intended to produce an alternative to services already provided, an extension of those services or a reform of those services.

These are the issues with which this report deals. Though some recommendations are offered at the end of this report, the analysis is presented mainly to raise the signals of caution.

We wish to make it clear from the outset that the focus of this study is extremely limited. We have been asked to comment upon the likely relationships between lifelong learning and the formal educational system should the Federal Government become involved in promoting lifelong learning in America. Our remarks are addressed to this issue and to no other. Thus, the caveats contained in this report do not apply to the desirability of lifelong learning efforts as a whole, but only to the wisdom and manner of possible Federal involvement in lifelong learning.

We believe that the enhancement of learning opportunities for all ages and social groups is a necessary and desirable social goal. But if we are to achieve this social end, it is

most important that we look at the potential pitfalls in our path before we act so that they can be circumvented. Wise social policy demands no less.

#### A. Social Concerns Behind Lifelong Learning

We begin this report with the assumption that "lifelong learning" is a banner for a movement around which various educational and social interests have rallied. If this understanding is correct, then it is of small importance to attempt any definition of "life-long learning." On the other hand, it is vital to understand the social concerns that have brought into existence, and continue to nurture, the lifelong learning movement.

Human beings cease to learn only when they cease to live. In a trivial sense, then, learning is continuous with life: from birth to maturity to old-age and death. This is simply a reflection of the human condition. But since human learning takes place within the context of social life, it is always possible to ask whether the social arrangements of everyday life inhibit or enhance learning opportunities that may lead to the enrichment of individual, human experience.

The emergence of a lifelong learning movement is evidence that many believe the presently constituted social arrangements of society are either insufficient for or impediments to individual enrichment through deliberate, sustained learning; and this, despite the fact that we possess a huge educational system with vast resources at its command. Indeed, many feel

that it is because of the educational system--a system of education that is lock-stepped, age-graded, geared to the production of degree, license, and diploma-holders, and a consumer of a large percentage of the national wealth--that so many educational needs are currently unmet.

But what are these needs? They are sweeping in their breadth and scope. For they emerge from nothing less than the structure and problems of American family life--from birth to parenthood to old age--and social life regardless of age, sex, race, and ethnic origin. Here are a few of these concerns:

- (1) The breakdown of family structure
- (2) The alienation and impotence felt by many people in American society over the incapacity to shape and control their lives
- (3) The increasing problems of being old in a youth-oriented society
- (4) The stable or increasing socioeconomic gap between "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" social groups despite a decrease in the inequality of educational opportunity in the formal educational system
- (5) The belief that work is central to one's individual identity and a source of meaning in life, even as many Americans feel estranged from their jobs
- (6) The rising tide of the unemployed young and youth-related crime at a time when the formal educational system seems paralyzed by crises
- (7) The seeming inability of our cities to nurture and support an urban culture that at once provides a source of humane values to all and yet remains pluralistic and open-ended

No supporter of lifelong learning is probably so naïve as to believe that removing social bottlenecks to enhanced learning opportunities can cure these and other social ills. Still, all



would agree that an open, highly-diversified, non-patronizing, lifelong learning system can ease some of the social strain that presently exists. And it is likely that voices from the lifelong learning movement will increasingly be heard in the political arena. It remains to be seen how public policy will be influenced by the lifelong learning movement, but that it will be influenced is suggested by the enormity of the social interests represented by the movement. Should the scale of a system of lifelong learning, supported by public dollars, become fairly large in the future, the lifelong learning system will surely have an impact upon other social institutions as it, in turn, will be affected by them. Chief among other related social institutions is the formal educational system. Clearly, it would be a mistake to frame public policy on the future of lifelong learning without anticipating the educational system's likely response to the establishment of a rival for public resources. And it would also be a mistake to assume that a lifelong learning system of significant magnitude would have no consequences for the existing educational system.

#### B. Lifelong Learning and the Federal Government

Should the Federal Government become involved in promoting lifelong learning in America? That is the central policy question. It is easy to state, but by no means easy to answer.

No matter what answer is given, the primary instrument for government policy will be the allocation of public funds. That is, in fact, the only role that many supporters of lifelong

learning envision the Federal Government playing. On the other hand, any mere allocational role played by the Federal Government necessarily involves much more. The Federal Government has a maximum responsibility to ensure that public dollars are spent in efficient and determinable ways. This entails, in part, that institutions or organizations receiving funds will have to have accounting procedures that are government approved, program expenditure review procedures that satisfy Federal criteria, and lifelong learning programs that meet legislative criteria as interpreted by the appropriate government agencies. Furthermore, institutions or organizations receiving Federal support for lifelong learning programs would have to meet the social equity policies established by the Federal Government. Affirmative action and special facilities for the handicapped are two such examples. For these reasons, many other supporters of lifelong learning advise against a Federal role even though it means a potential loss of funds for such activities. They argue that the heavy-handedness of Federal requirements would stifle the experiment, diversity, and innovation necessary for a truly excellent system of lifelong learning.<sup>1</sup>

But suppose that political pressure increases, and that a Federal role in lifelong learning becomes increasingly likely. Then, we must ask what institutions exist already that are

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, The Future of Adult Education and Learning in the United States; Warren L. Ziegler, Final Report, prepared for the Division of Adult Education, U.S. Office of Education, The Educational Policy Research Center, Syracuse Research Corporation, Syracuse, February, 1977.

related to the goals of lifelong learning and that have the institutional arrangements that meet Federal accounting and program requirements? The obvious response is to consider the institutions that comprise the formal educational system.

The educational system, like the lifelong learning movement, has an educational mission. The educational system, furthermore, has resources--both physical and human--that are necessary for the establishment of lifelong learning programs. The educational system is already involved in continuing and adult education. Much of the educational system is comprised of public institutions already accountable for the expenditure of public funds. And, perhaps most importantly, the educational system has institutional practices that satisfy Federal requirements for the receipt of public funds.

We therefore surmise that any large-scale Federal support for lifelong learning is extremely likely to involve the existing educational system in lifelong learning. No doubt the scale of Federal activity will be a determining factor. Presumably, if Federal expenditures amount to very little, the Federal Government will not be strongly tempted to turn to the educational system and the educational system would have no strong interests at stake. But if the Federal Government either entered lifelong learning in a large way or slowly increased its role, then involvement by the existing educational system would, we believe, be a virtual certainty.

Thus, in the remainder of this report, we shall examine how the educational system is likely to affect lifelong learning and

vice-versa. Much of the analysis will take place on the assumption that lifelong learning activities become large in scale. Given this assumption, we can ask under what conditions activities of lifelong learning are likely to be absorbed into the existing educational system and with what consequences? We can ask under what conditions lifelong learning, despite large Federal support, might nevertheless remain independent of the educational system? And finally, we may ask whether lifelong learning activities, even though absorbed into the educational system, might have a salutary reforming effect on the system?

In Part II of this report, then, we shall sketch a number of scenarios to examine the probable impact of a lifelong learning system and the existing educational system on one another. In Part III we shall briefly sketch some recommendations that seem to us implied by the analysis.

## II

### LIFELONG LEARNING SCENARIOS

#### A. Introduction

In this Part, we examine the conditions and the parameters under which the following claim holds true: any lifelong learning enterprise initially funded by the Federal government outside of the existing educational system as non-sequential, non-selective and non-certificatory will be transformed into a system that is sequenced, selective and certificatory. We think that this transformation scenario is likely to occur only if the scale of the lifelong learning enterprise becomes fairly large. Yet, we also believe that what constitutes a "fairly large" effort is smaller than many are likely to suspect.

We also examine the conditions and the parameters under which a lifelong learning system, established outside of the existing educational system, will be absorbed into the educational system. We sketch the consequences of such an absorption scenario. We also explore the conditions under which the lifelong learning system might remain independent of the existing educational system. And we consider the possibilities for educational reform implicit in the establishment of a lifelong learning enterprise within the existing educational system.

Let us begin with simplicities. Surely, one principal goal of any lifelong learning enterprise is the distribution of

knowledge and skills. The acquisition of these educational goods requires learning, and learning takes time. Thus, any learning opportunity will have a beginning and an end. That is to say, it will take some time. In ordinary life, learning opportunities vary enormously. They may occur in the course of a visit with a friend, a walk in the park, a visit to a local museum, the theater, involvement in some community activity, or conversation with a dinner partner. A bus ride can be a learning opportunity. In the educational system a brief learning opportunity is often called a seminar, workshop, or discussion meeting. A longer learning opportunity is often called a course. There are persons for whom learning something may take a lifetime, but all learning opportunities will have some duration. The mere fact that learning takes time is inescapable. It is also an important reason why we believe that opportunities for learning, when created and managed on a large scale, will inevitably take on the structure of some sequence.

But must a substantial Federal role in lifelong learning produce such a large-scale enterprise? Not necessarily. But on the other hand, a high rate of participation within the target population would surely be regarded as an essential test for the success of such an effort. Thus, we believe that any substantial and successful Federal effort will produce an enterprise of large scale. It will involve a large ratio of participants to eligible participants. Under these conditions we think it reasonable to expect the lifelong learning enterprise to become

more complex, and inevitable that the learning opportunities created will take on more and more of the structural features so evident in the already established educational system.

Consider the following scenario. Lifelong learning is for everyone regardless of age, sex, race, social class, etc. It is not intended only for certain age groups or certain subpopulations or occupational categories. Yet, we find distributed in the population, an incredibly wide range of interests, skills, knowledge and dispositions as well as many associated and different levels of mastery. A higher participation rate in activities of lifelong learning will quickly produce an increased range of mastery levels. No matter what the activity or topic, there will be those who are beginners and those who are more knowledgeable and more practiced. Thus, as the participation ratio increases, the enterprise will have to expand the number of existing learning opportunities to accommodate this wider range of mastery levels. In short, it will become more complex.

Furthermore, if the participation ratio is to grow, then the enterprise will have to extend to a wider range of activities to satisfy the broader range of interests. Otherwise, it will not grow. It will have to include not only a concern with drama, for example, but also a concern with cooking. It will have to accommodate not only those in the theater, but also those in the kitchen. Thus, if the enterprise grows, it will have to satisfy a broader range of interests. That is to say, learning opportunities will have to be differentiated. This is merely to

say that people are unlikely to come to dinner, and even less likely to stay, if the conversation promises to be too trivial for the serious and too elevated for the novice. For these groups we shall need another dinner table--another opportunity.

In sum, if the lifelong learning enterprise is successful, then it will have to meet the learning needs of its participants. Above all, we want to keep in mind that meeting the needs of learners is what lifelong learning is all about. But behind this banality there lies an important dynamic. Success means an increase in participation. Therefore, it means also that lifelong learning opportunities will become more complex in distinguishing between levels of mastery and more differentiated in the range of topics and activities. But success in this will, no doubt, produce an increase in participation, which will, once again, mandate increased complexity and differentiation between learning opportunities.

Of course, this dynamic is more complex than we have made it seem. There are limits to it. People possess different interests and levels of mastery, but they also possess similar interests and similarities of mastery. What follows, however, is a series of scenarios that portray these dynamics in more detail and that explore their implications both for the educational system and for the employment sector of our society. Nonetheless, we have already a premonition of what is to come. Any successful and large-scale effort to structure and maximize the number of learning opportunities--bus rides, garden clubs, dinners, discussions, museum visits, and classes--precisely

because it is responsive to the needs of learners, will have to become complex in distinguishing levels of mastery and ranges of topical interests. Yet these necessities sound strangely like the prerequisites and sequences of study that are, for many, an objectionable feature of the existing educational system and a chief cause of its being unresponsive to the needs of learners.

B. The Transformation Scenario:  
Sequence, Selection and Certification

Imagine a large-scale lifelong learning enterprise funded by the Federal government and established outside of the existing educational system, an enterprise that is initially without sequence, without principles of selection for placement, and which grants no certificates. Our claim is that that system of lifelong learning will in all probability be transformed into one that is sequenced, selective, and certificatory. Consider these characteristics ad seriatim.

1. Sequence

We have already outlined the principal forces that are likely to impose a structure of sequence upon learning opportunities. But now consider the matter in more detail. Imagine a lifelong learning enterprise in which learning opportunities are without sequence. What does that mean? It means simply that no learning opportunity is to be regarded as a prerequisite for any other. Such a state of affairs is an acknowledged possibility. Within limits, it exists already in

the educational system. There are many courses offered in the local college or university that can be taken without prerequisites. They are usually conceived, however, as beginning or introductory learning opportunities. But even with the most advanced and arcane subjects, students are permitted to choose as their interests may lead them, although admittedly, they are permitted that choice on the assumption that they have attained whatever mastery is needed by way of prerequisite. It is true that one may start the study of American history, for example, almost anywhere. One could start by learning about American arts and crafts. One could start by learning about the development of American industry, or about one's local history. Surely there are no learning prerequisites for anyone to serve on a jury! Yet serving on a jury is a major learning opportunity, although not one that is likely to be arranged by any agency concerned with lifelong learning. In short, it seems that, though there may be prerequisites for learning some things, there are no prerequisites for beginning to learn anything.

When we imagine a large-scale lifelong learning enterprise in which there are no sequences of learning opportunities, what we imagine is a network of opportunities in which each one is a beginning. It is an enterprise in which people begin learning about art, begin to acquire the skills of woodworking, begin to learn accounting, and so forth. Is such an enterprise likely to become very large? We think, probably not. Admittedly, we can conceive of a very large number--perhaps even an infinity--

of such "beginnings." Yet, the fact that everybody is a beginner in something does not imply that anybody will be satisfied with simply making new beginnings.

Yet, there is this counter consideration. For every art, for every activity, for every inquiry, there is something that will correspond to "beginning," "intermediate," and "advanced." The ski instructor will want to know: "Are you a beginner, a novice, an intermediate skier, or an expert?" The prudent person will answer honestly and begin on the bunny slope. There just is a sequence in learning to ski. Merely beginning is not enough. The same is true of working in a shop, learning about Social Security Benefits, studying history, or engaging in community activities. Still, what is a beginning for some may be intermediate or even advanced for others. An experienced person may begin learning about accounting at an "intermediate" level. An inexperienced person may have to begin at a more elementary level. And a person who cannot calculate may not even be able to begin at all. There are, in short, levels of mastery.

From one point of view, every learning opportunity can be a beginning, even though, from another point of view, it is clearly a continuation of what has been learned already. Thus, there are beginnings that are elementary (ABE), beginnings that are intermediate and beginnings that are advanced. It is unlikely that the study of history will be a prerequisite for learning about cooking, but it is practically a certainty that capability in calculation is a prerequisite for learning

accounting or learning how to do surveying. In short, there are sequences of learning opportunities between different kinds of activities or subjects. It is also a practical certainty that the bunny slope is a prerequisite for intermediate skiing instruction. There will be mastery levels within learning opportunities of the same kind or subject.

Clearly, if the enterprise of lifelong learning is to become very large, then it must take account of such levels of mastery within activities and experiential prerequisites between different learning opportunities. If it does not take some matters into consideration, then it will not be responsive to the needs of learners and will not expand. Recall our example of dinner conversation as a learning opportunity. Surely an invitation to dine is all that is required as a prerequisite. Yet many are unlikely to come or to stay for the conversation if it promises to be too trivial for the serious and too elevated for the novice.

Any effort to expand the scale of lifelong learning in American society may begin without any structure of sequence between learning opportunities, but sequence will either emerge rather soon or else the effort will remain small and not responsive to the needs of all learners. If we provide the learning opportunities that people say they want, then the lifelong learning enterprise will have to impose the structure of sequence upon learning opportunities. These forces are not terribly different from those that make the structure of sequence so evident a feature of the existing educational system. Scale,

we think, is the decisive factor. The elementary and secondary schools do not simply aspire to include everyone (within a definite age range) as participants. They succeed in doing so. And the problems of responding to different levels of mastery and different sequences of prerequisites is endemic in that part of the system. We suspect that it would be a strong feature of lifelong learning long before it reached the scale of the elementary and secondary system.

## 2. Selection

Can a substantial lifelong learning enterprise exist without employing principles of selection and screening? By "selection" in this context, we mean simply some mechanism for matching learners to appropriate learning opportunities. The answer is clear. Such principles will have to be invoked in the case of lifelong learning, especially in view of the fact that in any large scale effort there will have to be sequences based upon different mastery levels and experiential prerequisites. The structure of sequence among learning opportunities implies selection of some kind, even if it is self-selection. The more serious point has to do not with this simplicity, but with the question as to who will make the selection? Will choice be exercised by the learner or will assignment to learning chances be performed by the institution or organization that guides the enterprise?

Probably there will be no circumstances in which the exercise of choice will reside entirely on one side or the other.

Those who manage or facilitate learning opportunities will, in some measure, select which ones they desire to create and will in that way restrict the range of choices available to the learner. Still, the American assumption is that where choices are to be made, adults are capable of making them; and when the consequences are bad, they are capable of dealing with the situation. Whether that belief is true or false, the fact remains that it is a functional part of what we ordinarily mean by being an adult. Therefore, where the exercise of choice resides in the case of lifelong learning will be determined partly by the age of the learners. We believe that this relationship furthermore, is linear. Young children, typically, are not expected, indeed, they are not permitted, to exercise choice in selecting learning opportunities. When they are permitted extensive choice of selection, as in the "open classroom," not long after will come the call for a "return to basics," by which is often meant, among other things, a perceived withdrawal of the child's freedom to choose what will be learned and when. With young children, the prerogative of choice lies strongly on the side of the school, the teacher, and the family. On the other hand, the elderly are expected to have no such choices imposed upon them. With them, the prerogative lies strongly on the side of the learner. We believe, however, that there are other, more systemic factors that will influence where the burden of choice will lie in the case of lifelong learning.

Those forces stem primarily from the demand for efficiency. "Efficiency," however, means many things. It will mean one

thing to the learner, another to whoever provides the opportunities for learning, and yet something else to the public. It is important to note, for example, that in the normal course of affairs there are no incentives for the formal educational system to be as efficient as it can be. On the contrary, it would be more accurate to say that the formal educational system will operate as inefficiently as the society will permit it to. That is to say, it is practically never in the interests of those in the formal educational system to accomplish whatever it is that they accomplish with progressively less and less commitment of time, money, and human resources. The argument in any school or college is usually that they can do a better job with a bigger budget, and further, that they can do a better job dollar for dollar with more money, more people, and more time. The appeal, in short, is that efficiency is always purchased only with more resources. It is doubtful that anybody really believes such a claim, because one virtually never hears the hard argument of efficiency that as good a job could be done for less. We do not claim that the formal educational system is peculiar among social institutions in these ways. We wish only to note here that these are important features of the educational system. They are likely to be features of any lifelong learning enterprise, but especially of a large one.

Though there may be no inherent incentives for efficiency in the formal educational system, nonetheless, for the learner there are deep and powerful incentives to maximize efficiency.

He will want to learn as much as possible with the least input of time, effort, and money. Clearly, if the enterprise of lifelong learning is to be truly responsive to the needs of learners, then it must be highly efficient. People are unlikely to show up for a waste of time.

But what does this demand for efficiency really mean? It is often supposed that the most efficient arrangements for learning from the point of view of the learner are those in which the control of what to learn, in what sequence, at what speed, and at what times, is believed to be firmly in the control of the learner. These potentialities are often believed to be best exemplified in a variety of individualizing means of instruction such as computer-aided instruction. But it is a fundamental feature of all forms of programmed instruction that they require the most careful and refined prior discriminations between levels of mastery within learning opportunities and sequences between learning opportunities. Such arrangements are highly efficient from the point of view of the learner precisely because a myriad of decisions have already been made concerning what is to be learned, what comes first, second, and so forth, and where the student is to start. These choices are not in the hands of the learner, and that is partly what makes it a highly efficient set of arrangements for the learner. It is illusory to suppose that such arrangements place the control of learning entirely in the hands of the learner. Of the four properties of control--choices of content, sequence, speed, and convenience--only the latter two--speed of response,

and convenience--are left under the control of the learner. We should note that even the efficient use of a library, from the point of view of the user, requires a heavy measure of either advice and guidance or the previous mastery of an experienced user.

It is worth reminding ourselves of two previously noted banalities. The first is that learning takes time; the second is that every learning opportunity will have a beginning and an end. Even television programs are scheduled and have a beginning and an end. But why dwell on such transparent truths? Because, as anyone can testify who has tried to lead a committee or call a meeting of more than three busy persons, even the best response to the learners' demand for convenience is likely to be inconvenient to some and perhaps to many. And we should keep further in mind that even though the timing is inconvenient to everyone, still, many may show up. (Whether they do, we are tempted to add, will depend not upon what is convenient, but upon their individual utility curves.)

In short, the choice of convenient timing is a decision unlikely to remain in the hands of the learner even under the best of circumstances. But this may be no great loss in the effort to maximize efficiency for the learner. After all convenience is probably both administratively and educationally less important for the learner to control than speed of learning or speed of response in instruction. Being efficient, for the learner, means being able to learn as fast as possible, i.e., with as little investment of time and energy as possible.

This demand, imposed upon the lifelong learning enterprise by the needs of learners, will have a somewhat different set of consequences than arise from the demand for convenience. If we are to establish arrangements that maximize the efficiency that the learner requires, then we shall be driven toward a pattern of homogeneous groupings. In lifelong learning, whatever the setting, intermediate beginners should not be grouped with elementary beginners any more than they are on the ski slope. Instead, they should be grouped either with other intermediate beginners or else with elementary beginners who have since advanced. Otherwise, the lifelong learning enterprise will be more inefficient for both groups than it needs to be. There are circumstances, of course, in which, for reasons of management, heterogeneous groupings may be more efficient than homogeneous groupings. But we have already indicated that what is efficient for management may not often be what is efficient for the learner. But even in these circumstances, there is no doubt that the attainment of homogeneous groupings will remain an aspiration even of management. Homogeneous groupings, if they can be provided, are more efficient for the learner and less wasteful of everyone's time. The extreme efficiency for the learner that is observable in highly individualized approaches does not arise because such instruction is individualized. It stems rather from the fact that, to whatever extent such arrangements are individualized, they result in pressing the need for homogeneity to its logical extreme. In short, it is not individualization that gives rise to the

illusion that the learner controls the speed of learning. It is the maximization of homogeneity.

But let us return to a point just noted. Homogeneous groupings in learning opportunities are less wasteful of everyone's time. That is, they are more efficient for everyone, and that includes those who are responsible for managing, directing, facilitating, or leading the creation and conduct of lifelong learning opportunities. That is to say, by maximizing efficiency for the learner, those who manage the lifelong learning enterprise will also be advancing efficiency from their own perspective. The learner will say, "Don't waste my time," management will say, "Don't waste ours," and the public is likely to say, "Don't waste our taxes." There are few instances within the entire conduct of the educational enterprise in which these different groups of interests will converge so uniformly on a single operational direction. In this case, what is a demand of the learner, is also a requirement for the lifelong learning enterprise in order to be responsive to the learner; and at the same time a strong interest of the public.

But the direction on which these interests converge is the direction of homogeneous groupings within the lifelong learning enterprise. That is a course of action that will mandate the further refinement of sequences and prerequisites that we have already discussed. It will also mandate a strong creation of selection and screening procedures not unlike those that exist in the established formal educational system. Admittedly, such possibilities will arise only when and if the

lifelong learning enterprise reaches a rather substantial scale. But it is also probably a precondition for its growth.

The point that we have been driving at should now be apparent. Those arrangements that will maximize the learners' demand for efficiency are precisely those that will take many decisions out of the hands of the learner. Choice, of certain kinds, will remain with the learner, probably and primarily as a function of age. But advice and guidance, and perhaps even placement, will rest heavily on the side of the institutions or organizations involved in conducting the lifelong learning enterprise. And there will be such institutions or organizations if there is any substantial Federal role in the enterprise. In short, the demand to be responsive to the needs of learners, even in the case of lifelong learning, will reinforce the structure of sequence and prerequisites within and between learning opportunities and will require something like a strong role of advisement, counseling, and even assignment in matching persons with learning opportunities.

Whether the control of learning lies with the learner or with others, will depend, we think partly on scale, partly on demand, and partly on the content of what learning is desired. For example, there are some things the learning of which may be inherently inefficient. Learning to inquire (that is, becoming an inquiring person), like learning to be empathic or learning to listen to others, may simply take a long time and require lots of false starts. Learning such things may be at once the most important things for all persons to learn and

also the most inefficient for anybody to learn. In learning such things, heterogeneous groupings may be indispensable and inefficiency of learning may be something that needs to be jealously guarded. If that is so, then any substantial Federal role is unlikely to be any substantial advantage. Instead, it is likely to create just those conditions in which the necessary long-term and apparently inefficient practices of learning are least likely to be preserved.

Secondly, we recognize that there may be individuals, even large populations, whose interest is not to use time efficiently, but to use time up. They may see lifelong learning as an opportunity to "kill" time or to make time "pass." For them, perhaps, no Federal role is needed. For them, lifelong learning may be a form of entertainment which, even though enriching and valuable, requires no more Federal role than any other entertainment. We do not wish to suggest that lifelong learning as a movement related to social problems is unimportant or should not be encouraged for such populations. We wish only to suggest that it may not require any substantial Federal role independently of programs that already exist. It suggests rather that under such provisions as FHA financing, the Federal Government might impose educational requirements in the "social programming" of retirement centers just as they might impose standards for medical services in such places.

Then again, we acknowledge that the attainment of efficiency, the demand for it on the part of learners, and the creation of homogeneous groupings for lifelong learning probably

cannot occur unless the enterprise is rather large. If it is large, then, our thesis is, the enterprise will need to establish not only sequence between learning opportunities, but also something starkly resembling the kind of screening, placement, advisement, and assignment that is often viewed as an objectionable feature of the established educational system. Indeed, if it ever happens that the demand for lifelong learning ever exceeds the supply and that securing such learning services becomes a serious social good, then we are quite convinced that the power of choice will most certainly be transferred from the learner to the managers of the lifelong learning enterprise. Consider the Baake case. It is important to note that this case centers around questions of criteria for access to medical school and not access to programs leading to a Doctorate in Sociology. Access to a degree program in sociology is not usually regarded as a choice as socially consequential as admission to a medical school. Neither is there any severe demand that exceeds the supply of such opportunities. But when the consequences are far-reaching, and the demand is excessive, the maximal conditions are satisfied for screening, admission, and placement to fall most strongly in the hands of the managers of the system and outside the reach of the learner. One is permitted to conjecture that such conditions will never arise in the case of lifelong learning. But that judgment is also a commentary on the gravity, the scope, and the magnitude of the Federal role in lifelong learning.

These considerations argue strongly that any Federal role in the support of lifelong learning cannot omit support for the development and perfection of the function of guidance, advisement, and placement--the matching of learner to learning opportunity--in the lifelong learning enterprise. The performance of such a function is a necessity if lifelong learning is to grow. It is an inevitability if lifelong learning is to satisfy the demand to be responsive to learners.

But the performance of such a function need not be lodged initially with agencies or with expertise found within units of the existing educational system. It might be carried out by the support of new social roles described best, perhaps, as "educational brokers." Such a function may be lodged in schools, school systems, museums, libraries, or in independent agencies. But wherever such a function is lodged, its presence cannot be avoided, and its successful development, ironically enough, will be sufficient to make its independence of the existing system more and more problematic. Its success, in short, will tend to make the lifelong learning enterprise more and more a system and less and less independent of the already existing system of education.

### 3. Certification

The certification function of the educational system, it seems, is the favorite "evil" of all educational reformers. It is that aspect of the established system that needs most to be weakened and yet is most difficult to avoid altogether.

Indeed, we shall argue that the certification function of the educational system never arises except where the structural features of sequence and selection already exist, and further, that given the existence of sequence, selection, and large scale, it is inevitable that certification will also appear.

But by "certification" we do not mean to speak simply of such devices as degrees and diplomas. Nor do we equate certification with licensure. An educational certificate is not merely a means of admitting its possessor to the practice of barbering, carpentry, auto repair, or any other of the several practices of society. By "educational certificates" rather we mean any social device that permits one, as it were, to exchange the educational activities that have been performed in one place for those that would have been performed somewhere else provided that one had been in that other place.

Certificates, thus, are those devices, of whatever form, that serve, as it were, as "the medium of exchange" between different educational programs in different places or as testimony that one is qualified to perform a particular socially desired task. Without certificates, in this sense, within the existing educational system, there would be no way that one could go from one place to another and carry along the evidence that one had acquired some specified skills or knowledge regarded as socially important. Thus, certificates can be represented by such things as transcripts, letters, scores on tests, records of evaluated experience and a host of other social instruments that provide a form of public testimony.

They all function as the "medium" by which one exchanges activities performed in one place for those that would have been performed somewhere else had one been in that other place instead.

Educational certificates, thus, are the instruments of sequence and selection. They are those social devices, whatever their form, that permit one educational program or learning experience to be equated with another from some distance. They are what permits one to move, from Alma Mater to Alma Pater, to take up where one left off; and in the process they establish not only the standards of sequence and of mastery level, but also a strong relation between Alma Mater and Alma Pater. Indeed, it is the consequence of certificates, so conceived, that Alma Pater and Alma Mater come to be linked in a single system. Without such certificates they are simply independent centers of educational activities. With such certificates they become different centers of activity linked in a single system.

As "coinage of exchange," such certificates may be accepted from place to place at par value, at inflated value, or at discounted value. But, in any case, they are the social instruments by which we implement the structural meaning of mastery levels, sequence, and placement and advisement in any educational system. They are, at the same time, precisely what makes the system of learning opportunities a system. They are not necessarily what makes it an educational system, even though they arise from the inevitabilities of what constitutes learning,

and from what is required for an efficient response to the needs of learners.

It is quite possible, of course, to conceive of the lifelong learning enterprise so that no need for certificates will arise. But what is the meaning of such a conception? What does it really add up to? It means that learning opportunities are provided and sought for no reasons whatever that require any public testimony of what is learned. It means, in other words, that such learning is undertaken for no purely instrumental reasons requiring validation by persons other than the learner. No doubt, for example, we all learn a great deal from the displays, lectures, and self-guided tours that are excellently provided in the nation's National Parks and in the museum centers of the world. Such learning is personally enriching and socially desirable to promote. Yet, in such cases nobody cares whether any testimony is offered to others confirming what has been learned. Certificates are neither provided for such learning nor sought by learners. Such learning, however, is neither offered nor sought for purposes of "job upgrading," "skill maintenance," or "career training." Learning undertaken for these latter purposes is quite likely to require some form of public testimony of mastery. It is likely to require the introduction of certificates of some kind.

Thus, when we conceive a lifelong learning enterprise that contains no function of certification, what we are conceiving is a network of learning opportunities in which learning is sought and provided as a consumer good. Such an enterprise, we

think, is likely to remain small. Undeniably, it will be smaller than one providing also learning opportunities for instrumental purposes and which, therefore, will introduce a range of certificates providing public testimony as to what has been learned and serving as a medium of exchange.

A lifelong learning enterprise with no instruments of certification is small, limited in purposes, and not responsive to all the learning needs of all persons. It is likely, in fact, to appeal most to those who are most prepared to find in learning a source of pleasure and personal enrichment. It will be favored most by those who see in learning a kind of consumer good. The result will almost certainly produce a distribution of participation that corresponds to nobody's view of what is socially equitable. Insofar as social equity is a fundamental concern of Federal policy, as we believe it must be, then any substantial Federal role in promoting lifelong learning will have to encourage learning that is sought by learners for instrumental reasons. It will, therefore, almost of necessity be a role that will encourage the rise of certificates of attainment within the lifelong learning enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Whether the movement of lifelong learning expands or does not expand, it will have to be staffed. And if the enterprise requires the expenditure of public funds, then there will arise a strong public interest in assuring that those who staff it are properly qualified, and qualified by some other measure than peer acceptance among lifelong learning educators. Those qualifications will undoubtedly include certification from the existing educational system. Though it is likely that those who staff the lifelong learning enterprise will be certified, at least partly, through the existing educational system, it is unlikely that the educational system will be staffed by those who are certified within the lifelong learning enterprise.

The point is that whatever may be the Federal role, the lifelong learning movement is now and will continue to be related to the existing educational system and related in quite definable ways. And that relation will be significantly determined by the necessities for the certification function.

Summary. In presenting the details of this transformation scenario, we have nowhere spoken of the existence of a lifelong learning "system" in the sense that we all speak from time to time of the "system" of formal education. We have presented only those considerations that make it reasonable to expect such a system to emerge from its expansion into a large scale enterprise. The presence and management of sequences, levels of mastery, systems of guidance, advisement and placement, and certificates of attainment--these are all that is necessary for the lifelong learning enterprise to become a "system" in the same sense as the already existing system of education for which it is supposed to provide alternatives.

Neither have we claimed that everything included within the activities of lifelong learning will manifest these properties of sequence, selection, and certification. But neither should anyone suppose that all activities conducted within the existing formal system have such features. Our claim has been merely that an enterprise of learning opportunities that starts with none of these features, will soon acquire them, provided it becomes a successful enterprise of large scale. But, on the other hand, an unsuccessful program of small scale requires no Federal role. That is not the set of circumstances we have been asked to examine.

We have assiduously attended, moreover, to the assumption that lifelong learning activities are successful in reaching their most fundamental goal, namely, being responsive to the needs of learners. Though lifelong learning has and will

continue to have other characteristics than those we have considered, still, we would claim that these structural and systemic features are likely to be the most powerful. What begins as no system, will end as a "system" of lifelong learning. That is the transformation scenario.

### C. Other Scenarios and Other Social Sectors:

#### Employment, The Educational System, and Compulsion

Let us speak then of the lifelong learning system. We may ask how it might be related to the employment sector of society, how it is likely to be related to the existing educational system, and what may be the consequences in either case? We shall consider (1) the employment sector and compulsory education, (2) the prospects for absorption and independence of the lifelong learning system, and (3) lifelong learning and reform of the existing educational system.

#### 1. Employment and Compulsion

Employment: In at least two ways, employers might reward persons for participating in the lifelong learning system. First, they might, and often do, subsidize the costs to the employee for participation. But secondly, they might, and sometimes do, create incentives for employees to continue learning by rewarding such participation through job advancement and job placement. The second of these is probably the most powerful of the two for forging a link between the employment sector of society and the lifelong learning system. But it provides, by no means the only grounds for such a link.

In any society where employment presupposes the possession of learned skills and knowledge, the maximally efficient means for any employer to secure precisely the skills he needs in his employees is to conduct the needed education himself. In that way, the content of what is learned remains firmly in his control and the endorsement of its possession is "first hand." But the benefits of efficiently determining what is learned must be balanced against the costs of providing such education. And those costs can be considerable. The better path, and the one that is typically pursued, is to give up some measure of control over what is learned in exchange for someone else, preferably the public and the employee, bearing the costs of the education. This trade-off is partly what makes the established educational system age-graded and makes schooling a prerequisite to employment.

Regardless of the future of lifelong learning, employers, no doubt, will continue providing their own educational programs in order for their employees to secure job-related skills. Indeed, in most studies such educational programs are already included when calculating participation rates in lifelong learning. They are a part of the social landscape, and we may be sure that they will continue. But we may be equally sure that if the necessary and quite specific job-related skills and knowledge required by employers could be secured through some other agency at somebody else's expense, that would be a preferred solution. This path to the future preserves and perhaps even heightens the interests of employers in controlling the content

and standards of what will pass under the name of lifelong learning, and it relates the lifelong learning system more securely to the needs and control of employers.

Reward at the work place for participation in the lifelong learning system, together with control over its job-related offerings by employers, would constitute a strong link between the lifelong learning system and the employment sector of society. We do not believe that this control can ever be unqualified. But we believe that it can be, and is already, substantial. The strength of this link, as well as its dynamics, will be most clearly exposed if we examine what it would mean for participation in the lifelong learning system to become compulsory. We believe that it is already compulsory for certain groups within our society. But we do not raise the question for that reason. We raise it, rather, because we think that the question will reveal important features of the link between the lifelong learning system and employment in our society, on the one hand, and between the lifelong learning system and the educational system, on the other hand.

Compulsory education: Formal schooling in our society is compulsory. It is not compulsory, however, because there are compulsory education statutes. It is compulsory in the same way that going to the hospital is compulsory for one who is in desperate need of surgery. Attendance is compulsory because the alternatives to attendance are fatal. This is a form of compulsion that is vastly stronger and more irresistible than

could be created by any statute. The compulsion for schooling has little to do with statutes requiring attendance and much to do with near universal rates of attainment in the system.

The point can be simply put. When everyone completes high school, then high school completion, in and of itself, cannot be socioeconomically advantageous for anyone. On the other hand, in a society where nobody completes high school, then failure to complete it can be no problem--"dropping out" carries no social liabilities. But suppose that 75% of all 17 year olds complete the twelfth grade.<sup>1</sup> Being an attainer in such a group is likely to bring little relative advantage to any individual. The advantage is probably less than it would be were one part of a generation in which only 50% completed high school. The important fact, however, is that under such circumstances it is absolutely socioeconomically disastrous to be among the 25% who fail to attain. Schooling becomes compulsory. We believe that schooling becomes compulsory in this way at any level of the system when around 65% of an age-cohort complete that level.<sup>2</sup>

The obvious question is this: Could lifelong learning become compulsory in a way similar to the way that schooling has become compulsory in the formal system of education? If we

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, the national high school attainment rate expressed as a ratio to 17 year olds has been about 75% for the last 13 years. See U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Educational Statistics, Digest of Educational Statistics, 1977 edition.

<sup>2</sup>The reasoning that leads us to this conclusion is intricate and cannot be fully explicated in this brief report. It derives from our on-going study of the behavior and logic of educational systems.

consider the lifelong learning system as a whole, including all the diversity that it is likely to contain, then the answer would have to be, "No." However, within the diversity of the lifelong learning system, there are bound to be learning opportunities of longer or shorter duration that are offered, entered, and completed, for their instrumental relation to employment and other opportunities. Should this happen, then that aspect of the lifelong learning system might well become compulsory even though other aspects of the lifelong learning system do not.

There are three reasons to suppose that such a possibility is also a probability. Each has been mentioned in other contexts, but each deserves mention again. First of all, many employers complain nowadays both that the schools produce students with skills that are irrelevant to the manpower needs of the economy and students with no "marketable" skills at all. The career education movement is, to a large extent, an expression of such a complaint. Thus, for reasons that we have already mentioned, both employers and trade unions may well view with favor any effort to provide a tighter "fit" between education and work.

As the lifelong learning system expands, opportunities of this sort that already exist are likely to multiply. They are also likely to come more securely under the control of employers and unions. We must recognize that though the business community and the economic demands of the society exercise considerable influence in the formal educational system, still that influence

is far from decisive. And it is difficult to make it effective. There is a kind of "ideology of the public good" that has always informed the public role of the public schools. There is no such strong ideology in the lifelong learning movement. It arises more strongly from the desire to serve the quite individual desires and needs of quite individual learners, and the aggregate of individual interests does not add up to a "public interest." Employers, trade-unions, and other interest groups are likely to find that the quite specific control of content and standards will be easier to achieve in the lifelong learning system than in the already existing educational system even if that system extends its activities to include lifelong learning.

But secondly, because nearly everyone is coming to possess a high school diploma, that diploma is no longer an effective screening device for hiring. Necessarily, it does not testify to any specific employment skills. Thus, it has already been the experience of some employers that a high school "equivalency certificate," normed to quite specific achievement standards, is often more useful than the diploma in testifying to the possession of skills for employment. Thus, the beauty of a closer "fit" between lifelong learning opportunities and useful employment skills also lies in the development of a new and more useful screening device: a lifelong learning, job-related certificate.

Lest anyone suppose that this potentiality is small, we hasten to add that much of the "organized instruction" for

adults is in those programs that are sponsored by employers for those in "middle management" and those beginning careers. And these lifelong learning opportunities are already typically compulsory for career advancement in such companies.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we should note again that social equity is a fundamental goal of Federal policy, and differential participation rates in the lifelong learning system are likely to be viewed as inequitable, whether or not they are in fact. Yet there is a considerable body of evidence that less advantaged social groups are more likely to participate in adult learning activities when they believe that some fairly clear and significant socioeconomic benefits are to be derived from participation. Thus, from another quarter there will be found strong interests in maximizing the number of job, employment related, or instrumentally defined offerings within the lifelong learning system, if only to achieve a socially more balanced participation rate.

We think it is unlikely that participation in the lifelong learning system will, as a general rule, become compulsory. For

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<sup>1</sup> See K. Patricia Cross, A Critical Review of State and National Studies of the Needs and Interests of Adult Learners, a paper prepared for an NIE Invitational Conference, Washington, D.C. September 26-28, 1977, pg. 6. In figures compiled from the NCES Triennial Survey for 1975, Cross reports that participation in adult learning in 1975 was drawn disproportionately from the 25 to 44 age group (35.6%). This is the group that is most likely to contain participants in career entry and mid-career, employer supported learning opportunities. And these are also the opportunities that are most likely to be compulsory as things stand currently. They are often as compulsory for such individuals as the bar exams are compulsory for those seeking to engage in legal practice.

significant populations, however, we believe that it is already compulsory, and that that social compulsion for participation will grow within the lifelong learning system as the system expands. Many things may be achieved by expanding the lifelong learning system to a large-scale enterprise. But among them we must include the likely expansion of compulsory education. The absence of legal compulsion for participation provides only the weakest of grounds for claiming that compulsion is not present.

There is, however, this technical difficulty in being quite clear and precise in advancing this claim. Compulsion in lifelong learning cannot be described with the precision that compulsion in schooling can be described. Completing high school, we have claimed, becomes compulsory when about 65% of the 17 year old age cohort completes high school. But in relation to lifelong learning, there is no age cohort reference group. Instead, the reference group is either the labor force or a subsection of the labor force. In the lifelong learning system, the onset of compulsion, expressed as a percentage, of the entire labor force, is likely to occur at a success rate far less than 65% because only a portion of activities in the lifelong learning system will be defined instrumentally and because the lifelong learning system certificates are likely to be relevant only to a small range of employment opportunities. However, if we can identify the potential labor force for a small range of jobs, then, we think that compulsion is likely to set in at a success level that represents about 65% of this reference group.

This methodological consideration, of course, simply complicates the determination of when compulsory lifelong learning is likely to emerge; it does not affect the presence or absence of compulsion.

## 2. The Absorption and Independence Scenarios

What are the conditions under which the lifelong learning system will become simply an extension of the regular educational system, and under what conditions might it remain independent? These are vital questions to consider in determining the shape of the Federal role in lifelong learning. For if the result of any large effort is likely to end simply as an extension of the system that already exists, then funding, right from the beginning, might well take the form of supporting the existing arrangements in the effort to take on new activities. That would be preferable to starting an entirely new development.

Absorption: Between the alternatives of absorption and independence, we think that absorption is the more likely future for a large-scale lifelong learning system. Which future occurs will be decisively determined by the operation of educational certificates. They are, you will recall, the common coinage by which different centers of learning are related to one another into a system. If it were to happen that the local college or university would grant 6 credits of x and y to anyone who could present evidence of having satisfactorily completed n number of hours of instruction in educational programs conducted by General Electric for its own employees, and if,

conversely, General Electric were to accept  $m$  credits of  $x$  and  $y$  in the local college as equivalent to  $n$  numbers of hours in its own programs of instruction, then, for all practical purposes, the educational activities of General Electric to just that extent can be regarded as a part of the regularly established educational system. It would be reasonable to describe such arrangements as constituting simply an extension of the existing educational system.

But such arrangements need not be reciprocal in order for us to say that the lifelong learning system has been absorbed into the existing educational system. It will suffice if such an exchange of activities operates in either of the two directions. If General Electric is willing to acknowledge that so many credits in the system will adequately substitute for so many hours of instruction in their own programs, then, from the point of view of General Electric, its programs are a part of the system, even if the local college does not reciprocate. On the other hand, if the local college is willing to give  $n$  credits for specified kinds of instruction provided by General Electric, then, from the point of view of the local college, the programs of General Electric are, to just that extent, also a part of the system even though General Electric does not reciprocate. Under any of these conditions, we would be entitled to say that the boundaries of the existing educational system had simply been expanded, and the test of that claim is that educational certificates operate between the two units as a medium of exchange for educational activities.

It might be claimed that, even so, activities in the lifelong learning system will be different because they are less likely to be age-graded and are more likely to be experientially based. They are more likely to be conducted in a setting closely related to actual practice. On the other hand, we should note that as the lifelong-learning enterprise expands, as homogeneous groupings become more feasible in responding to the needs of learners, then age-gradedness is likely to arise also. Indeed, for certain activities within the lifelong learning system, it is likely to be an essential feature from the beginning. Those who participate in programs for the elderly will, no doubt be elderly. Though the differences in their ages may be as great as twenty years, it is not a twenty years that is likely to constitute much of a departure from age-gradedness. Age-gradedness, in short, is not a feature of learning opportunities that is limited to the regular educational system.

In addition, we should remind ourselves that units within the existing educational system already award what are called "experience-based credits." Admittedly, the practice has declined in recent years in some institutions. But it is rapidly expanding in others. If it declines, that will be due primarily to the difficulty in establishing a workable standard of the par value of learning by experience. No one doubts that experience teaches. But the felt necessity is to equate what is learned into some standard convertible to academic credit. In short, we suspect that wherever educational certificates from

the lifelong learning system function as a medium of exchange, the arbiter of that exchange value will be the standards of equivalence established within the existing educational system. But this is only another scenario for the absorption of the lifelong learning system into the existing educational system.

The principle that we are driving at and that, given sufficient space, we can defend in detail, is just this: Any institution that is established for the purpose of awarding educational certificates, and any institution that awards educational certificates, even if established outside the existing educational system, will be absorbed into that system. This same principle will apply to the lifelong learning system insofar as its activities lead to lifelong learning certificates.

Independence: The creation of an effective "medium of exchange" between the educational system and the lifelong learning system, we think, is sufficient for the lifelong learning system to simply be absorbed into the existing educational system. It may seem, therefore, that the absence of such a "system of exchange" would be sufficient to preserve the independence of the lifelong learning system from the existing educational system. We think, however, that this is too simplistic a view. The truth of the relation is likely to be more complex.

Indeed, we think that there are three conditions that would be sufficient to maintain the independence of the lifelong learning system, and that all three will be present, in some degree.

The first is the maintenance of a strong link between the lifelong learning system and the employment system. In short, if the kind of certificatory mechanism that we have described becomes a salient feature of the lifelong learning system, then for many persons, and for many purposes, it may become a kind of substitute for the existing educational system. For many, attainment within the lifelong learning system can then become a substitute for attainment in the usual educational system. Under these circumstances, it is quite plausible to expect the existing system to decline in size. More and more will be afforded the chance to seek learning in the lifelong learning system as an alternative to seeking more education within the existing system. This would assure the independence of the lifelong learning system, but it would also increase the probability that the lifelong learning system would increase the extent of compulsory education within our society.

Secondly, if the educational system is prevented from establishing the criteria for attainment in the lifelong learning system, that is, if it is prevented from becoming the arbiter of the "exchange value" of educational certificates, then the lifelong learning system would retain its independence from the existing educational system. This seems undesirable to do, however, because if the lifelong learning system is to be responsive to the needs of learners and at the same time reflexive in providing new ways for entry and exit from the existing pattern of education, then surely, existing

institutions of education will have to be the arbiters of what value will be attached to learning within the lifelong learning system. What we are likely to see, in short, is one set of values being attached to learning within the lifelong learning system by those in the employment sector of society and quite another valuation placed on those achievements by those within the educational system. This would have the effect of not only strengthening, but also legitimizing the capacity of educational institutions to evaluate persons' experience in terms that suit the purposes of the educational system rather than the purposes of the employment sector of society. In short, the purposes of education within the system will continue to be primarily access to more education within that system rather than an improvement of persons' lives and the quality of their expertise. The maintenance of independence in this way will also have the problematic value of placing the control of what is learned even more securely than it is now in the hands of employers.

The third condition that would suffice to secure the independence of the lifelong learning system is straightforwardly connected with scale and the content of what is learned through lifelong learning. If the lifelong learning system is limited to creating learning opportunities that have no instrumental value whatever either for employment or for securing subsequent education within the regular educational system, then, we think, it will remain a system for learning that is independent of the existing system. But, in that case, we think, it will also

remain small in scale. It will then be an enterprise for the advancement of learning primarily as a consumer good. In that case, it would have no certificatory function either in relation to employment or in relation to the existing institutions of education.

We do not wish to minimize the importance of such an enterprise either for the individuals whose lives would be enriched, for the social benefits that would come from such an effort, or for the contribution that such an effort would make to ameliorate the social problems that we sketched at the outset as basic to the lifelong learning movement.

### 3. Lifelong Learning and Educational Reform

So far we have concentrated almost entirely on the potential pitfalls that confront Federal efforts in lifelong learning. It is necessary that we take them seriously for the sake of wise social action, but it is important that we not be overwhelmed by their enormity and become blind to consequences of a beneficial nature. Federal involvement in lifelong learning--even if it should lead to the transformation and absorption of lifelong learning by the educational system--could have a positive reforming effect on the educational arrangements of American society.

Presently, the path to employment and sustained learning is monopolized, to a large extent, by the formal educational system. Not only does this state of affairs unnecessarily limit the range of choices available to the American people,

it also stigmatizes those who elect the only alternative to remaining in the educational system. To be a drop-out in a world where educational certification is a key to social success is too often a path to failure, feelings of worthlessness and attitudes of bitterness. Beyond the liabilities of leaving the educational system are the problems associated with re-entering the system. Because of the structural, sequential rigidity of the formal system, in which one must wade through a mass of prerequisites before one can pursue a serious educational interest, persons, whether young or old, are often discouraged from dropping back in. But perhaps even more troublesome is a pervasive atmosphere of paternalism, rising out of age-grading (weighted towards the young), that ensures the treatment of human beings as objects for socialization rather than as partners in learning. If anything, it is probably the paternalistic treatment of adolescents and young adults that encourages dropping-out. And the last thing adult learners need is to be treated like children.

Thus, almost any well-thought out alternative to existing educational arrangements in society would constitute some improvement. Though it may be undesirable to expand the present educational system by either charging it with the responsibility of undertaking lifelong learning or allowing it to absorb lifelong learning, even that state of affairs may help to enlarge the range of educational choices. Whatever the evolution of lifelong learning, there is no reason to suppose that it would lose its predominate character of being non-age-graded and more experientially-based.

A more informal, prerequisite flexible, non-age-graded lifelong learning network would make it easier to drop out of education at one point and drop back in at another. Furthermore, if the offerings within lifelong learning were more experientially-based, it may serve the needs of those whose needs are not now served by the educational system. And lastly, the effect of a large-scale lifelong learning network connected to the employment sector would probably reduce the size of the formal educational system. This, too, might constitute an improvement over the existing situation. For if the present educational system became--as it once was--only one among several paths to employment and adulthood, individuals who selected to remain within it might more easily pursue education for its own benefits rather than for the relative socioeconomic benefits of educational attainment.

At the heart of the educational problem in a technological society is the problem of social and economic competence. Or should we say the certification of competence? Presently, we as a society believe that there is but one prevailing way to measure competence that is both based on merit and objectively determinable: years of schooling attained, grades achieved, and diplomas received. Yet the diversity among human beings, the certainty that years of attainment do not determine competence, and the certainty that years of schooling are not merely a function of merit--all these argue that competence cannot be measured and certified in only one way. To believe otherwise compels individuals to pursue competence down a

one-track road, only to find, upon arriving with most of one's peers, that competence is still far ahead. "Competence" can be won in this way, but only at the expense of those peers who have dropped out of the race.

What our society requires is not so much a new race or giving some individuals a head start--so that all arrive at once to no effect--but rather a variety of different races. The certification of competence is endemic to every society, even the most avowedly socialistic ones. So it does little good to suggest that there need not be a race at all. But what we can provide are different ways for individuals to pursue and show themselves as competent: ways that take into account the diversity of human talents as well as simply sheer human cussedness.

In this context, lifelong learning offers a possible alternative to schooling as a means for establishing competence. We should take care, however, to ensure that lifelong learning is a true alternative and not merely an extension of the single race embodied in schooling. However, we must also ensure that lifelong learning does not supplant schooling and become the only race in town.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Would a substantial Federal role in creating a large-scale enterprise of lifelong learning turn out to be a reform of education, a needed social advancement, or would it turn out merely to be another avenue for expanding the already existing system of educational institutions? Would such an effort turn out to produce expansion of education, or reform? The picture is mixed. But these conclusions seem at least worthy of serious consideration.

A. Scale and Social Experiments

We have sought to demonstrate that differences of scale in lifelong learning are important. They turn out to be differences in purposes, content, and goals. We have argued that there is unlikely to be any such thing as a successful, focused, Federal role in lifelong learning that turns out to be of small scale. But, as we shall see in a moment, there may be such a thing as a successful and distributed or non-focused Federal role that can continue to be of small scale. At the moment, however, our point is to stress the claim that small-scale experiments devised to determine the effects of Federal participation is a course that will be maximally misleading for the formation of Federal policy. In short, if there are important differences in consequences and goals that arise from differences in scale, then examining the results of

small-scale social experiments is certainly not the way to learn how to anticipate large-scale effects. The results of small scale social experiments are unlikely to inform us about the consequences of large-scale efforts. They are, on the contrary, most likely to mislead us.

#### B. A Distributed Federal Role

We have suggested already, however, that there is a different path for the development of the Federal role in lifelong learning. The government can expand the requirements for FHA approval of retirement homes so as to mandate the development of plans for lifelong learning just as they currently prescribe the requirements for providing medical services. But this is only one example of what might be done to provide lifelong learning opportunities through already existing Federal programs. The Small Business Administration is currently engaged in creating seminars around the country for assistance to women who seek to start their own business or to improve their existing business skills. It might be required, with appropriate subsidy, that these efforts be carried out in conjunction with existing and local educational institutions so that they begin to identify the need and develop the institutional capacity to satisfy it in a continuing fashion. Examples can be multiplied for a range of small efforts dispersed throughout the enormous number of existing Federal programs. Many such possibilities exist without the necessity of further legislation. But where further legislation is needed, it may be required only in order

to authorize an extension or modification of existing agency regulations for the administration of legislation.

C. Non-System Activities

If new initiatives are called for, then it would be desirable to identify those institutions and existing arrangements that with maximum benefit and minimal adjustment might best carry out a new program of lifelong learning. What is sought is an enlarged network of learning opportunities that is (1) accessible on demand, (2) of low cost to the learner, and (3) open to persons of all social classes, occupational status, and ethnic origin. If we survey the existing institutions in American society that already satisfy these conditions we think that the fine examples would be (1) museums, (2) libraries, and (3) the educational media.

With new initiatives and substantial funds to underwrite the effort, these institutions might be converted from essentially depository and non-structured institutions for learning into aggressive institutions that would seek out the learning needs of each community and aggressively seek to satisfy those needs. Such institutions already have the capacity to act in concert with existing educational centers, with labor unions, with voluntary associations and any other segment of society where learning opportunities are sought. They are furthermore, already either public or charitable institutions possessing the administrative capability and the legal standing to receive Federal funds independently of the supposedly more

inflexible and solidly entrenched system of formal public education. Such an effort would have the added virtue of providing a suitable base for the creation of "educational brokers" and learning advisory systems on a large scale. The recent expansion of museums, museology, libraries and library science would furthermore assure such a network of learning systems a qualified staff.

#### D. System Subsidies

Finally, but only in conjunction with some mix of these other recommendations, we would recommend subsidies for existing institutions within the formal educational system so that they may expand whatever effort they already make in non-degree learning so that they can work through an expanded and more aggressive system of museums, libraries, and educational brokers to satisfy learning needs among populations that they do not now serve.