

Purpose of Adult Education

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## Abstract

The purpose of this conceptual paper was to propose an ultimate goal and purpose for the field and practice of adult education. A literature search was conducted to delineate historical philosophies of education that inform the current state of education, including adult education. Furthermore, building upon the rudiments of adult education extant an end goal for the field is presented. The conceptual proposal emphasizes the critical need for the pursuit of foundational truths in the human experience. This is akin to notions of Essentialism and Perennialism. This paper contends that adult education can significantly assist humanity by duly preparing adults to more effectively, efficaciously, realistically, and wisely interface the epochal markers in earthly existence. Thus, in order to commence such a litany of admirable traits in adulthood, it is proposed that adult education must involve itself in the business of acquiring and propagating information that leads to, integrates with, and logically yields that which is right, virtuous and timelessly true.

## Introduction

Every worthy endeavor, it is supposed, inheres a purpose. A purpose poses as a direction that all efforts must collude towards. As the endeavor of adult education is established to be worthwhile, it is equally proposed that it contains a specific purpose. This paper attempts to define what adult education may be and the purpose to which it aspires.

Heaney (1995) helps to situate the frame of this paper by the following statement:

Since the 1930's, American adult education has grown without an articulated philosophy. Most adult educators have not delved into complex issues of human consciousness, the origins of knowledge, or the meaning of freedom. Echoes of 'education for freedom,' with beginnings in Froebel and Dewey, found their way into the thought of Eduard Lindeman (1961) and others, but 'freedom' remained an abstraction lost in a discussion of method and technique. (*Issues in Freirean Pedagogy*, 1995, Freirean Education section, para. 1)

Though Heaney speaks of an elusive philosophy (a purpose) the position of this paper is that the very purpose of adult education is inextricably enmeshed within the field's philosophical foundation. Furthermore, Heaney, interestingly enough, notes life issues of consciousness, origins of knowledge, and freedom. The reader is advised to especially notate this concept of *freedom* as it will be proposed in the latter portion of this paper on how the quintessential object that is to be pursued through adult education is the very element which freedom requires if freedom is to be realized.

The following sections will discuss the topics of adulthood, educational perspectives, adult education, and a proposal of a purpose for adult education.

## The Adult

It is an idea that is neglected in modern times. As the meaning of the term “adult” is taken for granted, it is of little wonder how in defining the idea becomes an arduous and nebulous task. Jordan, in 1978, stated that the *adult* concept "did not appear in America at all until after the Civil War and not really until the early twentieth century" (p. 192). Merriam and Brockett (1997) stated that "today, adulthood is considered to be a sociocultural construction; that is, the answer to the question of who is an adult is constructed by a particular society and culture at a particular time" (p. 4). Furthermore, they added how componential varieties, by which a person may be considered an adult, are those defined by biology, legality, psychology, sociology, etc..

Paterson (1979) proffered an interesting description of adulthood:

Those people (in most societies, the large majority) to whom we ascribe the status of adults may and do evince the widest possible variety of intellectual gifts, physical powers, character traits, beliefs, tastes, and habits. But we correctly deem them to be adults because, by virtue of their age, we are justified in requiring them to evince the basic qualities of maturity. Adults are not necessarily mature. But they are supposed to be mature, and it is on this necessary supposition that their adulthood justifiably rests. (p. 13)

Paterson's notion of a supposition of adulthood acting as a legitimate justification for treating a person as an adult seems a curious perspective. It seems to bifurcate the issue where on one hand a person is an adult in actuality while on the other is merely viewed and considered as an adult due to age and supposition of maturity that that age connotes.

The thrust of this paper is based on the view that an adult is a person who is more

than a possessor of the mere semblance of adulthood socially assigned them (as in the case of children in certain places of the globe left with only the choice to fend for themselves in terms of obtaining food, shelter, clothing, livelihood, etc.). This includes the argument that embedded in the purpose of adult education is the continuous defining of what an adult is. It is the position of this paper that adults are not persons who simply fit the chronological profile in a given culture (as throngs are of “adult age” and yet without the rudimentary wherewithal regarding basic understanding of human decency, charity, sense of existential obligation, general sensibility, etc.). But, the framework of this paper is that adults tend to be the sector of the populace who are, at the minimum, conscious of their cultural norms of adulthood, juridically of adult age, capable of some kind of feasible livelihood, and enabled to think with proper ratiocination toward self-controlled expressions.

As can be felt, even an introductory and basic discussion as what an adult is deems to be a quagmire of certain complexity. It remains apprehensive whether or not when the term is used along with others, such as “education,” if this may render augmented lucidity. In hopes to remedy this situation, this paper is of the position that by working towards a more defined overarching purpose for adult education a brighter clarity of the field itself may accompany in haste.

### Education and Its Varying Perspectives

History provides a plethora of philosophical commentaries in addressing the issue of education. This section will present a broad scope of educational perspectives with the aim of emphasizing the connectivity of an education’s purpose to its parent philosophy. Pithily stated, there cannot be a purpose without first a philosophy, as a purposeless

philosophy is ontologically impossible.

Sproul (2000) explicates *education as* follows:

The task of education is to lead people out of darkness into light, out of the cave and its shadows and into the noonday sun. The Latin term *educare* describes this process. Its root meaning is 'to lead out of,' as the root *ducere* means 'to lead'. (pp. 35-36)

In applying the notion of *educare* to differing perspectives on how education ought to be used, for what ends, through which means, to which persons, at which times, etc., the following outline is offered to expose education's philosophical generalities and distinctions. The reader is to keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list.

Plato (427-348 B.C.) saw education as a commodity to be expended in nurturing only the persons found to be predisposed of high intellectual capacity and adeptness. These would become the leaders and rulers of society. The Platonic perspective posited that education will be a way to naturally compartmentalize the citizenry such that a clearer set of categories of people be established to erect an ordered hierarchy that supposedly would inhabit certain stability and cohesion. This approach to education has been rampant in the Western hemisphere as it has persistently embodied a hierarchical structure. It is observed that “schooling has usually been a process of selection and rejection, with great effort and ingenuity expended on testing, measuring, classifying, and segregating in accordance with the best available knowledge” (*education, philosophy of*, 2006, Platonic view section, para. 2 of article 36370)

Following Plato's notion of classes within society, the modern scheme of the university versus technical and vocational schools are better understood as stemming

from ancient traditions. Liberal arts were for the more prestigious and intellectually inclined, whereas the lesser bright thinkers were deposed to institutions of trade and craftsmanship. Furthermore, present day notions of cognitive learning, linear models of development and learning, ruthless versions of capitalism (exerting unethical competitive practices) reflect Platonic assumptions.

Thomas Aquinas (who was canonized by the Catholic Church and conferred on him the title 'Doctor Angelicus') is recognized as an intellectual giant in both the sacred and secular realms (Sproul, 2000). In terms of educational perspectives, Aquinas contributed his Scholastic philosophy, which "sought to create a coherent and comprehensive system of thought. Scholastics became experts at systemic thinking" (Sproul, 2000, p. 66). Furthermore, scholastics "sought to codify traditional thought into a cogent system (the 'anti-system' sentiment found in modern existential philosophy has biased many against this approach to truth). Scholastic philosophers relied heavily on rigorous logic, emphasizing the art of deductive reasoning" (p. 66). It is believed that this model of scholasticism greatly influenced the system of education in the Western hemisphere by emphasizing the strict disciplining of the mind, intellect.

In accord with Thomism, the educational notion of Perennialism aligns itself to this discussion. Perennialism, with roots in idealism and realism, this philosophy accentuates the force of preserving foundational principles of humanity towards communicating these truths to succeeding generations.

John Locke, the 17th-century English philosopher, viewed science, reason, and experience as imperative elements of learning and knowledge. He is famous for surmising that the mind at birth is a *tabula rasa* (a 'blank tablet'), which is characterized

as being found wanting of original ideas and forms, hence the Lockean view of the high role given to experience and sense perception. It is observed:

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and the *Conduct of the Understanding* (1706), Locke outlined the heavily experiential education that would be appropriate for a gentleman. His four cardinal aims of education, in order of importance, were virtue, wisdom, breeding, and learning. (*education, philosophy of*, 2006, Lockean view section, para. 2 of article 36372)

For modern application, there are traces of Lockean perspective in the concepts of positivism (in terms of strict empiricism), experiential learning, and also in the postulations promoted by Kolb (1984), Jarvis (1987), and Boud, Keogh, Walker (1985).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau advanced a notion of knowing now referred to as Naturalism. It is understood that he was reacting in contempt of the rationalism and scientific objectivity engendered by the Enlightenment period by formulating a concept punctuated with emotional spontaneity and subjectivity. Rousseau and Nietzsche are similar in that they both inveighed the enforcements, or restrictions, imposed by the external world on the individual person, who was believed to be with natural impulses to realize one's freedom, power, instinctual desires, etc. (Sproul, 2000).

Rousseau contended that the child should be controlled only by particular components in life as the nature of the child must have free reign to grow in accord to its own inclinations. He did not believe that the demands of adults contained much educational good toward the child. This type of mentation became the seed for progressivist views of education. Rousseau (1762) posed a framework of the forces within education:



We are born weak, we need strength; helpless we need aid; foolish we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man's estate, is the gift of education. This education comes from nature, from men or from things. The inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature, the use we learn to make of our growth is the education of men, what we gain by our experience of our surroundings is the education of things. We are each taught by three masters. If their teaching conflicts, the scholar is ill-educated and will never be at peace with himself; if their teaching agrees, he goes straight to his goal, he lives at peace with himself, he is well-educated. Now each of these factors in education is wholly beyond our control, things are only partly in our power; the education of men is the only one controlled by us; and even here our power is largely illusory, for who can hope to direct every word and deed of all with whom the child has to do. Viewed as an art, the success of education is almost impossible since the essential conditions of success are beyond our control. Our efforts may bring us within sight of the goal, but fortune must favor us if we are to reach it. What is this goal? As we have just shown, it is the goal of nature. Since all three modes of education must work together, the two that we can control must follow the lead of that which is beyond our control. (p. 6)

Admittedly, with nature being an untouchable phenomenon one's hopes of attaining education is relegated to *faith* within the context of a seemingly precarious existence of the human being.

Marxism claims that the panacea for the corruption in human governments and institutions reside in the model of communism - a theory promoting the idea that private

ownership of goods and property is bad, thus advocating a system where materials are owned in common, along with equal distribution to people on an as-needed basis. To effectuate such an end, Karl Marx viewed that a genuine gathering of socially responsible persons was required. For in the absence of trustworthiness and due accountability no such method as communism would fare well. Marx thought to liberate oppressed people by eradicating social classes toward a uniform layout of the citizenry (Sproul, 2000).

More recently, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, asserted his version of liberatory education, which inclines to help adults reflect on their personal experiences by showing them how past history is part and parcel of who they are today, which alludes to how the future may be shaped by their conscious actions (Mackie, 1980). Heaney (1995) notes that this type of education for emancipation has hope in the machine of social action (praxis) for change, which is supposed by those in this philosophical camp to be a natural outgrowth of critical reflection.

Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century, the philosophical doctrine of Pragmatism emerged from the thinking of C.S. Pierce and William James. Progressivism, with John Dewey at the helm, emerged from Pragmatism and further customized and refined basic pragmatistic notions toward an ideology for education (Apps, 1973). Allied to the construct propelled by Pierce and James “the progressivists give no emphasis to an absolute knowledge. To them all things are in a state of transition” (Apps, 1973, p. 22). Contrary to the aim of cultural perpetuity, espoused by essentialism and perennialism, progressivism is fixed on changing society. In addition, progressivism strongly emphasize the role of social interaction and environmental context in the process of learning, which is a leitmotiv in Deweyan thought.

Broudy and Palmer (1965) provided a retort to Dewey's progressivism and contended that the progressivist type of intelligence, as without systematized knowledge, will fare only for the most ordinary, mundane, and everyday problems. However, to address issues such as international amity, automation, racial integration, etc., a more advanced and systematic mannerism of knowledge and implementation was pondered to be required.

In the twentieth century, the philosophy of Behaviourism sprung from the mire of experimental psychology. With B. F. Skinner as its spokesman, this view of humanity “firmly rejected the conventional model of man as a free agent who acts in accordance with the decisions of an inner self that is neither fully explicable nor fully controllable by scientific means” (*education, philosophy of*, 2006, Behaviourist view section, para. 1 of article 36376). For Skinner the question of control in human behavioural engineering was central. In this respect, behaviourism denigrates the core assertions of Naturalism as it professes that “one does not grant the child ‘freedom’ merely by leaving him alone. To refuse to use scientific control to shape human behaviour is, for the Behaviourist, a failure in responsibility” (*education, philosophy of*, 2006, Behaviourist view section, para. 2 of article 36376). Behaviourism greatly influenced education in America in the form of programmed instruction and behavioral objectives in educational programs.

In reaction to the growing mechanization of humankind by the sciences the philosophical stance of Existentialism appeared on the scene. With the likes of Buber, Frankl (logotherapy) and Sartre, this secularistic world view solely concentrated on the here and now. Brubacher (1962) explained existentialist philosophy of education as follows:

It depends heavily upon the student's own experience in meeting particular situations. Left alone to confront them, he is encouraged to encounter them head-on, for it is in taking action in human crises that he develops self-reliance in overcoming despair. Similarly, it is through committing himself to intervene in the situation that values emerge. (p. 322)

Harper (1955) postulated that the existentialist is primarily concerned with "encouraging individuals of all kinds and conditions to understand their situation and themselves" (p. 227). Existentialism is heavily akin to constructivism Piagetian cognitive models in terms of devising meaning through one's own interpretation of an external event.

Other viewpoints similar to existentialism are the phenomenological and humanistic orientations. While phenomenology describes the process of a philosophical method used to analyze experiences, humanism is of the belief, as Protagoras professed in ancient Greece, that man is the measure of all things and exist as the fundamental source of knowledge and truth (Sproul, 2000). Thus, the connectivity and interlocking nature between existentialism, humanism, and phenomenology can be easily grasped. And the result has been that much of modern education in society is inundated by such philosophies.

In concluding this section, it must be gravely and indelibly remarked that all people are with a working philosophy, and so, a purpose. Because it is strongly supposed that philosophies are innately purpose-driven and that a purpose is colored by its foundational philosophy, it will behoove the adult educator/learner to incisively assay one's subscribed beliefs for its soundness.

Since the 1920s, when adult education first became a field of practice, adult educators have contemplated upon what it means to educate adults. Lindeman (1926) stated:

Adult education will become an agency of progress if its short-time goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-time, experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order. Changing individuals in continuing adjustment to changing social functions – this is the bilateral though unified purpose of adult learning. (p. 104).

It is a broad and grand purpose which Lindeman uttered. But not all educators proffered so large a task, as Locke (1948) commented more on the effort to equalize the wrongs of society by providing an education to an adult populace that did not receive the basics through traditional means during childhood.

Other adult educators voiced their statements on adult education, which were admixtures of both local and global intentions and visions. Knowles (1950) postulated that adult education had to work towards transforming the masses of adults in the world into more mature people. Maturity, according to Knowles, related to the issues of developing an attitude of acceptance, love, and respect for others; developing a dynamic attitude toward life; seeking to obtain necessary skills to self-actualize; growing to more comprehensively understand the essential values that bind humans together; working to change society, etc.. Knowles (1980) further stated:

One problem contributing to the confusion is that the term 'adult education' is used with at least three different meanings. In its broadest sense, the term describes a process--the process of adults learning...In its more technical meaning, 'adult

education' describes a set of organized activities carried on by a wide variety of institutions for the accomplishment of specific educational objectives...A third meaning combines all of these processes and activities into the idea of a movement or field of social practice. In this sense, 'adult education' brings together into a discrete social system all the individuals, institutions, and associations concerned with the education of adults and perceives them as working toward common goals of improving the methods and materials of adult learning, extending the opportunities for adults to learn, and advancing the general level of our culture. (p. 25)

Bergevin (1967) posited several specific purposes for adult education. He sought to render assistance:

To help the learner achieve a degree of happiness and meaning in life; to help the learner understand himself; his talents and limitations, and his relationships with other persons; to help adults recognize and understand the need for life-long learning; to provide conditions and opportunities to help the adult advance in the maturation process spiritually, culturally, physically, politically, and vocationally; and to provide, where needed, education for survival, in literacy, vocational skills, and health measures. (p. 30-31)

Houle (1972) mentioned five orientations (credos) within adult education. In describing them he said that "adult education should be a movement unified by a common effort to achieve a single all encompassing goal" (p. 7). In 1996, he commented:

Adult education is the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in

institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness; or it is any process by which individuals, groups, or institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways. The fundamental system of practice of the field, if it has one, must be discerned by probing beneath many different surface realities to identify a basic unity of process. (p. 41)

On both occasions, Houle appears to express that the field ought to have one overarching goal which all workers can aspire to. But what would such a grand goal possibly entail? Could there be a singular agenda that is not merely appealing but necessary?

In 1973, Apps offered his thoughts on possible objectives of adult education by way of four questions. He queried:

Is the purpose of adult education: To help people make psychological adjustments to their social conditions and natural world by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes? To equip adults with the skills necessary for identifying and solving problems they may face with an emphasis on the skills in solving problems and not on the content or subject matter? To help people change their social conditions? To help people become free, autonomous individuals? (pp. 37-38)

Additionally, Apps reflectively asked:

Should adult educators seek overall purposes for the field? Is the field so broad that overall purposes are not only impossible to determine, but may stifle the activities of individual adult education efforts? Should the overall purpose of adult education thus be to encourage multiple purposes? (p. 38)

For some educators the purpose of adult education was seen to be tethered to the

perennial issue of world views. Kelman and Warwick (1978) provided their insights in the following:

Identification of the problem has important ethical implications because it determines selection of the target to which change efforts are directed. Where we intervene depends on where we, with our personal value preferences and perspectives, perceive the problem to lie. (p. 13)

This thought aligns itself with the orientation of this paper. But if Kelman and Warwick's utterance may be subjected to a bit of modification it would be that only considering one's personal value preferences and perspectives may deem insufficient as one must also critique the very foundational beliefs of those preferences and perspectives concerning its soundness and sensibility as these will be the rational undergirding reasons for interventions and other actions. Critical reflection may be particularly instrumental here.

Jarvis (1985) had said that adult education can be used to maintain the status quo rather than to bring about change or address inequities. He asserted that "the education of adults transmits the dominant culture and in the process it reproduces the cultural system which, in itself, is a force for the retention of the status quo rather than social change" (p. 139). On the other hand, Long (1985) observed that "in its abstract dimension education has been characterized as a liberalizing, leading out, a kind of freedom" (p. 75).

From a more radical angle, Cunningham (1988), who opined that adult education's mission is to democratize the citizenry, asserted that in America it is presently "an apparatus for social control" (p. 133) rather than empowerment. She also viewed the practice of adult education as acting elitist and exclusionary. Merriam and Caffarella



(1999) proffered that “development and liberation can be goals of adult education” (p. 75). Such ends are closely linked with the proposed goals for adult education posited by the scholars of yesteryears such as Lindeman (1926), Knowles (1950), Houle (1961), and Bergevin (1967).

It is evident (as in Kelman and Warwick’s quote above) that conjuring up an ultimate, final, overarching purpose of adult education may heavily depend upon one’s world view, and so, on one’s philosophical perspective towards education and learning. Merriam and Brockett (1997) delineated three philosophical perspectives, which are “liberal - progressive, behaviorist - humanist, and critical” (p. 32). Through this structural grid they explain the varying methods and aims for educating adults. Each of these clusters hold differing epistemologies, which, logically, lends its end vision to be proportionately different as well.

#### A Proposal of a Purpose for Educating Adults

Grattan (1955) wrote of a Mary L. Ely, who in 1936 had published a work of compilations that included a list of eighteen reasons, or end responses, to the incomplete statement - “We need Adult Education..” Among the statement-completing responses there lay a curious proclamation. It pertained to attaining *true security* - that adult education is needed to attain true security. And how is such real security attained except by pursuing that which is true and truth? Thus, this paper propounds that the purpose of educating adults throughout the span of adulthood is to assist and provide partnership in pursuing truth.

It must be established the logic for the necessity of objective truth. What is in view here is not the sort of “truth” conjured by the pragmatist, as Dewey (1933) opined of the

truth value contained in a piece of information that may be of higher functional or operational worth than other bits of data. Nor is it a “truth” that is tentatively kept by the relativist (transient truth). But the truth this paper upholds is of the caliber that remains intact through the test of time and sustains its pertinence and vigor regardless of cultural or chronological context. It is apposite to such notions as *jus naturale* (natural law). The truth, in focus here, is the grand universal ethic that was prized and treasured in the past during the age wherein morality was a real virtue and the masses lived in genuine and venerable fear of the Divine.

Sproul (2000) provides various accounts of historical philosophers' logic and thought regarding the need for absolute truth. First, "Socrates realized that the death of truth would mean the death of civilization. Without truth and virtue the only possible outcome is barbarianism" (p. 28). Second:

Kant argues for the Christian God on the basis that he must exist for ethics to be meaningful. Kant says that even if we cannot know that God exists, for practical purposes we must live 'as if' he exists for ethics and society to be possible. He anticipates Fyodor Dostoyevsky's maxim, 'If there is no God, all things are permissible.' Without an absolute ethical norm, morality is reduced to mere preference and the world is a jungle where might makes right. (p. 131)

Third, Sproul (1986) commented on the widespread virus of secularism, pluralism, and relativism:

That is precisely where modern secular man finds himself. He lives his life with no ultimate, fixed, and absolute reference point that can define his life or the meaning of his existence. If everything is relative, you are relative, and there is no substance

to the meaning of your life. The crisis in pluralism is that there is no ultimate point of reference...Once we embrace relativism we live in a world of ultimate chaos. (p. 119)

The categorical imperative is that absolute, objective, universal truth is a necessity to existential and human sanity. In the absence of the fixture of secure truth all of life is empty, vacuous, and persistently stupefying. In such a world no freedom can be found, for freedom is coterminous with notions such as justice, prudence, sensibility, and sanity. Thus, based on the premise that objective truth is an embedded requirement in the structure of sane and meaningful human existence, this paper proposes the following for adult education.

#### *Rationale of the Proposed Purpose for Adult Education*

As genuine adults pursue objective truth this is liable to first establish a greater proportion of the general population to be rational, analytical, and rightly informed set of individuals, which will inevitably impact the broader community in constructive ways, which increases the probability of prompting an alteration in the mainstream thought and attitude, which will reach the remainder of the masses, which will enact a greater possibility towards a more collective effort to raze what is false and erect what is right, which will enable a vision radically divergent from that which is propelled in modernity, which is strictly steeped in militant humanism, which ignorantly confines society's citizens into delusional frames, which contributes to the distancing away from freedom - feasible and discoverable.

Another method of reaching a similarly logical end is to ponder on the foundational commonalities among all living humans. What are the final and guaranteed ends toward

which all individuals headlong propel, whether it is acknowledged or not, accepted or not? Are they not the things of pain, loss and mortality? Mirth is acquired and enjoyed along the way, to be sure. But in the final analysis, do not all human beings encounter pain, personal and concrete? Ineluctably, do not all human beings incur continuous and multiple losses of all varieties? Conclusively, all human beings face death and succumb to it. So, how are humans to deal with these unavoidable events? This paper contends that adult education, albeit only a partial remedy, can significantly assist humanity by duly preparing adults to more effectively, efficaciously, realistically, and wisely interface the epochal markers in earthly existence. Thus, in order to commence such a litany of admirable traits in adulthood, it is proposed here that adult education must involve itself in the business of propagating information that leads to, integrates with, and logically yields that which is right, virtuous and timelessly true.

The pursuit of (objective) truth is bound to yield a *mélange* of reactions of emotionality, skepticism, joyfulness, and affirmations. Though such a directed and focused study may be catalytic in prompting multifaceted and manifold quantities of responses and reactions, one particular human action that unavoidably becomes galvanized is that of some measure of *contemplation*. Contemplation is used here to devote particular specificity to what may be nurtured as an adult learner endeavors to decipher *truth*. Contemplation, it is posited, is a better characterization than mere “thinking,” as thinking is simply to have something in the mind. But to perpend and contemplate bears closer affiliation to the enactment of “cogitation,” which is to deeply, with due and deliberate attention, ponder upon the matters at hand. The rationale is that as adults engage in learning toward truth, in attaining to further knowledge and knowing

of that which is real and veritable, the learners' constituent elements (of what Binswanger (1946, 1963) considered as *eigenwelt* (personal world), *mitwelt* (interpersonal world), *umwelt* (societal, environmental, contextual world), *uberwelt* (spiritual world or dimension)) will be affected, which in turn may better equip the person to handle the inescapable intricacies of life.

Considering the preceding argument of existential exigencies, below is presented a framework of this purpose to adult education.

1. An overarching purpose of adult education is to draw nearer to objective truth.
2. This is to be pursued by attaining functional wisdom, which denotes the applicative nature of the construct of *wisdom*.
3. How is wisdom acquired? By acute observation/awareness, critical contestation and rumination, critical application of obtained knowledge, and proper alignment of *foundational material* to what may be agreeably, logically, and irrefutably considered as objective truth.
4. What is foundational material? This is the extraction from the struggle of basic issues in life framed as the *substructure*.
5. What is the substructure? Substructure is the basic life issues of connectivity/contiguity versus disconnection/fragmentation and man-centered humanism versus God-centered theology.

The following is the substructure (mentioned in points 4 and 5 above), which is a multi-category set wherein the basic issues in/of life are incorporated and calibrated:

1. Connecting Past to Present: recognizing and working towards the ideas of foundations, origins, acknowledgment of historicity of human life (reality of past

shaping the present); thematic threads across cultures; detecting things in life with proclivity toward universal truths; etc.

2. Relating Self to Others: recognizing and working towards the ideas of relational intertwining among all of mankind – common denominators of man, the “neighborhood” of humanity, etc.

3. Relating Self to Vocation and Duty: calibrating one's vocation (calling) in life; how to contribute to society as one is with ontological duty to do so; how one ultimately helps oneself by serving others, etc.

4. Acknowledging the continuum of Life to Death: recognizing and working towards the ideas of the fact of human mortality; noting life as a continuum, not compartmentalization; rightly sensing the (contiguous) nature of life toward demise; facing mortality in a humble manner; etc.

5. Acknowledging the distinctions and relatedness of Secular and Divine: recognizing and working towards the ideas of phenomenal versus the *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) and the noumenal (Kant, 1990), less than clear and imperfect human ethics versus absolute Truth, humanism versus theism, etc..

At this stage it may be prudent to inquire - “what is the point of pursuing objective truth?” In response, the following lists tasks or obligations to be wrought via the vehicle of adult education:

1. Maturation: informational maturity (expanding one's fund of knowledge); cognitive processing maturity (toward ratiocination); inter-personal maturity; philosophical maturity (toward an elevated ability for abstract, non-linear thinking).
2. Enlightenment: on the issues of the plight of humanity; limits of human

potential; meanness of man's hubris; source of resolution to the ills of human meanness, etc.

### 3. Combating Nonage (lack of development, movement).

As can be sensed, constructing a purpose for an activity, like adult education, requires much labor and punctilious exactness. It is only fitting that meticulous concentration and scrupulous tendencies be the applied tools in arriving at a foundational purpose as the purpose of a thing is the motivator of subsequent activities.

#### A Word of Wisdom

It is the position of this paper that the ongoing search for truth will inevitably involve the acquisition of, exposure to, indagation into wise thinking by wise people. Joan Erikson (1988, p. 177) characterized wisdom as "an elusive word because it encompasses an attitude, a disposition toward life, past, present, and future, only occasionally recognized in rare individuals." Not only is wisdom rarely seen among the masses but wisdom is still not uniformly defined by people and cultures. Robinson (1990) defined wisdom as something that changed over time and historical eras. Sternberg (1990) proclaimed wisdom to be a metacognitive style, while Baltes and Smith (1990) hold it as an expertise in daily living. Kramer and Bacelar (1994) posited that wisdom is the ability to think in a dialectic manner. Moreover, Macdonald (1996, p. 1) explained that wisdom is "a whole array of better-than-ordinary ways of being, and living and dealing with the world."

Holliday and Chandler (1986) proposed:

Wise people must be able to solve problems - but not in an abstract sense. The type of problems that wise people presumably deal with appear to have strong practical

and emancipatory components. That is, wisdom problems are problems endemic to life and to the human condition...Consequently, the problems typically involve or center on *values*. (p. 90).

This notion of wisdom being applied to problems that involve or center on values is a key factor in recognizing the morally latent nature of wisdom. To elucidate this matter of why it is critical to attain moral-building wisdom, which is invigorated by objective truth, support is provided from the research of cult practices.

Kaslow and Sussman (1982) proposed a litany of factors that have been observed to be stimulants toward cult membership. Such factors include fatalistic attitude, feelings of anonymity and depersonalization, materialism, fluctuations in the educational curricula (disconcerting theories being taught as fact (e.g., theory of evolution)), postmodernism, humanism (including behaviorism), arrogance of being, self-stupefying rationalization, and the abdication of self-responsibility. Furthermore, the two researchers posited that uncertainty of a life philosophy and searching behavior to address the need to find answers to their own and social problems are a couple of the general characteristics of those vulnerable to the cults.

Pavlos (1982) referred to a psychiatric commentator, who asserted that when faced with unlimited choice, some persons refuse to choose. Moreover, in the absence of an *internalized value system*, which may greatly determine one's direction in life, one is paralyzed when the external world removes its guidelines and restraints. These assertions give more credence to the notion that a foundational philosophy - an internalized value system - is a categorical imperative for human beings towards rightly discerning the manifold issues in life. It is the emphatic position of this paper that an effective



internalized value system can only be acquired as one consciously and actively pursues objective truth. Thus, the aim of adult education is to present choices to learners of the varieties of world views, of philosophical foundations, and the historical consequences of particular schools of philosophy. Even those learners who choose to live without any specific foundation have essentially chosen a foundation, which is a world view of fundamental relativism and pluralism. Countless numbers of keen minds have pursued the knowledge of truth and foundational reality and have discovered that it is always a battleground amid which their quest must be waged. Adult education, too, is a battleground: a battleground of ideas and forms, in the midst of which the clashing of world perspectives occur.

Daloz (1988a), concerning the task of the adult educator, contended:

There is a dimension to this work that goes beyond simply encouraging students to grow, worthy though that end may be. For it is to be more than indoctrination, teaching is inherently moral and must be concerned with ultimate values. (p. 241)

Freire (1970) also rightly declared that education is never neutral. Hence, knowing that no education can claim to be free from bias, bent, and partiality, the very purpose to which it adheres must be of responsible, sane, and admirable integrity. As "andragogical missionaries" (Daloz, 1988b, p. 7), adult educators must be cognizant and, sooner or later, admit that their position and role has a built-in moral component. Thus, all adult educators simply must accept their vocational call with true and genuine trepidation as the work involves assisting interested learners in laying down the foundations of intellect for the purpose of erecting an internal edifice of integrated knowledge base acquired through continuous education, which in turn is bound to impact the totality of their being

and the context of their living.

Summarily, Smith, Dixon, and Baltes (1989, p. 312) pithily suggested that wisdom is "good judgment about important but uncertain matters." Pursuing truth may be otherwise considered to be pursuing and acquiring wisdom. Because truth cannot be gained in the absence of wisdom, and wisdom cannot be exercised apart from the content of truth, wisdom and truth are inextricably intertwined and thus packaged in collaboration. An adult's task is to become wise over time. This will best be accomplished as that adult pursues truth. Thus, even when an adult ignores objective truth, and the pursuit of it, that adult may still be appealed to the idea of becoming wise. As that adult then pursues wisdom may it be recognized that such a process and aim will undeniably cross paths with the act of pursuing objective truth.

#### Conclusion

Lindeman (1926) succinctly defined adult education as "the modern quest for life's meaning" (p. 6). His statement attributes a weighty burden and role to that which can be understood as adult education. It is in like manner that this paper's proposal for a purpose of adult education exacts a high (not untenable) standard as its worthy goal. As a firm foundation is essential for a meaningful life, truth must be sought after believing that it exists and is knowable. This paper is of the opinion that humans are finite, mortal creatures in dire need of superior assistance. Truth cannot be connatural with such ultimately impuissant humanity. But, at the same time, this does not mean that objective truth is imperceptible. The first step for human beings to take is to pursue the very truth that regulates universal faculties. To do so involves the exercise of the mind and the fullness of its endowed senses toward the wielding of instrumental arts and sciences of

logic, philosophy, theology, history, biology and other substantial knowledge fields. All of this requires a structured approach and system of knowing and learning, and it is this very framework that is adult education.

Harper (1955) claimed:

The real meaning of human freedom is that it arises from and is directed toward an order of reality which is primarily beyond any human circle....Whenever men have tried to use themselves as ends, or shrink their world-view to a view of self, their isolation becomes so cramped that their whole reflective apparatus slows down and revolts or becomes paralyzed. The world and truth are the bright goals of free man.  
(p. 233)

That freedom universally refers to that which is unfathomably beyond limited human imagination, and so transcends the phenomenal, must be a recognized premise if truth is to be genuinely pursued.

In sum, due to humankind's predilection and propensity for actuating distortions of an original meaning, such a motto as *semper reformanda* (meaning "always reforming") sounds the tocsin that all of humanity's generativity must be in constant check, invariably prepared to rightly reform in a moment's notice as required. As people are constantly changing and developing, in some measurable habitude, their ways too must proportionately be reforming in order that as one matures in cognition, beliefs, and world view the practicum of life become increasingly reflective of the gradual and/or sudden changes in personhood. It is also contended here that *semper reformanda* act as a catalyst for the need for continuous education. Until death do education apart, it is commended that all able minded adults persevere toward truth, with truth as being education's end.

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