AEDUCATION FOR A COMPLETE LIFE

E.L. Boyer

It is difficult to come to grips with a topic as broad and ambiguous as 'Education for a complete life'. Does it mean education throughout life Jcontinuing education Jor does it mean education for a fulfilled life, that is the fullness of education, or is it a mixture of both? Regardless of how you approach the topic, I suspect that it is related to purposes and goals and that does not comfort me at all because I know no riskier topic, no issue that causes more continuing controversy, no theme that has been less carefully resolved than the question, 'Education to what end?'.

Several years ago the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies convened a seminar on the topic 'What is an educated person?'. The Institute brought together 20 or more of the world's most erudite and thoughtful people. The conference was one of the most bruising incidents in the Aspen experience which generally operates in a climate of goodwill and gentility. After about four days, everyone actually agreed in principle that education is a splendid thing but, when it got right down to deciding specifics, great battles raged.

We should be rather generous with this reaction since the tension that is immediately conjured up when one gets serious about educational purposes is not surprising. After all, the purposes of education are inextricably related to the purposes of life itself and, when asked to think about the meaning of education, we are really asked to expose our own judgments about the meaning and values of existence, that is, what life is worth and what lives are to be valued. It is understandable that education like religion stirs deep intensity very quickly. Jerome Kagan, a professor at Harvard, once said that, when searching for the meaning of an educated person, one has to make decisions about what he called the transcendent human qualities to which we are committed, and that is extremely difficult. I simply state the obvious as an overture: our view of education does in fact reflect to a considerable degree the priorities we assign to living.

This can be illustrated by reference to the nature of the education provided in various periods of human history. In ancient times, education was what some would pejoratively call elitist. The goal was to prepare the privileged for their God-given position on the earth. Chaucer's knight, who epitomized this special status, learnt not only the use of arms, but he also learnt music, dancing, drawing, and the arts of speech. The educated man in Chaucer's terms was to live a privileged life and to dominate the rest. In the aristocratic view of education, which was reflected best perhaps in the 18th century, the mind was something to be not just trained but to be

polished. The educated person in the aristocratic context learned the art of getting along, not just in the public assemblies but in the private clubs, in the drawing rooms Ja process beautifully reflected in Lord Chesterton's letters and in the generous servility of Tom Jones.

A rather different view of education might be called the civic view, which is the notion that the educated man is a model citizen and a servant of the state. Education for citizenship appeared first in the Greek polis, it reappeared in Rome, it reappeared again during the Renaissance, and it has remained a prominent strain in modern thought as well. In the first half of the 20th century, one of the central justifications for the public schools in the United States was the concept of education for democracy. It was education deeply rooted in what could be called the long history of the civic ideal. In this view, men and women were seen as political animals Jpeople whose potentialities are realized as they are socialized and as they participate in the life of the community. In this view of education for a complete life, individual talents are subordinated to collective needs or, better expressed, individual talents are directed towards the common good. A sharply contrasting view of education focused not on the state but, quite to the contrary, on the perfection of the individual. Plato for example urged the wise men of his day to renounce politics and to turn instead to what he called the city within yourself. The educated person, Plato urged, was to cultivate his own garden, as reflected in his belief that education was self-directed. Similarly, Seneca urged that public affairs should be avoided, favouring instead what he called the sacred and sublime studies which will teach the substance, the will, the environment, and the shape of God. Education from this view will teach the destiny that awaits the soul. Curiously it was the Christian influence that shifted the ideal of education away from self-nurturing and self-refinement to a more utilitarian and practical view. In the Christian view, a clear distinction was drawn between the aims of education and the aims of men. Cardinal Newman made this distinction explicitly clear when he said that knowledge is one thing but virtue is another, good sense is not conscience, refinement is not humility, and philosophy, however profound, gives no command over the passions. Education, Cardinal Newman argued, may help you get along in life but will not lead to virtue nor to salvation.

I have indulged myself in this breathless leap through history to make one central point. Education has always reflected the mood and the vision of the time, and the view of the purpose of education has always been linked inevitably to the view of the purpose of life itself. It clearly follows that

in the 1980s we cannot talk about education for a complete life without discovering something about the emerging values and the emerging forces that are at work today. Therefore I should like to identify four conditions in the contemporary context which I believe will have a powerful impact on the future of formal education and will inevitably shape our definition of what we mean by education for a complete life in the decades just ahead.

First I suggest that, because of rising expectations, the demand for education will continue to increase all around the world. Education for a complete life in this context will be defined socially and it will mean education for collective goodness. In the decades just ahead, more and more people I am convinced will view education not just as a right but as a privilege and this will continue the wave of education commitments that began after World War II. Education will continue to escalate as a universal dream. Today, in most developed nations of the world, 10 to 12 years of formal schooling are considered as essential as 6 to 8 years were 50 years ago. Even the completion of secondary education seems painfully restrictive for those who are expected to live their lives well beyond the year 2000. I have yet to find a parent who will say that less not more education is his preferred expectation for his child; and I think you impose that limit on others with great caution unless you are willing to impose it on those you know and love.

During the last half of the 20th century, education has become so identified with social progress and so accepted as a ticket to success that the demand for education for more people will continue to be a central condition of our time Jbudgets and political parties notwithstanding. I am also persuaded that those who are undereducated, however one might define that term, will be tragic social discards in a world in which more not less education will be absolutely needed. Therefore I believe that this revolution of rising expectations should be embraced by those who care about education and our culture. We should embrace it not just because it is politically and socially a reality but because it is right. To put it even more directly, I do not believe that the link between more education and greater social equity is a hoax. In the United States at least, there is considerable evidence to suggest that increased access to education has expanded social mobility and has provided greater economic independence for larger and larger numbers of historically bypassed students. Further there is considerable evidence to suggest that the social and economic price we pay for keeping people out of formal education in the form of extended unemployment is far greater than the price we pay for letting people in.

In the end there remains one over-riding question and it cannot be ignored. Can we have what Lord Bullock called a plurality of excellence? I believe that we can but, to achieve this goal, we must not confuse equality of access with uniformity of program. We must have different kinds of schools and different kinds of higher learning institutions to serve different kinds of students and that differentiation must be kept explicit. During my days as chancellor of a university with 64 campuses, one of the greatest battles was trying to convince colleges that they were not universities and technical schools that they were not simply junior colleges, and to keep this upward drift towards uniformity from denying the versatility and the variety which diversity of student bodies absolutely required. Therefore I suggest that in the days ahead education for a complete life in most societies will mean greater expansion of opportunity but it will inevitably require greater diversity of alternatives as well.

This leads to my second view of the social landscape and a comment or two about its impact on the educated life. I suggest that, because of changing life styles and changing economics, the length of education will increase and the educational structure we provide will necessarily become more varied. Traditionally we have chopped up the span of human life into little slices like a great salami. First we have a thin slice of early childhood Jthe time we had for happy play, then came a somewhat thicker slice which we expect to be devoted to full-time education, next we have a thicker chunk of full-time work, and finally a little nubble on the end, characterized by some as dignified decline. In this traditional life cycle of the past, the stages of existence were kept rigidly apart with, if I may change the metaphor, each clanking along behind the other like a string of freight cars behind an engine. It seems quite clear that today in most developed countries this life cycle has begun to change. In the United States about 40 per cent of all boys and girls now enrol in pre-school programs before they go to kindergarten, and this has arisen without any national policy of pre-school education. With over 50 per cent of the mothers employed, their children are engaging in pre-school education of some sort or at least socialization. Thousands of our children now watch Sesame Street and the rigid line between the so-called play years and the school years is now completely blurred.

Increasingly university students are deferring their studies or enrolling for part-time work, trying to break out of what seems like a timeless endless incubation. In the United States today over 55 per cent of all students enrolled in post-secondary education are part-time not full-time students.

Clearly the college-going years have become considerably blurred and, to add to this confusion, the neat and tidy adult world is beginning to break up. In 1900 the average work week in America was 62 hours, in 1945 it dropped to 43, and today the average work week is 37.5 hours. Life expectancy has increased from 47 years in 1900 to 71 years in 1973, and it is estimated that, by the year 2000, 30 per cent of all the American population will be over 50 years of age. It seems quite clear that traditionalized life-cycle patterns are increasingly being rearranged. Older people now retire earlier, they live longer, and they have more free time. For the first time in our history, education may be viewed not only as a pre-work ritual but as a lifetime process which can and will be pursued from age 5 to age 85.

We have built an educational system precisely to fit the rigid life cycle model, an education system which principally serves the young and the unattached. I believe that the traditional life-cycle pattern will no longer hold and education for a complete life will mean for most adults education throughout life. This will require more flexibility both in the structure and in the content of formal education. As the adult lifelong learning pattern becomes more flexible, that will have a serious impact on the pre-adult structure of schooling. We can anticipate more flexibility as we anticipate and prepare for recurrent education. Recently I proposed in a New York Times article, to which no one has responded, that perhaps our own pre-college 12-year sequence might be restructured into four years of the basic school in which we focused entirely on the fundamentals of learning on language and on computation, then four to five years on what I would call the common school, in which we would work on the common core with students, and then we would create a new kind of upper-level school called the transition school, in which our young people would self-consciously take a time in which they bridge from formal schooling into apprenticeships. The content and the structure of that transition school would be planned not just by educators but by business, parents, and the community as a whole. A transition school is urgently needed for the upper adolescent years because at that age young people are both students and adults and the deviation is usually abrupt and unplanned.

The third major development with implications for education for a complete life is concerned with the rapid developments in communication technology. I believe that, because of new technology and because of mass communication, students will increasingly be taught by non-traditional educators, teachers beyond the school. Forty years ago, we had no television in our home, we had no radio, we had a model-T Ford that with a bit of luck

took us 50 miles from home. When I went to school I was in awe of my first grade teacher; she was a walking encyclopaedia and the classroom was my window to the world. In those days, formal education had no competitors. Today, in America, children watch television for 4.5 hours every day, before they start school Ja total of 6000 hours of TV watching before they have seen a teacher. By the time they graduate from secondary school, young people will have watched TV for 16 t000 hours and they will have been in front of classroom teachers for 11 t000 hours. To complicate the picture, Christopher Evans in his new book The Micro Millenium discusses the impact of yet another form of language, the computer. He argues that during the 1980s the book will begin, what he calls, a slow and steady slide into oblivion; computers will take over because they store more information and because their information can be more readily retrieved. Evans says that, in the future, books will be tiny silicon chips which can be slipped into small projectors and read through viewing screens against the wall or on the ceiling if you like to read in bed.

We are confronting a new kind of revolution, a communication revolution, that is just as powerful in its force as the industrial and navigational revolutions were. The control of communication is now essentially the control of power. The non-traditional teachers in our culture, those who control information outside the formal settings, are having an impact on the coming generation and on formal schooling in ways we hardly comprehend. A recent survey revealed that, 20 years ago in the United States, teenagers reported that they were influenced most by their parents, second by their teachers, and third by their peers. In 1980 teenagers reported that they are influenced most by their peers, second by their parents, and third by television. In 20 years television has jumped from eighth to third place while classroom teachers have dropped from second to fourth. In my view classroom teachers are losing both authority and prestige because many of the students are too smart too soon. The students feel that they can contend with the symbols of authority on their own terms.

The strength of traditional and non-traditional teachers in our culture must somehow be combined. I believe that television and calculators and computers cannot or will not make discriminating judgments, they cannot or will not teach the students wisdom, and I am convinced that we must have schools where priorities are set, where classrooms provide group learning, and where teachers can serve as models and demonstrate first hand what scholarship is all about. However let us not be beguiled here or drawn off to false battles: the challenge of the future is not to fight technology, which

is a losing battle, nor is the challenge of the future to co-opt technology and try to become our own media technicians in the classroom. The challenge of technology is to teach about it, to learn what is happening to us, and then to develop a partnership from strength by building into the traditional and non-traditional education those parts that each can do best. Teachers are not television technicians and the television technicians are not educators. How can the strength of both be reinforced?

Moreover we have to recognize the prospect that technology unguided could increase rather than decrease discrimination. It is possible that the development of certain sophisticated technologies will increase and widen the gap between those who have no knowledge and those who have no knowledge and that will mean creating a new kind of coercion in which the high priests of information will control the uninformed. It is a great irony that, at the very time when information is exploding, we run the risk of having relatively few people control the centres of information and developing a new serfdom built on ignorance.

I have explored the matter of communication in some depth in order to make one essential point. I am convinced that communication is increasing at a sweeping pace and that students are being taught by teachers that are moving far beyond the schools. The evidence seems to suggest that the informal teachers Jpeers and television Jare becoming more influential than formal teachers Jparents, churches, and classroom teachers. I believe therefore that we cannot talk about education for a complete life in the days ahead without finding ways to relate traditional and non-traditional education.

Thus far I have discussed education in the context of rising educational expectations, and I have suggested that education increasingly will be viewed as a process that never ends. I have predicted that the teachers of tomorrow will be both traditional and non-traditional. But what about the substance? Can education in fact lead to something we call completeness, not just in a societal sense but in a personal sense as well. I am appalled that I go through conference after conference and we talk about the means and the structures and the forms and the aspirations of education and we never talk about its substance. We somehow are frightened of its content, and in the United States at least it has not been since James Conant 20 years ago that we have had a serious report about secondary education that has talked about what we should teach.

As a final point I would like to discuss the curriculum that is necessary for a complete life. I believe in the days ahead our definition

of what we call the core curriculum in formal education will change. I believe we will move beyond the traditional subjects, without discarding them, and we will increasingly look for a central integrating purpose of education Jan integrating purpose as I would define it that will help all students gain perspective and see themselves in relation to other people, other times, and other forms of life. This is my definition of the core curriculum. We confront a world where all actions are inextricably interlocked, and yet many students do not see these connections. It is frightening or at least sobering to confront the possibilities of people who see their world as having connexions only as far as the things they can see and reach and, if that is the nature of our wisdom of life, we are in for a brutal rude awakening. We have lots of subjects in the curriculum but there is no integrated theme, subjects but no end, means but no purpose. Today at many educational institutions the only things students seem to have in common are their differences. There is no agreement about what it means to be an educated person, and many teachers and students are more confident about the length of education than they are about its substance.

While we are indeed non-uniform people, we do have a common heritage, a common contemporary agenda, and a common future in the broadest sense; and we simply cannot afford a generation that fails to see or care about connexions. I acknowledge that students are very different people, and I am the first to defend electives and independent choices. I also believe deeply that we share some things in common, and that all of us must come to understand that we are not only autonomous and self-centred individuals; we are also members of a larger group of living things to which we are accountable and connected. There is no single set of courses by which this notion of shared relationship can be conveyed, but I believe that, through a properly structured study of our common need for language, our common heritage, our common social institutions, our common activities such as work and leisure, and our prospects for the future, through these narrow gates of academic disciplines, we can suggest a larger truth regarding our connectiveness here on earth.

Lewis Thomas wrote recently in Lives of the Cell that all sorts of things seem to be turning out wrong and the century seems to be slipping through our fingers with almost all purposes unfulfilled. One thing that is wrong with us and eats away at us is that we do not know enough about ourselves. We are ignorant about how we work and about where we fit in. Thomas concludes by saying that most of all we are ignorant about 'the enormous imponderable system of life in which we are all imbedded as working

parts'. I suggest that in the future the curriculum of the schools inevitably will come to terms with this reality. The core curriculum will have one central integrative purpose, built on the disciplines but not limited to them, namely to help students better understand that enormous imponderable system of life in which we are all imbedded as working parts. I think the urgency of the social context will force the schools to begin to educate increasingly about the reality of this world.

During the month of August 1937, the New Education Fellowship held a regional conference in Australia under the sponsorship of the ACER. The proceedings of that conference were published under the title Education for Complete Living and I suspect that publication was the inspiration for my rather open-ended assignment. The preface in those proceedings included the following statement:

> The material progress of the world has been such that millions of people have been released from the necessity for giving all their time and energy to secure a mere livelihood. Universal schooling and increased leisure for adults provide an opportunity for raising the general level of human life to heights never before attained.

Then the question, a kind of a soberting undertow, was introduced.

> But what kind of life, individual and social, should we aim at and what procedures should we adopt in order to realize these aims? These questions constitute today's challenge to education.

Frank Tate who was president of the ACER at that time gave a partial answer to these enduring questions when he wrote in the introduction as follows:

> Education should enable the right pupils to receive the right education from the right teachers in the right schools under conditions which will enable the pupils best to profit from their learning.

Is there anyone who would challenge Frank Tate's definition? The only problem then, as now, is what is right. I have suggested that because of the changing conditions of our world the 'right pupil' means serving the many not the few, the 'right school' means lifelong recurrent education, the 'right teacher' means a closer link between the traditional and the dramatic non-traditional teachers, and the 'right education' means giving students a better understanding of our interdependence on the planet earth. These at least are a few of my reflections on the topic 'Education for a complete life'.