Book Reviews

The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning. Allen Tough. Toronto, Canada: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971. 191 pp. $4.00 (paper).

Are highly deliberate efforts to learn very common? Why and what do people learn? How much time do they spend at learning? Is their learning self-planned, or do they go to classes and groups? Can we provide better help for individual learners?

Tough and his associates have provided at least tentative answers to these questions, based on the data obtained from interviews. The last question on providing better help for individual learners actually turns out to be, "*How* can we provide better help?" Apparently this is of major importance to the author for he devotes nine chapters to this topic and five chapters to all the other questions.

It is in his analysis of the process by which adults plan and are assisted in their learning projects that Tough makes a substantial contribution to adult education. The questions he poses aren't new. Others have dealt with similar questions and although the answers differ from those of previous studies, this may be accounted for by the differences in the very small and particular group of adults observed and the difference in observational procedures. However, it was surprising to learn that about 70 percent of all learning projects were planned by the learner. Learning projects are defined as "a series of related episodes, adding up to at least seven hours. In each episode, more than half of the person's total motivation is to gain and retain certain fairly clear knowledge and skill, or to produce some other lasting change in himself."

What is of great potential value is the description of the preparatory steps the learner may perform when undertaking a self-learning project and the ways in which he might be helped to perform these steps satisfactorily. Not only adult educators, but the teachers of children also could increase the competency of students to carry out their own learning proj-

ects — a point discussed by Tough in the chapter on implications for institutions and instructors.

Most claims made by the author were supported. Yet, in several instances it was not clear if a particular claim was based on data from the numerous studies leading up to this report or simply speculations of the author. An example of this is the list of ideal characteristics of a person helping the learner with his learning project.

Being aware of the author's expressed bias that learning is good and is the process that will enable adults to rid their world of troublesome conditions, the reader can be on guard against accepting proposed prescriptions to facilitate learning projects that aren't supported by data. One example is the claim that "high" learners are happier than others. A 1963 study by this reviewer produced data indicating such learners were no happier than others.

In seeking a means by which the adult can improve his learning project, references to those who design instructional systems such as Robert Gagné, Robert Mager, or others might have complemented those systems prescribed by the author.

Finally, the author is to be commended for his methodology. The term in the subtitle, "fresh approach," is truly that. This approach involves the identification of concepts following the observation of the phenomena, resulting in the observer knowing, literally, *what* he's talking about. Unfortunately, careful description often is sloughed off in the race for explanation. The author avoids this error.

When the fact becomes known that the adults in this study spend an average of 700 hours a year in their learning projects, and that certain groups such as professionals devote an average of 1,240 hours each year in this effort, or 31 40-hour weeks, one can appreciate the well-placed concern that Tough has given to the phenomenon. Clearly, efforts to increase the proficiency with which adults can perform these tasks acquire a sense of urgency and importance for all adult educators.

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Are They Ever Too Old To Learn? Huey B. Long and Curtis Ulmer. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Publishers, 1971. 48 pp. $3.75.

The effect of age on learning ability is of paramount interest to practitioners in the field of adult education. The authors of this publication have done a superb job of reviewing the research in this area of adult

learning and condensing the contrasting opinions about the effect of age on the ability of adults to learn into practical and usable information that's pertinent to adult educators.

Long and Ulmer warn of the limitations of Thorndike's widely quoted publication, *Adult Learning*, in predicting the aging effect on learning. Thorndike estimates that learning ability declines about 1 percent per year from age 25 to 50. The authors point out that Thorndike used a cross-sectional procedure. In other words, the learning ability of the same individuals wasn't studied as their age increased. Consequently, the generally lower level of education of the older adults in comparison to a higher level of education among the younger adults in the study could conceivably have led to an erroneous conclusion about the effect of age on learning ability. More recent longitudinal studies by Owens and Kuhlen have shown, according to the authors, that when educational background is equated, adults don't lose their ability to learn as quickly as believed by Thorndike.

The authors cite Lorge's research results which indicate that when "learning power" is of major importance and not "learning speed," the performance of older adults may be similar to the performance of younger people.

There's an excellent section about differences among adult age groups. The authors divide adults into 3 age groups: (1) young adults, 20-34; (2) middle-aged adults, 35-55; and (3) older adults, 56-75. A general profile of the characteristics of each age group as it relates to learning ability is given.

In the final section, the authors offer practical suggestions in light of known theories about the learning ability of adults that should be helpful to adult educators as they strive to provide the best situations for learning.

Although this publication is relatively brief (48 pages), it contains a wealth of pertinent information on the effects of aging on learning ability. The subject matter is discussed concisely. There's little excess verbiage and each section is meaty and relevant. This should be a valuable addition to the adult educator's personal library.

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Challenge and Perspective in Higher Education. Francis H. Horn. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971. 224 pp. $8.95.

Included in this volume are 16 addresses delivered by the author over a period of nearly 2 decades, chiefly while he was president of Pratt

Institute and the University of Rhode Island. He obviously has chosen these speeches from "several hundred addresses" because he considers them among his best. Surely a man who has been a university president as long as the author is entitled to have a volume of his choicest utterances left for posterity!

Although each of the essays is discrete in itself, they're grouped into four broad areas: objectives, problems, administration, and students. "There is no address dealing exclusively with the faculty, but views on the role of the faculty are expressed or implicit in almost every address."

As one would expect in a book of this type, there's no unifying theme except as the views and philosophy of the author recur to give some modicum of continuity to the volume. Readers will notice a repetition of ideas and even of expressions. In addresses to many audiences over an extended period of time, one tends to repeat himself. As the author says in the preface:

> Deeply held beliefs especially are repeated. In these addresses there is repeated emphasis upon such themes as the increasing tempo of change; the importance of liberal education and of continuing education; the desirability and inevitability of one–worldism; the necessity for greater wisdom in the affairs of men and of nations; the goal of independence of thought and action; and many other firmly held convictions.

The essays cover a sufficient span of time that some of them have, in measure, lost their currency. For instance, the 1955 speech entitled "Who Should Go to College?" seems strangely anachronistic in 1972.

The author admits that of the 16 addresses, "several are quite controversial and present unorthodox views." That's true. For example, I doubt that college and university business managers in general are as unhappy as he portrays them. I further doubt that his views on student personnel work would be widely acclaimed by practitioners in the field. His strong support for social fraternities and sororities would be contested in many quarters. And, repeatedly, he advocates a five-year baccalaureate degree. That sounds strange indeed in these days when a three-year baccalaureate degree is being advocated on many fronts.

The author, himself at one time a dean of an evening division, lends strong support for extension work and for continuing and adult education. He believes a balanced program of liberal and vocational education desirable, and especially he sees liberal or general education as being a life-long process to be followed in considerable measure after the formalities of regular college work during one's youth. In this regard, he sees extension work, and especially evening colleges, playing important roles.

The book ends with a chapter entitled, "The Student Revolt: A Defense of the Older Generation." This chapter is a good one — at least

I happen to agree with what he says. But one wishes he might have closed the book with a less defensive, more positive "climax."

On balance, I have mixed reactions about the book. Parts of it have lost their currency. Several of the chapters are quite controversial, although, of course, that's no reason why they shouldn't be written. On the other hand, several of the chapters I deemed to be excellent indeed.

In conclusion, I shall probably not ask my doctoral students to read all of this book, but I shall surely want them to read selected chapters.

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Planning for Innovation: Through Dissemination and Utilization of Knowledge. Ronald G. Havelock. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Center for Research on Utilization of Scientific Knowledge, Institute for Social Research, 1971. 533 pp. $8.00 (paper).

This report provides a framework for understanding the processes of innovation, dissemination, and knowledge utilization, and it reviews the relevant literature in education and other fields of practice within this framework. Dissemination and utilization is viewed as a transfer of messages by various media between the resource or teacher and the learner or user. Major sections analyze characteristics or individuals and organizations that inhibit or help this transfer.

The process is interpreted at four levels: the individual, the interpersonal, the organizational, and the social system. Additional chapters deal specifically with specialized "linking" roles between resource and user, types of messages and media, and phase models of the process.

This excellent research report concluded that dissemination and utilization models can be grouped under the categories of: (1) research, development, and diffusion; (2) social interaction; and (3) problem solving. Each of these perspectives contributes to our understanding of dissemination and utilization. Actually, they can be brought together in a linkage model that incorporates important features of all three.

Linkage is seen as a series of two-way interaction processes that connect user systems with various resource systems. Senders and receivers can achieve successful linkage only if they exchange messages in two-way interactions and continuously make the effort to stimulate each other's problem-solving behavior.

This conclusion has an important message for those programming in extension. It says that if you expect to influence interaction between the

learner and the resource or teacher, it should be continuous and stimulating. This type of collaborative interaction will not only make solutions more relevant and effective, but it will also build relationships of trust and mutual concern. These trust relations over time can become channels for the rapid, effective, and efficient transfer of information.

This report will be a valuable reference for many Extension staff members. It's not a how-to-do-it manual. Rather, it's an excellent reference that could be used in various ways in graduate programs and in-service training activities. Staff members should find informal discussions of various chapters very stimulating and worthwhile.

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