

BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

WHY EDUCATION IN THE LATER YEARS

Louis Lowy and Darlene O'Connor. 1986. Lexington Books.

In the introduction to *Why Education in the Later Years* Louis Lowy and Darlene O'Connor propose that education be viewed "as part of the broader field of social welfare" because basic needs should be met through a large variety of mechanisms. Education is one of those essential mechanisms. Elderly people also need those mechanisms, including education. Society has then the responsibility to look after the satisfaction of those needs. Unfortunately, "colleges and universities," say the authors, "have been the slowest to respond to the educational needs of older learners." (p. xv)

Part I, "Foundations of Educational Gerontology," introduces the reader to different points of view regarding adult education. The authors inform us that a very important evolution has taken place in our society. Formerly, adult education was seen as a "frill, a dubious waste of scarce societal resources on people who had little, if any, ability to do productive work..." (p. 5) Now it is widely considered as a "continuous process of lifelong learning." The first part of the book is important for those who want to establish, seriously, in their own milieu, a positive respect for the education of adults who want to engage in lifelong learning.

Part II, "The State of Education for People in the Later Years," reminds the reader of things she or he already knows, for instance, data on demographic changes are introduced. The most important chapter in Part II (Chapter 5) talks of the transformation of education by older adults. The reader, in my opinion, will expect more than what is said here. The authors start with the traditional but futile debate on pedagogy versus andragogy. Too much emphasis is put on that question. Most of us know what Knowles has said about this dichotomy as well as the dead ends of this debate. What we would like to hear is what adult learners could do with their possibilities, their experiences, their lives, to transform education. In this lies the major question of the book. How to transform education so that

each learner, whatever her or his age, social condition, various and numerous experiences, can grow, develop and finally become a "fully functioning person." Too little is said on this fundamental question.

Much more should have been written about the expressive, contemplative and transcendental needs of older adults — a theme introduced briefly by the authors. It is only through meeting these needs that education for adults and for children too, can be transformed, modified and adapted. The reader should be made more aware of the means to transform an educational system that cares more for the needs of the system than those of the person. The concept of "humanagogy," taken from Knudson, is briefly presented by the authors. It would have been interesting to hear more about this neologism because we do need a "unifying concept" that can enlarge our conception of education.

Part III, "Why Invest in Education in the Later Years?" shows that modern society has much to gain if serious effort is made to invest more in education for older people. Of course, many social agents are necessary to make education for older adults a high priority. Chapter 8 proposes a humanistic philosophy of education which merges the instrumental and expressive dimensions of education. This, in my opinion, is the most interesting chapter. But I believe that the authors should have argued more insistently for the merging of these two major types of education. In fact, this merging is essential for any human being. Too often, though, the educational system does not want to go very far in encouraging expressive learning. I also believe that older people would feel more comfortable when retiring if they had been better prepared for expressive education. Unfortunately, this is not usually the case. This chapter could have shown how our educational system could be reoriented to accomplish this.

On the whole, this is a very interesting work, very well documented, and well constructed. Adult educators will enjoy it. Above all, it should be read by our politicians and by those who now rigidly control educational funding. They would learn that it is not useless to invest in education for those in their later years.

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