

Daedalus deals with adulthood

Adulthood, *Daedalus*, Volume 105, No. 2, Spring 1976.

This issue of *Daedalus* is composed of nine articles dealing with adulthood based on psychoanalytic, medical, literary, cultural and religious data. It is reviewed here for educators of humans of all ages.

Two resolves fell by the wayside as this review was developed. The first was to scan, skim or even skip certain sections, pages or paragraphs, a less than reputable practice admitted to by some reviewers in the more unguarded moments. The second was to review the issue in terms of adult education, the specialty of the reviewer.

The first was destroyed by the high quality of the writing provided by the authors. It was impossible for this reviewer to overlook any part of the journal. The articles are integrally related. To skip any would have been cheating myself.

The second melted before the increasingly apparent futility of compartmentalizing human development, a theme repeated in the articles. The appropriateness of the concept of lifelong learning rather than adult education as a focus for the review became clear. It was clear, also, that the articles on adulthood were as appropriate for those who assist younger persons with their learning tasks as they were for the educator of adults. Therefore, this issue of *Daedalus* about adulthood is recommended for all educators—cradle to grave—that they might gain insights from the psychological, physiological, cultural and religious orientations of the articles included in the issue and be more able to assess their own adulthood as well as help others define the goal toward which they move.

But the journal of which this review is a part is written by and largely for educators and the reviewer is a professor of adult education, so while an effort will be made to provide a presentation not completely age specific (adults), its flavor will be adult oriented.

Youth education is oriented mostly to the future, to the time at which the learner will be adult and assume responsibility for self and others. Also, as the editor of *Daedalus* emphasizes in the preface, little is known about adult life, especially the middle and later years.

The importance of a holistic approach to human development is indicated by the fact that educators and others have only recently begun to recognize that men

and women might learn or continue to develop psychologically and intellectually after achievement of physical maturity. Colleges and universities now recognize and recruit learners who have enjoyed more than 18 to 21 birthdays. Edward L. Thorndike's research published in 1928 let us know that adults can learn. It was shocking news then and it is even now more than a mild surprise to many educators who have assumed education is for the young and only to be paid for by adults.

An example of the negative attitude toward adulthood and adults held by educators is the history of free, public education through secondary school being available for persons 5 through 18 years of age. My state, Ohio, has only recently begun to allocate a state education subsidy for the student over age 18 who is working toward a legitimate high school diploma. Prior to this innovation, those over age 18 who wanted to take courses toward a high school diploma had to pay tuition to reimburse the local school district for the cost of that education which would have been free if only the student had been able or prudent or wise enough to partake of it during the expected chronological developmental period.

This is an example of the results of seeing our society as being oriented to youth. In addition, much psychological research has utilized college age students or patients in a therapeutic situation. Discounting the ready availability of such subjects, it is interesting, if not incredible, that conclusions and recommendations flowing from such research should be readily applied to adults whose development did not necessarily cease at the conclusion of their "formal" education or at a designated chronological age or who have learned to function at healthy and accepted norms for their society. The combination of a declining birth rate and an increasing life span has helped us see new horizons for education, new clientele for educational institutions and new fields for research for scholars. Psychologists are now advancing theories about developmental phases of adulthood. Robert Havighurst, a sociologist, was a pioneer in that effort when he suggested appropriate learning needs of humans which were associated with the roles they assumed during adulthood.

It is necessary to caution educators who become convinced that adulthood education is here to stay that the "new" emphasis on adults may lead some to extremes. Consider the inclination of the American public to solve social problems by using education. Consider the emphasis on education for the physical sciences at the first Sputnik. The elderly, those over age 65, are not only increasing as a percentage of the population, but present a measure of drama and pathos. Films and plays, such as "I Never Sang for My Father" allow the general public a glimpse of what-it-will-be-like for the elderly and their progeny. So, here we go, lined up for yet another possible binge in American education—"Let us provide education for the elderly to—(the reader will please fill in this area, utilizing his biases, knowledge and/or area of educational specialty)."

It would be unpopular to appear in opposition to education for the elderly, but it might be hoped that as we leave an era in which education for the young has been emphasized so strongly, that some balance could be achieved, viewing adulthood as a process and learning as lifelong. That is what this issue of *Daedalus* is about, according to my perceptions, developing a relationship between the study of adulthood and the study of childhood.

It would be presumptuous to try to distill and report the articles in *Daedalus* for Spring 1976 in a review of this nature. A sentence or two will serve the purpose of introducing the reader to the delights to be found in a thorough reading of the publication.

It was Erik H. Erikson's idea to develop this theme for an issue of *Daedalus*. His article is based on the motion picture, "Wild Strawberries" and his own formulation of the human life cycle. An old man, the central character of the picture, reflects on his life in a manner which illustrates movement during life—from infancy to old age, from Hope to Wisdom—in a way which tends not to compartmentalize, but to view life as a whole.

Drawing on information from medical practice, human biology and psychiatry, Herant Katchadourian seems to accept reproductive capacity as a clearer indicator of adulthood than sexuality. His review of the physiological processes associated with development during adolescence is helpful. He relates this development to social and cultural determinants which affect humans throughout life.

Robert Bellah, Ford professor of sociology and comparative studies at the University of California, Berkeley, reviews the contrasts seen in continua representing activity and rest, the profane and the sacred. The use of these concepts in defining adult societal roles or adulthood itself is the substance of his article.

Three articles follow which investigate the impact the three religious systems (Christianity, Islam, and Confucianism) on the idea on adulthood. Christianity has man growing toward adulthood, the unachievable goal of being like Christ. In the Sunni tradition of Islam, self-awareness is a chief purpose to be achieved through "living in the world." The Confucian emphasis on the "process of living" involves self cultivation "to become a person."

The effect of culture on attainment of adulthood is treated by Thomas P. Rohlen in his article, "The Promise of Adulthood in Japanese Spiritualism." The promise is "spiritual freedom, ease and universal belonging." How similar is this to Maslow's self-actualized being?

Achieving adulthood within an extended family in India around 1900 was not as beneficial an experience when compared to the nuclear family as the gilding of time and the process of forgetting the bad things might make it appear. The family context impacts on adulthood and the Rudolphs give an excellent view of the not unalloyed effects of the extended family as chronicled by Amar Singh.

Finally, Leo Tolstoi's life and writings and the society in which they occurred are used by Martin E. Malia to demonstrate the cultural context in which adulthood was achieved in Russia. The progression of the concept of being an adult which appears throughout Tolstoi's works and the capacity for adulthood allowed by the forms society adopted in Russia during his lifetime are important to educators in any cultural setting.

What implications then, might educators of youth and adults draw from this volume on adulthood? First, a definition of the state is difficult. Even by physiological criteria, there is no strong agreement as to its onset or completion. Sociologically and psychologically, a definition is even more difficult. Second, adulthood is affected by genetic and environmental inputs which the educator should consider, even though he may not be able to measure them or their effects precisely. Third, there is much to be learned from other cultures about the process of maturation. Fourth, it is not necessarily useful for educators to view human development as occurring in stages. It may be more helpful to observe segments of an ongoing process which has no clearly delineated parts, but is a whole process with a beginning and an end.

The editor promises a future issue of *Daedalus* dealing with adulthood in America. This and a 1977 issue on the family should complement this fine beginning and be of great value to educators of all descriptions and persuasions.

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