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ABSTRACT

Eduard Lindeman (1885-1953) is considered a major philosopher of adult education in the United States. Lindeman advocated the use of adult learning groups and believed that adult education was a force for constructive social action. In his most important work, "The Meaning of Adult Education" (1926), Lindeman discussed four principles of adult education: (1) education is a life-long process; (2) adult education is non-vocational; (3) adult education should emphasize situations, not subjects; and (4) adult education should place primary emphasis on the learner's experiences. Lindeman's methods of adult education stressed the importance of discussion. He believed that the curriculum should focus on the method instead of content. Through the 1940s, his curriculum ideas became more specific. He stated that the maintenance of a democratic society should be used as the curricular agenda for the discussion groups. Lindeman decried the use of textbooks, relying instead on the adult learner's experience, and he believed that education should be multicultural, rather than Eurocentered. Lindeman's ideas are reflected in adult education today. Adult literacy programs are moving toward small group instruction, whereas community-based programs are moving away from teacher-centered curriculum. An increased emphasis on multiculturalism is also evident. (KC)

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*Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio*

**Leaders in the Field of Adult Education**

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**EDUARD C. LINDEMAN**

*"Adult education is...  
"a right, a normal expectancy."*

by Sarah Nixon-Ponder

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Eduard Lindeman (1885-1953) is considered to be a major philosopher of adult education in the United States. According to Lindeman, adult education is "a co-operative venture in non-authoritarian, informal learning - the chief purpose of which is to discover the meaning of experience" (as cited in Brookfield, 1987, p. 122). He advocated for the use of adult learning groups, believing that "adult education must be confined to small groups and that lectures and mass teaching...{should be} automatically eliminated" (1926, p. 11). Lindeman believed that adult education was a force for constructive social action.

In his most important work, The Meaning of Adult Education (1926), Lindeman discussed the four principles of adult education:

1) *Education is a life-long process.* By regarding adult education solely as a means for preparing learners for unknown future events is to short-change them intellectually.

2) *Adult education is non-vocational.* "Adult education more accurately defined begins where vocational education leaves off" (1926, p. 5).

3) *Adult education should emphasize situations not subjects.* Influenced by his friend John Dewey, Lindeman believed that adult education begins when adults feel themselves needing to adjust to new situations.

4) *Adult education should place primary emphasis on the learner's experiences.* "Experience is the adult learner's living textbook" (1926, p. 7).

Lindeman's methods of adult education stress the importance of discussion. He believed that the curriculum should focus on the method instead of content. Lindeman wrote that learners should have a set of analytical skills which could be applied to understand a range of different situations, that "education is a method for giving situations a setting, for analyzing complex wholes into manageable, understandable parts" (1926, p. 115). These analytical skills would be developed through discussion groups. He believed that adults need to learn how to learn, that metacognitive skills need to be taught and developed.

In 1920, Lindeman wrote about andragogy with Martha Anderson. They stated that andragogy was "the true method of adult learning" (as cited in Brookfield, 1987, p. 127). This was to become one of the most important concepts in the field of adult education. The theory of andragogy was further developed in the 1970s by Malcolm Knowles.

Though Lindeman's ideas on curricula for adult education changed, by the 1940s he

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was becoming rather specific. He stated that the maintenance of a democratic society should be used as the curricular agenda for the discussion groups. In 1944, he stated that adult education should assist adults to learn how to make important choices reflecting issues they are obliged to confront. The connection between social action and adult education is evident in his statement: "All successful adult education groups sooner or later become social action groups" (as cited in Brookfield, 1987, p. 133).

Lindeman, like John Dewey, decried the use of textbooks. He believed that textbooks were too constraining and confining, and should only be used as a secondary source of information. Lindeman believe that "experience is the adult learner's living textbook" (1926, p. 7), and thus using the discussion method as the means for relaying and sharing the learners' knowledge. Lindeman was also highly critical of Eurocentric curriculum and pushed for a more multicultural expression of culture, music, literature, and art - one that would be more reflective of America, not Europe.

Lindeman declared that the participation of citizens in informed social action was the hallmark of a democratic society. He believed that all successful adult education groups should be social action groups, and that authentic, democratic social acts are preceded by adult education. Adult education should prompt in adults an awareness of their own history and the culturally constructed nature of the environment. Adult education should assist adults to reflect critically on their internalized values, beliefs, and assumptions.

The rebirth of many of Lindeman's ideas are evident in different areas. Realizing the importance of group interactions, adult literacy programs that have traditionally practiced one-

to-one tutoring are moving toward small group instruction. Community-based programs, rejecting traditional curriculum, are using the learners' experiences to write new learner-centered lessons and curriculum. Literacy programs are moving away from Eurocentric materials and toward multicultural resources that reflect their adult learners' lives. Instructors are learning to facilitate learning groups, moving away from the concept that knowledge comes from the teacher, not the students. Organized groups such as the Study Circles Resource Center, The Pittsburgh Mediation Center, and the National Issues Forum have been built on Lindeman's idea of social and democratic adult education.

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