

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The poet Vachel Lindsay once wrote a poem about a courageous reform governor of Illinois who committed political suicide by standing against a miscarriage of justice. Lindsay called the poem, “The Eagle That Is Forgotten,” and ended it with the words,

To live in mankind is far more than to live in a name.¹

When one looks at the literature involving adult education in its broadest definition (including civic awareness), great “eagles” that led the socially conscious movement of this country for the better part of the twentieth century have all but been forgotten. There are “eagles” such as James Harvey Robinson who took the lead in founding the New School for Social Research; Eduard Lindeman the noted Columbia University professor of social work who believed that adult education would result in social action and social change; Lyman Bryson who, while teaching at Columbia University, wrote Adult Education which contained the notable statement, “It is impossible to teach a college youth of eighteen how to meet all the problems of a middle-aged man of fifty;” Alvin Johnson who was enormously resourceful in keeping the New School alive in the 1920’s and 1930’s and, in addition to its focus on social research, also made it a center of modern artistic and musical experimentation; Dorothy Canfield Fisher who was twice elected president of the American Association for Adult Education and whose writings in the Journal of Adult Education and other publications indicated a strong advocacy of adult education for women; Everett Dean Martin, who directed the Peoples Institute of New York and argued that adult education was needed for cultural enlightenment; and many others. These “eagles” are now often just footnotes in these papers, their accomplishments taken for granted and their names

often damned with faint praise. The dedicated lives of Harry and Bonaro Overstreet place them alongside the “eagles” of the adult education movement of this period and well beyond.

Since the adult education movement did not exist in an isolated world of its own it is useful to recall what the political, social and economic circumstances were during the first forty years of this century. For it was the conditions and events of the times that motivated the Overstreets toward the full-time practice of adult education as a way of helping their fellow citizens to deal with the problems they faced. It is nearly forgotten that in this country not too long ago racism was rampant, anti-Semitism and xenophobia were the norm, and women had no rights. The economic foundations of a democracy such as social insurance, minimum wages, the rights of industrial laborers, protection against child labor abuse, security of bank funds, and environmental regulation with respect to clean air and clean water were unknown and had to be fought for against strong unyielding reactionary forces. Many of these same problems remain, but in a more subtle format. Then, of course, there were the huge wars of democratic nations against fascism and totalitarianism in which tens upon tens of millions were killed all over the world – more civilians than military. There were unspeakable crimes against humanity such as the Nazi holocaust and the Soviet Gulag. For a new generation much of this seems remote. It was not remote for someone like Alvin Johnson who literally saved the lives of dozens of scholars who were victims of Hitler by establishing a University in Exile as a part of the New School for Social Research, thereby extending the adult education opportunities of the New School by becoming its graduate program. It was not remote for Eduard Lindeman who, in March, 1945, wrote an article, “World Peace Through Adult Education.” He said that the United States would emerge from the war as the strongest sovereign power on earth and this meant that “the future peace of the world rests upon our shoulders.” He went on to note that “the only reliable instrument for establishing confidence among nations is adult education.”² Nor was it remote for the Overstreets whose commitment to social causes long before it became fashionable to do so is a good example of the liberal conscience of the first seventy years of the twentieth century.

Harry Allen Overstreet (1875-1970) had a long and distinguished career. He was educated at the University of California and Oxford University, taught for ten years at the University of California, and, from 1911 to 1939, was head of the Philosophy and Psychology

Department at the College of the City of New York. His first published article was in October 1902; his first public lecture outside of the University of California at Berkeley where he was an Associate Professor of Philosophy, was in 1904 in Moscow, Idaho. His last public lecture was in Oxford, Mississippi, on June 23, 1967, when he was nearly ninety-two years old, and his last published book was in 1969 at the age of ninety-four. Both during his years at City College and after his retirement in 1939 he was interested in adult education and mental health, and his books, articles, lectures and courses reflected his growing conception of what was involved in the maturing of those fields.

Harry Overstreet's full-time involvement with adult education came after his retirement from City College in 1939. Prior to his retirement, however, he had begun working with the education of adults through lecturing at the New School for Social Research, at Ford Hall, Cooper Union, the Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the People's Temple. As he wrote in a letter explaining his commitment to adult education:

I went into adult education because I felt that adults were the forgotten men and women of our society. I went first of all by way of labor education, then I discovered, through the New School for Social Research, Ford Hall, Cooper Union, and other institutions, that not only workers needed and wanted education in their adulthood. So I eventually took all grown ups for my particular province, and I have had a whale of a good time teaching people who at the same time taught me.³

Bonaro Overstreet (1902-1985) was educated at the University of California and Columbia University. She taught for five years in Kern County, California, first in high school and then in the Junior College. She published her first poetry as a student and her first book in 1931 when she was twenty-nine. Her first public lectures outside of the classroom were at the Tulare, California Evening and Weekend School to which she had been invited by its director, David L. MacKaye, after he had read her book, The Poetic Way of Release. Even during her teaching years her interest in adult education was developing, and after her marriage to Harry Overstreet in August of 1932, adult education and the mental health movement became her major concerns. She continued to write, lecture and teach after Harry's death in 1970; her last lectures and classes were with the University of Virginia's Division of Continuing Education in the fall of 1984.

The Overstreets became known for their collaborative efforts. They worked as a team in writing, lecturing, teaching, and serving as community consultants, for many years. They developed a method of lecturing together by conversing between themselves and with the audience which became known as the Overstreet Colloquium. They also adapted the method for use as community consultants. They worked in the areas of civil rights, mental health, personnel and management relations, conducting courses, workshops and institutes for many educational, economic, and governmental institutions. From 1953 until Harry Overstreet's death in 1970 they concentrated more and more on the quality of the human mind in its relation to its social environment and conversely, on the effects of social environment upon human development. They turned their attention to the threat of communism and political extremism of any kind. Their books and colloquiums during these years reflected their belief that these doctrines were an assault upon the integrity of individual minds and human relationships.

For a period of more than seventy-five years, Harry and Bonaro Overstreet, individually and together, contributed an impressive body of work. They published thirty-one books; contributed more than a thousand articles in more than one hundred different magazines, professional and technical journals, and bulletins; wrote a syndicated newspaper column, lectured in forty-eight of the fifty states (Bonaro lectured in the last two after Harry's death) and in many foreign countries; made training films, audio cassettes, radio and television broadcasts; taught courses and led workshops for universities, businesses, and government agencies, and served as community consultants to aid in solving special community problems. Throughout all of these activities the Overstreets always considered themselves "adult educators" whose mission was to convince and motivate their fellow citizens regarding the importance of an informed citizenry.

The Overstreets' Concept of Adult Education

When Harry Overstreet wrote Influencing Human Behavior in 1925, he used the term "adult education" to mean "a process continuing throughout life." Education was not simply something which had been received at the end of some specified schooling period but was needed for all ages that have gone beyond the "superficial training of youthful immaturity" and now could be "carried on with minds that are really old enough to be fully free." He stated that the world moves ahead so rapidly that even individuals who received adequate education in college are "left quite measurably in the rear." Those who think they have kept up with "the

intellectual and scientific times” through newspapers and popular magazines “really do not know the science – the physical or the social science – of today!” He stated that adult life should not be regarded as simply a “putting-into-practice of education received, but as a process of continuing education-with-living.”⁴

By 1941 both Harry and Bonaro Overstreet had put in many years as adult educators with numerous books and articles for many publications including the Journal of Adult Education. Still a precise definition of the extent and limitations of the adult education idea remained elusive. That year (1941) they pursued a study and published a book for the American Association for Adult Education, Leaders For Adult Education. They were seeking the qualities needed for a leader and the training necessary to insure good leaders. Even then they wrote, “it is difficult to define the precise function of adult education in our present-day democracy.” They did, however, come up with “a pragmatic definition of function: the task of the adult educator is to provide for men and women growth-inducing experiences – mental, emotional, and social – that are necessary to their well-being.” The leader must be able to tap into a wide range of experience and therefore “must be both specialist and generalist.” If adult education resisted definition, it still remained “a permeating idea” for institutions that never considered their objective to be educational such as life insurance companies, penal institutions, consumer cooperatives, etc.⁵

Also in 1941, Bonaro wrote, Brave Enough For Life, in which she expanded their ideas on the field of adult education and why she loved it beyond being a vocation like any other. First, it forces the educator to put “to work every atom of knowledge that comes his way.” It forces one to keep abreast of the field of interest. Second, despite its apparent formlessness, “there is no way in which an adult educator can succeed at his job if he misjudges the wants of people.” Third, and this is an oft quoted line of Mrs. Overstreet, “there are no precedents in adult education that are too sacred to be violated.” Fourth, “adult education is a movement that cuts across all the rigid lines of modern specialization.” Fifth, “adult education is a field of work that allows people to render direct, specific service to the democratic principles they profess.” Sixth, and finally, adult education “links me with men and women throughout the ages who have devoted themselves to the social and educational problems that happened in their time.” In addition to references to Grundtvig and Horace Mann, special note was made “of women like

Mary Lyon, Catherine Beecher and Alice Freeman Palmer who led the long struggle to raise the level of women's education." Bonaro Overstreet concluded that for her "adult education is both an act of faith and a reason for faith."⁶

This was hardly the final word on the concept of adult education for the Overstreets never ceased probing the question. In 1954 they wrote an article for a publication put out by the New York Adult Education Council. The article, titled, "The Adventure Has Been Ours," lists at least four new insights from their personal experience. One of these insights is that "adult education has its greatest power to renovate and redirect a life when the learner is not just doing what he feels to be his duty." Second, "adult education has to be primarily self-education. It cannot be primarily a wish to improve others while remaining oneself unchanged." Third, adult education "will be carried forward on many fronts." Although some educators apparently felt that nothing is happening when it is not a group enterprise, the Overstreets believed that reading a book may be participating in the adult education movement. Fourth, "how adult learning is related to social action is an argument that tends to resolve itself within the individual who deeply knows what it is he wants to learn." In each given situation people live with whatever insight is at their command. And, according to the Overstreets, "As we become more educated people we make more educated responses. . We see more of what is involved in situations and see it more accurately and sensitively – and what we thus see becomes the determinant of what we do and how we do it."⁷

The definition of adult education continued to evolve over time. It is obvious that to the Overstreets it was not a narrow limiting definition but was as broad as it needed to be for any situation. Civic education with its emphasis on democratic action was important as was community organization and the need to direct social change. Their philosophy was expressed in an unpublished statement concerning their work in which they wrote, "our work held pretty steadily, we believe, to the conviction that life calls for growth, and growth calls for freedom, and freedom can be experienced by individuals only within a non-totalitarian system." In the book Towards a History of Adult Education in America Harold Stubblefield placed Harry Overstreet with a group of theorists for whom the unifying principle was social education. Included in the group were Eduard C. Lindeman and Joseph K. Hart. Harry and Bonaro Overstreet's writings and actions clearly show that is where they belong.

The field of adult education which so strongly attracted the Overstreets and others has had a long history in this country even before it was known by the designation of adult education. It is a history of individuals with social conscience who worked actively to better the lives of fellow citizens. Much of what has been written about the adult education movement has focused upon institutions, teaching and learning methods, and the growth of the academic field and profession of adult education. Cyril Houle, a respected adult education theorist, wrote that “the first effective expression of the term adult education did not appear until after World War I.”⁸ Since then, adult education became a distinctive field of study and many intellectuals began referring to it as a profession. “The first major definition of the field” was a document published in 1919 by the Adult Education Committee of the British Ministry of Reconstruction. This publication had an impact on adult educational thought in both England and America. The emphasis of the book was on the need to stress humanistic and liberal education and, according to Houle, it served as a model for the American credo that “adult education should be a movement unified by a common effort to achieve a single all-encompassing goal.”⁹

In 1926, with the backing of the Carnegie Corporation, the American Association of Adult Education (AAAE) was formed with Dean James Earl Russell of Columbia University Teachers College as its first president. In the years that followed, the presidents of the AAAE were the intellectual educational leaders of the time and included Dorothy Canfield Fisher (two terms), Charles Beard, Everett Dean Martin, Alvin Johnson, Harry Overstreet and Lyman Bryson.

The highly respected books in the field of adult education which trace the history and institutional development of adult education in the United States as it relates to our national history have added to our understanding of the scope, depth and complexity of the field of adult education. There exists, however, a growing interest in biographical research and analysis of the individual efforts of major leaders in the adult education movement. There are a number of these books, and although all are worthy of consideration, I have selected some of the most noteworthy as good examples of the genre.

Biographies and Autobiographies of Adult Educators

Of all of the adult educators of the period, Eduard Lindeman, who for more than twenty years was Professor of Social Philosophy at the New York School of Social Work, Columbia University, has received the most intensive biographical attention. The most comprehensive

biography is David Stewart's Adult Learning in America: Eduard Lindeman and His Agenda for Lifelong Education.

Stewart came under the spell of Lindeman's book The Meaning of Adult Education while a graduate student. He wrote that although the substantive content of Lindeman's book was hardly original, "his mind was fertile and quick, and he used it to popularize (in the best sense of that word) the concept of adult education."¹⁰ Stewart credits Lindeman with being "the earliest major conceptualizer of the progressive-pragmatic tradition in American adult education."¹¹ Even though Lindeman never provides a definition of the term "adult education" it is apparent that it was to serve "humanistic values."¹²

The greatest philosophical influence on Lindeman's thinking was Emerson. Emerson was the peerless spokesman for American democracy and, according to Lindeman, "it is adult education that should be the principal instrument of the democratic process."¹³ This is the thesis of the book which is in line with Emerson's thinking about the relationship of means and ends. To Lindeman adult education was to be the ultimate means and "it was *means*, not good or ends, that should be emphasized in any reconceptualization of education."¹⁴

In Stewart's account there are eight basic themes running through Lindeman's books and articles with regard to adult education:

- . . . (1) adult education is a process coterminous with life, (2) experience is the most potent resource for learning, (3) means in education are related to and are as important as ends, (4) diversity among individuals in a learning situation may be a source of strength, (5) adult education is the chief instrument of the democratic process, (6) the scientific method is applicable in problem-solving associated with adult learning, (7) adult education has important social action dimensions, and (8) mindless specialization is antithetical to humanistic adult education endeavors.¹⁵

Stewart's book also points out that in his later years Lindeman was hounded by McCarthyism. Although he had always opposed communism he was described as a "controversial educator who is a notorious advocate of Progressive Education."¹⁶ This is a distinction Lindeman shared with the Overstreets who fortunately outlasted McCarthy.

Another book on Lindeman is Stephen Brookfield's Learning Democracy: Eduard Lindeman on Adult Education and Social Change. The author noted that Lindeman's

contemporary influence remains great even though he was “neither a professional adult educator nor concerned chiefly with questions of technique.”¹⁷

The title of Brookfield’s book, Learning Democracy, is a short summation of what the author believes to be the highest aim of education to Lindeman. Democracy was a living process just as “Education was, first and foremost, conceived as a life long process.”¹⁸

The book is meager on biographical information and consists for the most part of twenty-six short articles written by Lindeman between 1927 and 1951 which touch on some aspect of adult education. The author’s conclusion is that Lindeman will survive because his writings appear to speak chiefly to present day developments and changes. He believes that Lindeman would have subscribed to a concept of media literacy for adults. In short, a network of media study groups would discuss the content of television programming in a democratic society.¹⁹

One book which covers fourteen American adult educators from colonial times to the present is Pioneers In Adult Education by Willis D. Moreland and Erwin H. Goldenstein. Some are relatively familiar figures in the literature of adult education such as Benjamin Franklin, Josiah Holbrook, Peter Cooper, John Vincent and Jane Addams. Others have had limited treatment. These include Booker T. Washington, Sequoyah, a mixed blood Cherokee who designed a phonetic alphabet, and Margaret Fuller Ossoli, a champion of women’s education in the mid-nineteenth century. The authors have chapters on Justin Morrill who led the fight for land grant colleges and Seaman Knapp who was greatly concerned with vocational needs. Also represented are John Lowell of the Lowell Institute and Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago who were “strongly dedicated to meeting the liberal education needs of adults.”²⁰ Finally the pioneers include those who stressed civic education such as Alvin Johnson and John Studebaker in addition to the previously mentioned Jane Addams and Booker T. Washington. The authors state that they hope “to assist scholars who aspire to write a definitive history of American adult education or who wish to provide a comprehensive chronology of the development of adult education in the United States.”²¹ This aim is similar to the goal of this paper about the lives and contributions of the Overstreets – that is, to place their specific contributions in a historical perspective.

It is of interest to examine in a little more depth a few of the educators chosen by Moreland and Goldenstein because their stories bear a relationship to the Overstreets. For

example, Peter Cooper was an inventor and industrialist who amassed a fortune and established Cooper Union for the advancement of science and art in New York City. An education had been denied to Cooper himself so “he established Cooper Union to provide a practical education to the working class who otherwise could not afford it.”²² It opened its doors in 1859 and all classes were filled on opening night. Cooper Union was an experiment in adult education as a trade school for men and women. Throughout its history, education was treated as a “lifelong process.” The evening lecture series began almost as soon as Cooper Union opened its doors and has continued to the present.²³ In 1897 the lecture series was merged with the People’s Institute which was under the leadership of Charles Sprague Smith and later Everett Dean Martin. The lectures were free of charge, and in a forty year history, “millions of people attended them.”²⁴ Both Harry and Bonaro Overstreet lectured there many times. Bonaro said that when she spoke at Cooper Union she could not help but be aware that from that same hall in February 1860, Abraham Lincoln had delivered a speech that was to propel him to the Republican nomination for the Presidency. She always remembered that in that speech Lincoln said, “Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it.”²⁵

Another “pioneer” that is extolled by Moreland and Goldenstein is Jane Addams. The Overstreets knew Jane Addams and spoke and wrote about her work. They and the authors of Pioneers in Adult Education are not alone in considering her as a leader in adult education. In his book, The Design of Education, Cyril O. Houle wrote that “Twenty Years At Hull House by Jane Addams is the classic account of how adult education appears within a settlement house orientation.”²⁶ Addams “believed that settlement houses had a distinct role to play in the educational field.”²⁷ Hull House was made up primarily of immigrants who had recently come to this country. Addams was interested chiefly in their occupational training and their instruction in English. She was, however, “particularly concerned that the immigrants preserve for themselves and their children those values and traditions that they had brought with them.”²⁸ The authors state that perhaps the greatest contribution that Hull House made “was that it demonstrated that it was possible to create a learning community among members of different groups and races that would be of service to all.”²⁹

The book is a useful reminder that adult education has a distinct and proud heritage in this country and that there have been many men and women who viewed education and growth as a lifelong process. We all learn and gain from those who have gone before us in our field. Sir Isaac Newton, in a slightly different context, said, “If I have been able to see further than others, it was because I stood on the shoulder of giants.”³⁰

Another book which reviewed contributions made by individual adult educators is Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education edited by Peter Jarvis. The book covers the work of thirteen adult education thinkers of this century. Seven of these are from North America (five from the United States and two from Canada). Those from the United States are John Dewey, E. L. Thorndike, Eduard Lindeman, Cyril Houle and Malcolm Knowles. The two Canadians are J. Roby Kidd and Moses Coady from Nova Scotia.

The editor, Peter Jarvis, in addition to writing the chapter on Knowles, provides the first and last chapter which deal with certain questions about the nature of the discipline called Adult Education and a conclusion about the field of study. Jarvis argues that there is an ever-changing body of adult education knowledge and taken together with new complexities in society there is an ongoing process of developing adult education knowledge.

Contemporaries of the Overstreets

There is a chapter on John Dewey in Jarvis’ book by Angela Cross-Durant whose thesis is that for Dewey, growth is the reward of education and that his “thinking is as important to lifelong education as it is to initial education.”³¹ Cross-Durant associates the lifelong education movement with UNESCO which make s a “plea for regarding all of life’s resources and experiences, from pre-school to the grave, as playing a meaningful part in an individual’s education.”³²

Another major “thinker” discussed in the book was Edward Lee Thorndike. Thorndike (1874-1949) is a transitional figure in the history of education because of his application of the scientific method to educational questions. He wrote Adult Learning (1928) which was of major importance to the field of adult education. W. A. Smith, in Twentieth Century Thinkers, wrote, “It may be said of Thorndike that he offered the psychological world of education the first miniature system of learning,”³³ Thorndike’s pioneering efforts were of great significance to

Harry Overstreet who often referred to his friend Thorndike's findings in the development of his own concept of maturity.

One chapter is devoted to Malcolm Knowles whose own development in the field of adult education owes something to both Lindeman and Harry Overstreet. Peter Jarvis wrote that Knowles formulation of "andragogy" is "the first major attempt in the West to construct a comprehensive theory of adult education . . . while it will have become apparent that it is not as comprehensive as he would have perhaps anticipated, he has provided a foundation upon which such a theory might eventually be erected."³⁴ Jarvis concludes that a criticism of Knowles "is that he has not sought to develop his ideas fully and that he tends to be descriptive rather than analytical or critical."³⁵ The andragogy – pedagogy distinction in its simplified terms was the art and science of helping adults to learn versus the art and science of teaching children. Knowles depicted them as being opposed to each other. He amplified this in 1973 with his book The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species which Jarvis indicates is a seminal book in the field.

One of the biographies in the book which held a special appeal for the writer involves Monsignor Moses Coady of Nova Scotia. He and his cousin, Father Jimmy Tompkins, were instrumental in starting the Antigonish Movement. A little more than a year ago, the writer had the pleasure of a visit and private tour of the Coady Institute located at St. Francis Xavier University in the small town of Antigonish. The Institute has actively run training programs setting up cooperative ventures for adult students from third world countries. Father Jimmy was a friend of the Overstreets and they wrote about the Antigonish movement; in some of Bonaro's writings Jimmy Tompkins emerges as a kind of folk hero.

The article in Twentieth Century Thinkers focuses on Coady as a man ahead of his time. Coady was ecumenical in his outlook and was an environmentalist with views on the waste and destruction of natural resources long before it became a movement of its own. "We cannot sin against nature and hope to win."³⁶ His greatest achievement (and Tompkins') was that they put ideas, theories and principles into practice. "The cooperative approach stressed self-reliance, the development of local leadership, broadly based education, and a peaceful redistribution of economic benefits."³⁷

Jarvis provides a summary for the book and concludes that "adult education is not a seamless work of integrated knowledge but rather a variety of combinations of sub-disciplines."³⁸

The book Toward A History of Adult Education in America focuses on adult education during the period from the end of World War I to the early 1950s. It has a most compelling subtitle, “The Search for a Unifying Principle.” That elusive unifying principle, needed to give meaning and coherence to the efforts of these leaders, more often than not involved “a vision of the good society.”³⁹ Stubblefield points out the people involved in adult education at this time were “the first generation theorists of adult education as a social practice.”⁴⁰ He covers all of those referred to earlier as “eagles” plus many others who made notable contributions. In searching for a unifying principle for grouping these theorists Stubblefield divided their contributions into three parts – adult education as 1) diffusion of knowledge, 2) liberal education, and 3) social education. As might be expected, this is a useful way of looking at the field for discussion purposes, but in reality many of these adult educators defied easy categorization. For example, the AAAE falls into the diffusion of knowledge category but at one time or another Everett Dean Martin, Alexander Meiklejohn and Harry Overstreet were Presidents of the organization. Stubblefield does an excellent job of describing the environment which brought about the New School and the internal conflict that seemed to pull the Carnegie Corporation in its support of adult education down a different path. Among the achievements of the AAAE was the publication of the Journal of Adult Education in which critical ideas were openly discussed.

The book goes a long way to resurrecting the ideas of such adult education leaders as Alexander Meiklejohn, John Walter Powell and Joseph K. Hart. To Hart “adult education was an applied social science” and he regarded it “as an area of research, an instrument of reform, and as a foundation of community life.”⁴¹

The chapter on Harry Overstreet is the best critical treatment to date. Overstreet was a philosopher who made adult education his special domain. Stubblefield’s discussion of Overstreet is respectful and fair in its description of the concept of psychological maturity. He appears, however, to agree with some critics who called the efforts of the Overstreets “popularizing.” This paper probed what is meant by that term in its use by different authorities. And while the efforts of Overstreet’s wife are acknowledged by Stubblefield, it is obvious that they are secondary in the author’s mind to that of Professor Overstreet. This paper contends that their work was a true collaboration of equals whose contributions were vital to each other’s

work. One example of Bonaro's ability is the fact that she is the only adult educator to have an entire issue of the magazine Adult Leadership devoted to her contribution.

In addition to biographical studies, some adult educators wrote their autobiographies. One is the warm, engaging autobiography, Pioneer's Progress by Alvin Johnson, the noted American economist, educator, novelist, and essayist. He was an editor of the New Republic, the Yale Review, and for many years the principal editor of the enormous Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.

Johnson's book, written in 1952, began with his birth in Nebraska, and, as Max Lerner puts it, is "the story of an unending education by an unending educator."⁴² Johnson, whose parents were born in Denmark, was influenced by the Grundtvig movement in Danish folk schools and cooperatives (as were Lindeman, Overstreet, and other educators). His book, published at age seventy-six, looked back at an extraordinarily full lifetime of intellectual achievement in the field of economics and in the adult education movement. He is perhaps most famous for his instrumental efforts in the establishment, organization and growth of the New School for Social Research in New York City. There were many other famous names involved in the founding of the New School, including Charles Beard, James Harvey Robinson, John Dewey, Wesley Mitchell, and Thorstein Veblen. There was, however, little agreement on the kind of new institution that was wanted, and, one by one the others left the institution and responsibility fell to Johnson as the Director. It was Johnson's aim that "We ought to create a true school of advanced adult education" and that is the view that prevailed.⁴³ Under his firm leadership the New School grew larger and stronger. Johnson was able to attract a remarkable group of lecturers and faculty, and he refers to the late twenties (a period when Harry Overstreet was often lecturing on human behavior and other subjects) as the Golden Age of the New School, in that it answered a pressing need in American social and cultural life.

During Hitler's reign in Nazi Germany, Johnson succeeded in bringing to America many notable Jewish European scholars. He expanded the adult education opportunities of the New School by establishing a University in Exile which later became the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science. Johnson in his autobiography was modest in his brief account of these efforts, but Rutkoff and Scott in A History of the New School for Social Research wrote:

. . . in a single stroke, Johnson transplanted a school of German social science to the United States, and fulfilled his own pledge, made more than ten years

earlier, to make the New School a center for social science research. . . . The New School with its small budget made more appointments to its various divisions than any other American institution.⁴⁴

A large part of Johnson's autobiography involves the history of the New School through Johnson's retirement as president in 1945. His book is a valuable source book, full of observations and anecdotes which are important to our historical understanding of the times. It was very well received and Dorothy Canfield Fisher provided an excellent review in the New York Herald Tribune Book Review Section on September 28, 1952, and Max Ascoli, in the Yale Review, wrote:

Pilgrim's Progress is indeed a very good book, probably the best book Alvin Johnson could write about himself, but I am not sure that it is the best book about Alvin Johnson that can be written. There is too much modesty in these pages and, no doubt deliberately, he avoids placing the emphases they deserve on the greatest things he accomplished in his life. . . . Briefly this Dr. Johnson needs a Boswell in order that generations to come may know him thoroughly. He deserves it.⁴⁵

Johnson saw clearly that the adult education movement should be closely related to the democratic ideal and that "the adult learner must be permitted to engage in activities under conditions that allow for unrestricted freedom of thought and investigation."⁴⁶ He wrote frequently on adult education and a number of his articles were for the American Association for Adult Education's Journal of Adult Education. In a dissertation by Michael Joseph Day which reviewed the articles submitted to the Journal during the period of 1929-1941, Johnson is among the adult educators tied for first place with the most contributions – ten. Other adult educators that are high on the list are Bonaro Overstreet with eight and Harry Overstreet with six.⁴⁷ It is of interest when discussing Johnson to note that one of Bonaro's Journal articles, written in 1934, was "The German University in Exile" at the New School.

Will and Ariel Durant wrote A Dual Biography which was published in 1977. This book was written in alternate sections by the Durants and is filled with many anecdotes and details of their private lives. They were, however, primarily historians and only a small portion of the book can be said to be on the subject of adult education.

Will Durant wrote about a few of his problems when he was Director of the Labor Temple. "The students would pay twenty-five cents per lecture; the teachers would be paid only what his students brought in. It seemed unlikely that good teachers could be attracted by such an

arrangement, but they came, out of pure good will; and professors like . . . Harry Overstreet from City College gave at Labor Temple School the same courses which they were giving for higher fees in the academies.”⁴⁸

Durant later described activities at the Labor Temple in religious terms imagining “a church that would make its every chapel and cathedral a citadel of adult education, bringing science and history, literature and philosophy, music and art to those too old for school, and yet young enough to learn.”⁴⁹

The preface of the Durants’ book had an explanatory note which stated that “of course every autobiography is a form of exhibitionism . . . If in these pages we quote some of the adverse reviews that our books have received, it is partly because we would rather be attacked than ignored.”⁵⁰

Will Durant wrote the hugely popular The Story of Philosophy in 1926. It sold in the millions and was translated into eight languages including Chinese and Japanese. It had a number of critics including Mortimer Adler and in future editions, Durant said much of it was “disagreeably just.” The sharpest criticism came from Durant himself who wrote, “No critic pointed out a much more culpable omission: the Story said not a word about Chinese and Indian philosophy.”⁵¹ He tried to rectify that in his ambitious The Story of Civilization, which covered eleven volumes. The first volume was entitled, Our Oriental Heritage. Another volume, Rousseau and Revolution won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968.

Joan Shelley Rubin in The Making of Middle Brow Culture discusses the three decades following the First World War during which “Americans created an unprecedented range of activities aimed at making literature and other forms of ‘high’ culture available to a wide reading public.” She stated that her primary task was to “redress both the disregard and the oversimplification of middlebrow culture” during that period “by illuminating the values and attitudes that shaped some of its major expression.”⁵² She chose to examine five subjects: the New York Herald Tribune’s Books Section; the Book-of-the-Month Club; the initial ideology behind the Great Books movement; the appeal of the “outline” books; and literary programming on radio. Rubin stated that the delineation of the competing ideals of “character” and “personality” helps the efforts of historians to better understand the consequences of the country’s shift from a producer to a consumer society.

Rubin does not use the term “adult education” in her book (except for her use of one quote of Russell Lynes in which he describes the “lower middlebrow” as the “course takers who swell the enrollments of adult education classes.”)⁵³ In her discussion of her five chosen subjects, Rubin covers many popular figures of the period, including three prominent adult educators: Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Will Durant and Robert Hutchins. She included a short biographical outline of the lives of Fisher and Durant and then focused on their work in two of her five chosen subject areas. The most extensive coverage was that of Durant in the treatment of the “vogue of the outline book.”

Rubin considered the Durants to be popularizers who were “by mid-century, somewhat obsolete.”⁵⁴ She ventures to say that the books are wall units and unread. How she reaches this conclusion she does not say. The question that is avoided is why people with notable credentials gave them approval. For example, John Dewey, whose opinion should carry some weight, wrote of The Story of Philosophy that it was “thoroughly scholarly, thoroughly useful, human and readable. Dr. Durant has humanized rather than merely popularized the story of philosophy.”⁵⁵ H. L. Mencken, who scorched the American middle class in the twenties with his barbed satire and who coined the word “booboisie” for stupid, gullible, bourgeois Americans, gave Durant his unqualified approval. That included all of the history volumes as well as the philosophy book.

Rubin’s treatment of Fisher deals primarily with her role as a novelist and member of the Board of Judges of the Book-of-the-Month Club. She stated that Fisher, along with Henry S. Canby, were dominant exponents of “integrity, morality, and literary standards which perpetuated the genteel tradition in a perhaps surprising place: at the heart of an institution inextricably tied to advertising and consumption.”⁵⁶

Hutchins is covered briefly in his position as President of the University of Chicago with his implementation of a “General Honors” seminar at Chicago, his reorganization of the first two years of college studies around general education courses, and, when between 1936 and 1942, he “sought to replace the entire undergraduate curriculum with ‘great books’ courses rooted in the classical trivium and quadrivium.”⁵⁷ She then treated his work with Mortimer Adler in promoting the Great Books Program which culminated in 1952 “with the publication of the Encyclopedia Britannica’s fifty-four volume Great Books of the Western World.”⁵⁸

The Making of An Adult Educator by Malcolm Knowles is an unpretentious book which he refers to as “a sort of autobiography, but only sort of.”⁵⁹ Knowles describes his youth growing up in Missoula, Montana and his scholarship to Harvard. He was working as a training director for the National Youth Administration in 1937 when he attended an AAAE conference in New York. “I was inspired by the quality of the people I met there . . . Harry and Bonaro Overstreet, Eduard Lindeman, Will Durant, Fredrick Keppel, and Charles Beard. I decided then and there that I felt much more compatible with and inspired by people like this than I would with diplomats . . . I was now an adult educator.”⁶⁰ Lindeman was his first mentor and he began reading all of the existing books on adult education including those by Lindeman, Lyman Bryson, Morse Cartwright, Edward Thorndike and Mary Ely. Knowles spent some time in the U. S. Navy but had nothing to say about that experience except that he attended the University of Chicago on the G. I. Bill. At Chicago his advisor was Cyril Houle and another major influence was Carl Rogers.

Knowles spent eight years with the Adult Education Association first as administrative coordinator and later as executive director. He had been greatly influenced by the “participative management” theories of Kurt Lewin and the National Training Laboratories leaders. He believed the association should be one in which policies emerged from the grass roots and move up. His role was “to keep the membership informed about current conditions and possible future developments and to manage the processes that involved the membership in formulating and expressing their desires and wills.” He visualized the mission of the association as “being to build a strong membership organization that would be the engine for a vital and growing adult education movement in the United States.”⁶¹

After he received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago he spent fourteen years as a professor at Boston University and five years at North Carolina State University from which he retired in 1979. Like Harry Overstreet he found that “life begins at retirement” when he became busier with faculty-development workshops with community colleges and universities than when he held a full-time job. He also had more “time to write producing two books and about sixty articles, book reviews . . . in the first nine years of retirement.”⁶²

In a chapter on how his own ideas have evolved, Knowles indicates that he discovered Harry Overstreet’s The Mature Mind “and found further reinforcement of the notion that adult

learning is concerned with ‘linkages with life.’”⁶³ In 1950 Knowles also was introduced to Thomas Fansler’s Creative Power Through Discussion. It was Fansler who, back in 1934, credited Harry Overstreet with originating the concept of the panel discussion.

In the 1960s while at Boston University, Knowles introduced the term “andragogy” to describe the method of helping the adult learner and contrasting it with the pedagogical model of childhood learning. The first book that presented the andragogical model was published in 1970 by Knowles entitled Modern Practice of Adult Education: Androgogy versus Pedagogy. In ten years time the “versus” got changed and when the book was reissued in 1980 the subtitle became Pedagogy to Andragogy. His thinking about both models has changed over time and Knowles covers three pages with six current assumptions. Knowles is flexible because he allows that there will be substantial changes to his thinking in the next ten years. In this respect he is a model of the adult education conviction that growth does not stop.

In his last chapter, Knowles acknowledges some misgivings that “the adult education movement in this country has not exerted the influence on national policies that the movements in several other countries has accomplished.”⁶⁴ He insists that he himself is not good at political action but the gap should be “a challenging opportunity for the next generation of adult educational leaders.”⁶⁵ Knowles has a naturally optimistic disposition as long as the professionals in the field remain dedicated to the concept of lifelong learning and maintain a sense of excitement about the future.

The biographical research and analyses that led to these books on the lives and efforts of major adult education leaders of the past have made a significant contribution to a more complete understanding and appreciation of the field of adult education. However, with the exception of Stubblefield’s book which included Harry Overstreet, there has been virtually no coverage of the lives and work of Harry and Bonaro Overstreet. A doctoral dissertation was written by Brigid Dorman of the University of North Texas on Bonaro Overstreet which examined her life as revealed through her books, but it did not deal with her lectures and articles, nor the ways in which the Overstreets collaborated so completely on their research, writing, lecturing, and as community consultants. This paper attempts to help fill the gap in the literature about the Overstreets by examining their lives and contributions in their roles as adult educators and, in so doing, add to the body of work on the lives of past leaders of adult education.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of this investigation was on the efforts of Harry Allen Overstreet and Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet in their lifelong dedication to adult education. The problem investigated was: What were the contributions of the Overstreets in the field of adult education, particularly with respect to their collaborations, what was their philosophy and purpose; on what areas did they focus; what methods did they use; and how was their work received.

The following questions were used to guide the investigator in the collection and treatment of data:

1. How did the Overstreets perceive their roles in the field of adult education and how did they attempt to carry them out?
2. What social beliefs and concerns formed the basis of the Overstreets' efforts in adult education?
3. In what areas of American life and education did the Overstreets primarily involve themselves?
4. What were the Overstreets' methods of collaboration and in what ways did they contribute to one another's growth and development?
5. What were the results of their efforts and how was their work received?

Significance of the Study

It is difficult for people studying the adult education movement to ascertain the influence of various individuals and their ideas without specific references or acknowledgments. This study of the personal involvement of two such prominent leaders in the field as Harry and Bonaro Overstreet attempted to add substance to the outline of historical events and methods. A penetrating look both at the extensive activities and published works of these two people, who, together with others in adult education, interacted with so many leaders of the vital issues of the period, can help to illumine and add substantively to the body of knowledge

An examination was made of the methods the Overstreets used and developed in order to implement their goals. The results can add to the body of knowledge of practical use for adult education practitioners.

It is hoped that an understanding of the philosophical school to which they belonged (that of social consciousness and civic responsibility) and which guided their efforts will enrich our

knowledge of the philosophical tenor and values of leaders of the adult education movement during an important period of its history and increase our understanding of how they integrated philosophy with practice.

Research Methods

Malcolm Knowles, in his Foreword to Stewart's book, made "a case for biography as a vehicle for conveying important knowledge." He stated that some of the most influential works in our literature have been biographies because they provide a "window through which we can see how great minds work,-- not just what they produce" He believed that we can understand ideas better and appreciate them more in the context of its life and times.⁶⁶

This study looked at the people and events in the adult education movement from the 1920s to the 1980s through the involvement, relationships, and body of work of Harry and Bonaro Overstreet. Since the search for the answers to the questions posed required analysis, synthesis, and judgments about the past, the historical method of research was used. This method offered the advantage of providing a developmental perspective on the social concerns and efforts of the Overstreets in the field of adult education. It aided in the identification of the basic philosophy which guided the Overstreets in their work and in the identification of the methods they found to be the most efficacious.

The study looked at both their individual efforts and their collaborative efforts with an emphasis on their methods as a "team." Harry, of course, wrote a number of books and articles before Bonaro joined the "team" and they warranted examination because they are important to an understanding of the basis for his philosophy of adult education and the social areas of concern to him. Also, since poetry tends to be an individual effort, Bonaro's poetry was treated separately.

The study examined their individual and their joint writing efforts, the chronology of their work, the areas of social concern in which they concentrated their efforts, their areas of expertise, and the methods they used to accomplish their goals.

Sources of Data

This study made extensive use of primary sources of several kinds. One was the publications of the Overstreets which included thirty-one books, many periodical and professional and technical journal articles, newspaper column, book reviews, and pamphlets.

Another included lecture notes, outlines, and transcripts; and course and lecture series outlines. Contracts, and personal and business correspondence of the Overstreets were examined. Available tapes and films (including those specifically prepared for training purposes and those of lectures which were filmed) were reviewed.

In addition, the writer was fortunate to know the Overstreets personally and therefore had first hand accounts of their experiences as a valuable source for the study. They made available to her all of their files, books, and memorabilia. The writer had many discussions over nearly nineteen years about their eventful lives -- their work in adult education, their philosophy, their values and their methods of work. A large portion of the Overstreet files were given to her by Bonaro Overstreet to use in her research and they will be given to the Lilly Library at Indiana University to be included with the Overstreet Manuscript collection.. Other sources include the Lilly Library, the Library of Congress, the American University Library, the University of Michigan film library, the files of the Department of the Army Training Center, and family, friends, and professional acquaintances of the Overstreets. Several years ago, the writer conducted a survey by correspondence and by telephone with people identified as being able to provide significant information as to the Overstreets' contributions, and their comments have been included.

It is believed to be appropriate for the writer to explain something of her relationship with the Overstreets. In January of 1967, she was an officer in the local League of Women Voters when she volunteered to help the University of Virginia Continuing Education Center develop a lecture series on civic issues involving the state and local community. The Overstreets lived not five miles from the Center and the writer visited them to request their participation. She also invited them to be the primary speakers for a Virginia Association for Adult Education annual conference. They accepted, and their colloquy on The Citizen's Need to Grow Up was a huge success. A friendship grew and became close over the next nineteen years -- three years with Harry before his death and sixteen years following with Bonaro. Bonaro made herself available as a resource for many projects with which the writer was involved for the University of Virginia and in her work in the state and national adult education associations. The two traveled together to many adult education meetings and conferences both here and abroad.. The writer's husband and children also joined in celebrating special occasions with them. The

writer's family "house watched" the Overstreets' home when they were out of the area. They met and visited with members of their family on a number of occasions. The relationship was very close, and the writer was the last person to spend time with Bonaro before she died. Her relationship with the Overstreets, Harry for three years and Bonaro for nearly nineteen years, should, in fairness, indicate that she has a bias in their favor.

Because of this bias the writer was acutely aware of the need to examine all of the materials as objectively as possible. She knew that objectivity seems to vary inversely with one's personal involvement in the area discussed or examined. Certainly prior associations could influence objectivity and one needed to be aware of personal feelings which could influence one's rationality. However, although the writer knew and liked the Overstreets, the events of their lives did not closely affect her own life, interest, needs and attitudes. She did not believe that she needed to defend their reputations nor did she believe that she harbored any attitudes or predispositions that were not conducive to a calm and rational investigation. She has had professional experience in analysis and evaluation both as a consultant analyst for the federal government and in her position with the University of Virginia. Both roles required careful objectivity in the performance of her responsibilities. Furthermore, in this study she searched for appraisals of the Overstreet's work from both critics and friends and presented the views of those who opposed their work as well as those who extolled it.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in different time frames because the focus of the Overstreets' interests and efforts changed in emphasis over time. There were periods when their focus was on behavioral and other psychological issues. They devoted time and effort to the civil rights movement and personnel management. There were times when mental health was of primary importance. At other times they were acting as researchers for telling the story of the P.T.A. or Town Hall as examples of democracy in action. In later years they focused on the dangers of communism and political extremism. Although all of these interests were important throughout their lives, it is of interest and importance to look at them not only during times of increased activity but also to understand the periods of history in which they took place.

Chapter one provides background of the period covered by the study, introduces the Overstreets in the statement of the problem, reviews the literature related to the study, poses the

significance and delimitations of the study, and provides a description of the research methodology used.

Chapter two traces the lives of Harry Allen Overstreet and Bonaro Wilkinson from their birth to the time of their marriage in 1932.

The following chapters examine both thematically and chronologically the work of the Overstreets in their various areas of concern and in the variety of media and methods which they used

Chapter three covers the years of the Depression of 1932 to 1939 and deals with their increasing interest and involvement with adult education. It discusses the basic philosophy which guided them in their work and the people and ideas which influenced their thinking and writing as well as the social concerns which motivated their efforts.

Chapter four covers Harry Overstreet's retirement from the College of the City of New York in 1939 and Harry and Bonaro's decision to devote full-time to their work in adult education. It covers the World War II years, their work in civil rights and their recognition of the importance of adult education in providing adult leadership for the nation. It also shows the beginning of their working as a team rather than individually..

Chapter five presented the growing popularity of the Overstreets as team workers in adult education, particularly in the area of community consultants and in the area of parent education.

Chapter six covers the research and writing of The Mature Mind, the concept it expounds, and the reception it received.

Chapter seven covers the 1950s and 1960s during which the Overstreets were attacked by both the far left and the far right. It deals with the way in which they handled the situations they faced and the research and writing they did to combat the attacks. Their lecture and workshop schedules did not decrease and yet they traveled overseas to do extensive research on communism and wrote several best selling books on the subject.

The final chapter draw reviews the Overstreets' efforts and contributions and draws conclusions about the Overstreets' work and the impact of their contributions in their chosen field of endeavor – adult education.

NOTES

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- ⁴ Harry A. Overstreet, *Influencing Human Behavior* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1925) 196-199.
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- ²⁷ Moreland and Goldenstein, 160.
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- ²⁹ Ibid, 164.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 164.
- ³¹ Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education, ed. Peter Jarvis (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 94
- ³² Ibid., 83.
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- ³⁴ Ibid., 185.
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- ⁵³ Ibid., xv.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 265.
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⁵⁸ Ibid., 193.

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⁶¹ Ibid, 16.

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⁶³ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 139.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Malcolm Knowles in the Foreword to Stewart's, Adult Learning in America, xi.