Tending the Garden of Learning: Lifelong Learning as Core Library Value

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Abstract

Lifelong Learning is enshrined in the professional practice of librarians through the American Library Association's "Core Values of Librarianship" (2004). As a Core Value, the term is extremely vague. What do we mean by lifelong learning, and why does the term have such a powerful hold on the imaginations of educators? This paper works to understand the term by looking at one of the earliest conflicts in American educational history and philosophy: the choice between student-centered schools and employment-centered schools. During the first decades of the twentieth century, America was struggling to define its national core values. Educational theory was seen as a key way to articulate and pass on these values. One pedagogical approach involved developing schools to educate individuals to become thinking and informed citizens; another administrative approach involved creating schools as vocational institutions to educate individuals to become skilled employees. After a brief debate, employment-centered schools emerged as the clear winner. Since that time American schools have been viewed almost exclusively through a vocational lens. The implications of this decision for libraries, schools, and learning are explored.

Lifelong Learning is enshrined in the professional consciousness of librarians through the American Library Association's (ALA) "Core Values of Librarianship" (2004). According to this statement, the "ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts

to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all" (n.p.). Recently, the place of Lifelong Learning as a Core Value has been questioned by Rick Anderson (2013), who asks whether it can be a Core Value of librarianship as long as libraries "spend scarce resources on recreational resources that provide little if any educational value" (n.p.). In response Victoria Collie (2013) defends Lifelong Learning as a Core Value, noting that "the point is for patrons to learn how to find information, enjoy the process, and seek to know more" (n.p.). This debate hinges on what we mean by the terms *core value* and *lifelong learning*. Should Core Values fundamentally guide all decisions made by libraries, or are they more like guidelines or talking points? When the values conflict, as they might in professional practice, how should we prioritize competing values? And what about lifelong learning? What does it mean in this context? How ambitious is our mandate to support it? Are we teaching people to find information and enjoy the process (a kind of recreational learning), or are we involved in a larger, more ambitious pursuit to help people grow and learn throughout their lives? While Lifelong Learning is enshrined in the list of Core Values, these kinds of crucial questions are left to be resolved in the day-to-day professional practices of librarians.

The introduction to the "Core Values of Librarianship" on ALA's website notes that the "these policies have been carefully thought out, articulated, debated, and approved by the ALA Council. They are interpreted, revised or expanded when necessary. Over time, the values embodied in these policies have been embraced by the majority of librarians as the foundations of their practice" (2004, n.p.). It useful, however, to note that from the beginning, the selection and definition of these Core Values caused significant controversy within ALA's leadership. As the initial draft of the statement was taking shape, Mark Rosenzweig (2000) was especially vocal in his criticism, arguing that the document abandoned many of the traditional values of librarianship, especially those values related to social responsibility, social justice, and service to democracy. In a long thread archived on the *Library Juice* website, he blasts the statement for abandoning those values:

> No mention is made of social responsibility as a value or even of the social role of librarianship in promoting democracy, community and a pluralistic culture. There is no recognition of the need to positively increase access to different viewpoints. From our [social responsibility] viewpoint, that completely negates the significance of expanding collections to include other voices, the alternative press, etc. There isn't even an endorsement of intellectual freedom and concrete opposition to censorship! This is HIGHLY disturbing to me from a social responsibilities perspective. On other than social responsibilities grounds, it does not recognize our commitment to the promotion of scholarship,

> research, inquiry, discovery and to the promotion of a "learning society" as it was once called. (n.p.)

Rosenzweig's criticism of the Core Values statement is sweeping and largely philosophical (which seems appropriate in discussing core values), and centers on social responsibility and the failure of ALA's leadership to take a strong position in defense of what he considers a historically central library value.

Lifelong learning clearly serves a major purpose in our rhetoric about libraries, and indeed about how we should live our lives. But what exactly does it signify? And why has something so vague and relatively obvious taken such a powerful hold on our imaginations as a key to contemporary educational (library) practice? Why this term and why now? The Greek philosophers spoke of the "unexamined life," apparently to encourage lifelong learning as a key to living a reflective, meaningful life. Renaissance humanism was founded on the notion of lifelong learning, and from the Enlightenment onward, learning and thinking have been equated with citizenship and the very notion of being human. When Descartes said "I think, therefore I am," he essentially linked thinking with human existence. If we take the term literally, it follows that we have very little choice about whether to continue to learn. Life continues to present us with challenging situations. We respond and adapt, and as we go we see what works and what does not. As long as we are alive, we have no choice but to keep learning. Thus lifelong learning is in this sense a truism. We must mean more than that when we raise the concept to the level of a Core Value of a major world institution.

In 1941 Henry Luce, the publisher of *Life* and *Time* magazines, originally coined the term "the American Century" in recognition that during the twentieth century, the United States came to set the agenda that continues to define progress and create institutions that have become the aspirational model for much of the rest of the world. The point is raised here not to valorize Americanism or American cultural values but rather to acknowledge the powerful force that American culture has exerted during the past century, for better or worse, in the shaping of a world culture, including the shaping of libraries. The discussion that follows will therefore focus on how American debates over lifelong learning shaped its libraries. While acknowledging that libraries are now a global presence, it seems fair to say that this institution and its values were forged within the American context. The following exploration will proceed under this assumption, that American notions of citizenship and learning form the foundation for the ALA's version of Lifelong Learning as a Core Value. While libraries have evolved into an international force, the roots of the world's libraries are in America's libraries.

Origins of Lifelong Learning in the Twentieth Century

American beliefs about learning as both formal and informal processes were formed through the twentieth century within the context of larger processes of building the nation and its culture. As institutions like schools and libraries were forming in the early twentieth century, a number of conflicting narratives about learning were taking shape in the national discourse, and these narratives shaped the evolution of the institutions. Identifying these narratives can help us clarify the values inherent in them as we try to understand what lifelong learning means to us today. Before any discussion of learning can happen, however, we must acknowledge that our discussions of education and learning are deeply infused with social and political tensions about what kind of nation and people we want to be. As John Dewey (1916, p. 65) said, "There is no such thing as an ability to see or hear or remember anything in general; there is only the ability to see or hear or remember something." We might extrapolate this to say that there is no such thing as learning *in general*, but only learning *something*. In political terms, education is about learning who we are, what we value, and what we hope to become. For those with a strong investment in society and its individuals, education is therefore a powerful means for imprinting a shared vision in the minds of citizens, especially young people. At the outset of the twentieth century, educators were painfully aware of the implications of the power of educational philosophy; they self-consciously strove to imagine the kind of education that citizens in an emerging democracy should have.

The emerging twentieth-century American citizen would need to be self-reliant and independent of mind, but he (or eventually she) would also need to learn to belong and live productively in American society. In the evolving social contract being forged throughout the twentieth century, all people are assumed to be free agents, and by extension are assumed to be able to take care of themselves both personally and economically. All people should have the freedom to decide how to live their lives and to be whatever they wish, but everyone must devote an appropriate part of life to finding a way to be economically self-sufficient. The more we learn about and understand the world and ourselves, the better we assume our lives will be, both economically and personally. This way of understanding the concept of *self* is predicated on a model of learning as an essentially autonomous activity; in the broadest sense the American citizen has to be able to take care of him- or herself. Each individual bears responsibility for negotiating a life with the external world and for learning from the experience. This concept of autonomous responsibility is central to American versions of self-reliance and learning, as both formal and informal activities.

Modern notions of learning took shape as America began to evolve

from a primarily rural nation to an urban one, with a corresponding evolution from an agricultural economy to a manufacturing one. This transition, reflected in a migration of rural people and immigrants into cities, spawned a series of social problems surrounding what it meant to be educated in an urban, industrial, and deeply capitalist nation like the one the United States was to become in the twentieth century. Education was largely conceptualized as a means for addressing the challenges presented by the future. To understand how the lifelong learning of "the American Century" developed, we need a vantage point, a perspective from which we can identify how learning enters the national conversation about identity and self, and a vantage point from which we can see lifelong learning going forward. The second decade of the twentieth century (1910–1920) can provide us with such a vantage point. As a disclaimer, a focus on this distant historical decade might imply that this paper will be a history of lifelong learning in America. This is not my approach. My goal is more rhetorical, aiming to locate specific narratives that have given shape to how we think about learning. This strategy is more closely aligned with discourse analysis than history.

As Stephen Kern notes in his introduction to *The Culture of Time and Space* (1983, p. 1), "From around 1880 to the outbreak of World War I, a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space. Technological innovations including the telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile and airplane established the material foundation for this reorientation." Indeed, by 1916 America was in rapid transformation, churning forward from its agrarian past toward its industrial and post-industrial twentieth-century future. World War I in Europe intensified America's focus on what it meant to be American in a land of immigrants. In 1915 the first commercial radio station in the United States took to the air—Pittsburgh's KDKA, providing the beginnings of the first truly national media culture. Within five years, by 1921 hundreds of thousands of listeners would tune in to hear the Jack Dempsey versus Georges Carpentier fight live on radio (Surdam, 2015, p. 184). The Model T Ford was first produced in 1906, and a decade later the automobile was reshaping travel and allowing for much more mobility, with myriad collateral social changes. Communities across the nation became increasingly connected by the rail lines constructed in the late nineteenth century, creating networks between dispersed and isolated farm towns and thereby forming the web of a national culture. Telegraphs provided instantaneous communication between distant points on the map. These new transportation and communications systems provided an infrastructure that enabled the massive movement of people (and ideas) to and from urban centers (from both rural America and overseas). F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is commonly recognized as a chronicle of the social upheavals of

this age, and we can productively read it as the story of the ways in which the telegraph, rural to urban migration, and the automobile had entered and were reshaping American life. It was an age of rapid change, mobility, and anxiety that created opportunities for those positioned to grasp them—a disrupted age, with many similarities to the one we inhabit now.

A number of cultural institutions were taking shape around this period to deal with the rapid changes and social stresses created by these developments. Undoubtedly, the most relevant to a discussion of libraries and lifelong learning was the work of Andrew Carnegie, who was in the final stages of his massive funding project to create the foundation for the institution of the public library. As the Carnegie Foundation boasts today: "One of his lifelong interests was the establishment of free public libraries to make available to everyone a means of self-education. There were only a few public libraries in the world when, in 1881, Carnegie began to promote his idea. He and the Carnegie Corporation subsequently spent over $56 million to build 2,509 libraries throughout the English-speaking world" (Columbia Universities Libraries, n.d.). Carnegie's death in 1918 brought a close to this thirty-five-year project. We have come to view Carnegie and other founders of the public library as individuals "dedicated to the continuing education of the common man," who believed that the library's "collections and services [should] be as broadly popular as possible" (George Ticknor, qtd. in Harris, 1975, p. 2), but Michael Harris calls this the "myth of public library origins," a myth "still widely accepted by public librarians whose liberal and idealistic commitment to the public library as a 'people's university' has never faltered from that day until now" (p. 2). Harris provides us with a counternarrative as an alternative to this myth.

He begins the story of the founding of the public library as institution in Boston with economic and intellectual elite Brahmins, who "were especially unhappy about the flood of ignorant and rough immigrants into [the] country," and so a committee of the Boston Public Library created an institution to "educate to restrain from vice, as much as to inculcate sentiments of virtue." In the end the basic values of the aristocratic class would "dictate the 'purpose' of the public library for more than a century" (p. 6). This "authoritarianism and elitism were reflected in [the] goals of the library," which existed to "educate the masses so that they would follow the 'best men' and not the demagogues . . . and to provide access to the best books for that elite minority who would someday become leaders of the political, intellectual, and moral affairs of the nation" (p. 8). In the last analysis, the public library as institution was founded to serve two aims: the first was to "Americanize" the mass of immigrants, to guide them to become civil and manageable; the second was to serve the reading needs of the elite class who would rule the masses (pp. 13, 17). The public library

originated largely as part of an effort to manage the potentially disruptive lower classes.

Public libraries are at the heart of what the ALA means when it speaks of a commitment to Lifelong Learning. The public library is fond of its title—"the people's university"—and of its role in being the people's resource, but the Carnegie Library movement, and indeed the creation of the public library as an institution, must be understood as part of a larger set of interests in lifelong learning during this era, each with different philosophies and beliefs about why people should be encouraged to continue learning throughout their lives. Harold Stubblefield (1981, p. 207) groups them together as similar initiatives that included the Settlement House movement, espousing social education; the idea of adult civic engagement as advocated by the Progressive movement; the Granges, with the "idea of informal educational agencies for adults"; and indeed Melvil Dewey's idea of "home education" as supported by libraries. Lifelong learning during this period became part of a much larger project to develop social engagement and commitment to individual growth through learning. All these initiatives can be grouped together under the term *progressive*. Taken literally, progressive philosophies and programs were designed to improve human life by embracing change and progress. Progressive programs addressed social problems, encouraging social progress by helping people become better citizens, lifting up the country one citizen at a time. The concepts of American formal education and lifelong learning must first be understood as having roots in this progressive movement.

Within this progressive movement there was tension between various kinds of learning. Practical learning for common people was designed to help them get jobs and live productive lives. One educational leader of the early twentieth century called this "learning for the 'rank and file'" (Labaree, 2011, p. 171). This kind of vocational learning might be contrasted with what came to be called "liberal learning," which was designed to help people become more fully developed as human beings participating in life and culture. In a less progressive (and increasingly obsolete) way, America also continued its quest to develop a form of high culture. With an eye on Europe, many cultured Americans yearned for a form of American art with great authors, painters, and poets, and a corresponding society that could nurture and appreciate them. This quest for an elite intelligentsia created another site of tension between learning to foster a high culture versus learning to form a baseline of citizen literacy. Advocates of high culture tended to look to the past and focused less on the idea of progress.

Indeed, learning in the early twentieth century clearly became an elastic concept that could be applied to a variety of goals—vocational, liberal, and/or cultural. Looked at in this way, *"learning* as a term (and *lifelong learning* especially) might be viewed as a *boundary object*," a phrase that can

have different meanings to various audiences and perhaps serve to help translate between communities (Star & Griesemer, 1989). *Lifelong learning* is a fuzzy, vague term that appeals to those who would manage the working classes, encouraging them to develop constructive leisure time, while also appealing to those who would encourage high-brow culture toward sophisticated intelligentsia, as well as to those who would encourage learning as a path to self-knowledge and wisdom. Lifelong learning speaks to many constituents and viewpoints, pulling them together in one way under a "big tent," but in doing so, disguising and submerging honest disagreements about definitions.

Chautauqua: Enacting American Culture

In this climate that recognized the need for education for lifelong learning, for a variety of reasons America began to experiment with uniquely American ways to meet those needs. One of the first widely successful experiments that emerged in the late nineteenth century was a grassroots phenomenon called "Chautauqua." Chautauqua arose more or less organically from a series of public meetings in upstate New York but does not seem to have started with the goal of creating lifelong learning as we might know it. Instead, it evolved to meet audiences' needs for entertainment and enlightenment on the "circuit" that evolved along with it. Chautauqua was a complex phenomenon—part traveling lecture circuit, part evangelical tent meeting, part vaudeville variety show—it blended genres of performance and education into something that Theodore Roosevelt supposedly called the "most American thing in America" (Canning, 2005, p. 238). Chautauqua deserves special attention because it was one of the earliest and most successful efforts to imagine Lifelong Learning in a way that could both create significant interest and develop a method toward meeting it. Chautauqua merged a number of early American traditions into something we would recognizable today as mass media. It gathered together lecturers (including college professors, ministers, and social activists), actors, and musicians in a nondenominational, apolitical version of popular "edutainment." Its most successful acts delivered their lectures thousands of times at the hundreds of Chautauqua venues that sprang up throughout the Midwest and spread eventually to every state in the union.

In the most comprehensive and ambitious study of American Chautauqua, Charlotte Canning (2005) situates the movement as a response to a growing crisis in what it meant to be an American. Chautauqua arose at a time of profound change driven by immigration and the shifting demographics of the nation. She notes that "between 1870 and 1910, 21 million people immigrated to the United States." Given that the population of the United States was just 40 million in 1870, "this represented an enormous increase in new citizens" (p. 36). Chautauqua therefore became a "platform" to "perform" a version of America; it enacted the diversity of

thought, belief, and values across the country and so constituted the earliest form of shared national culture. Lifelong learning within this context becomes something much more than vocational education or skills acquisition; learning becomes a key way in which we imagine a culture and a nation. For both immigrants and longtime residents, Chautauqua gave an education in what it meant to be American. Chautauqua did this not by being didactic but rather by performing an American pageant, one that viewers were invited to absorb, emulate, and debate.

As we can see from Chautauqua and the origins of the American public library, learning was very much on the minds of early twentieth-century Americans. It was seen as a way to "Americanize" the tremendous influx of immigrants flowing into the country and to mitigate the pressures of urbanization and changing demands of the workforce (Canning, 2005, p. 50). It was also seen as a way to direct leisure energies to manage change and shape American values. Carnegie's building of a public library system was part of this agenda, as was the opening up of higher education to what might be called "vocational" interests through the creation of land-grant schools to more directly connect higher education to the economic needs of the nation. These experiments were intended to build an educational infrastructure that would connect education to the "common man," but the reasons for doing so were complex, mixed, and sometimes conflicting.

SNEDDEN VERSUS DEWEY

Progressive educators of the early twentieth century could agree that America needed a more coherent educational system, and that learning needed to evolve to meet the needs of the changing American culture. However, the appropriate kind of response to these needs was far from clear. The choice posed to that era has come to be seen historically through the lens of a single published encounter between two progressive educators, Dewey and David Snedden, in 1915. Snedden, who served as the Commissioner of Education of Massachusetts, was a former public educator and school principal who worked his way up the educational ranks by advocating that schools develop practical curriculums to serve the needs of the working class. He saw himself as "progressive" in that he considered the future of America as a workplace and saw the need to train workers as the great challenge of progress. David Labaree (2011) refers to Snedden as an "administrative progressive." Administrative progressives were

> focused on making education socially useful for the emerging social conditions in twentieth- century America, which included a highly differentiated industrial economy and a large urban population stratified by class and ethnicity. . . . The watchwords for the administrative progressives were utility and social efficiency, and their central practical legacy for the workings of American schools included the structure of curriculum tracking in secondary schools, the tailoring of instruction to

the academic skills and social trajectories of individual students, the use of standardized testing for student placement, and the shift from purely academic studies to those of a more practical nature. (pp. 168–169)

The administrative progressives served to enshrine "the now-canonical utilitarian rationale for education, which meant seeing education as a means to solve major social problems, particularly to maintain social order and promote economic growth" (p. 169). We can certainly recognize powerful strains of contemporary thinking in the administrative-progressive tradition, with its emphasis on practicality, efficiency, and standardized testing and placement.

Labaree contrasts Snedden and other administrative progressives with the "pedagogical progressives," best represented by Dewey:

> Dewey and the pedagogical progressives focused primarily on developing a new process of teaching and learning in the classroom. They sought to ground learning in the needs and developmental capacities of the individual student; to organize this kind of child-centered instruction around the principle of stimulating the student's natural desire to learn about the world through an active engagement in discovery in the classroom; to focus on learning to learn rather than learning specific bodies of knowledge; to involve students in self-directed projects and activities instead of drilling them on content; and to develop a classroom process that modeled and promoted values of community, cooperation, justice and democracy. (p. 169)

The debate between administrative progressives and pedagogical progressives came to a head in the pointed exchange between Dewey and Snedden published in *New Republic* in 1915. Marcia Braundy (2004) describes the nature of this debate as a clash between "those looking for education to develop thinking, capable citizens, and those who were looking toward education to develop cogs for the wheels of industry" (n.p.). According to her, Dewey saw a commitment to education as "a foundational requirement for active participation for all citizens in a democratic society. . . . Snedden seemed to have been driven both by the needs of industry for workers and the potential for vocational education to emerge as its own industry, as a service to industrial development" (n.p.). These tensions, between Dewey's philosophy of liberal learning for a lifetime and Snedden's vocational education for the workplace, gave rise to a significant moment in American education as it relates to lifelong learning.

Indeed, we might see this moment in 1915 as what Emily Drabinski (2014) has described as a rhetorical "*kairos*"—a particular conceptualization of time, a way of seeing time as "embedded in a context, produced by social and political forces and demanding responsive and proportional action in order to effect change" (p. 481). Rather than conceiving of time as a series of undifferentiated events, *kairos* emphasizes that times are qualitatively different, with much more at stake at some moments than at

others. Much was at stake in 1915 when Dewey and Snedden debated the best way to organize schools and instruction in order to facilitate progress. In their disagreements we see the needs of commerce and industry for skilled workers (Snedden) pitted against the progressive notion of education as a vehicle for full citizenship and full human potential (Dewey). According to Arthur Wirth (1974, p. 169), "The choice then and now is whether schools are to become servants of technocratic efficiency needs, or whether they can act to help men humanize life under technology." On the side of industry and commerce were Snedden and his student and colleague Charles Prosser, who were called the "social efficiency philosophers" (p. 170). They espoused a vocational education that looked to industry to define its needs, then charged the educational system with meeting those needs. They were allied with "the conservative Social Darwinists" in thinking that "scientific-corporate capitalism was the cosmic instrument for progress, . . . [and] accepted the proposition of the manufacturers that what was good for business was good for America." Given this belief, "the task of education was to aid the economy to function as efficiently as possible—'to make each child a better socius,' a more fit member of a complex society" (p. 171).

Dewey vigorously opposed this version of vocation education, advocating instead for something that would come to be called "liberal education." In an oft-quoted passage, he wrote that

> the kind of vocational education in which I am interested in is not one which will "adapt" workers to the existing industrial regime; I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that. It seems to me that the business of all who would not be educational time-servers is to resist every move in this direction, and to strive for a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it. (Dewey, qtd. in Wirth, 1974, p. 176)

For Snedden and Prosser, industry (and its drive for efficiency) should drive progress, with education providing the kinds of skilled employees demanded by industry. Dewey, on the other hand, wanted to use education to reform industry, to make it more humane, more worker-centered, and a more constructive partner in creating a fully functioning democracy with citizens who could play their parts.

The debate about educational models relates fundamentally to desired outcomes. If the role of education is to liberalize the mind, free it from artificial constraints, and support personal growth toward fulfilling lives (the Dewey model), then education should be designed toward that end. Dewey regarded this as "democratic education"—a crucial way to produce a more democratic society. For the American experiment to succeed, Dewey believed that the American citizen should be educated to think for him- or herself as the fundamental agentive unit in the state. With this kind of citizen as the desired educational outcome, society and especially

education needed to nurture, support, and sustain this democratic citizen. Snedden imagined an America too, but one fueled by the economy and in constant need of retooled workers. For Snedden the organizing principle was not the citizen. It was the workforce. Snedden believed that education should provide the skills for employment, which in turn would allow the citizen the means to live a richer, fuller life. He further believed that education was a way to enable workers to learn new employment skills that would provide them with the lifelong ability to earn increased wages and thus afford an increasingly better life. The stakes involved boiled down to two arguments for progress and what to do with the increasingly urban citizens: educate them to be free and autonomous thinkers, or educate them to be skilled employees.

The consensus among historians is that "the debate over vocational education, which took place in the first twenty years of this century . . . was won by the social efficiency advocates" (Sherman, 1974, p. 212). Indeed, the twentieth century was dominated by increasingly sophisticated capitalist practices that involved making processes more efficient at turning products over more quickly to speed up profits. Labaree (2011) asks the most fundamental question, one that still resonates with American educators and that we must return to if we care about *kairos* and the role of rhetoric and argument in shaping democracy. He notes that "Dewey is arguably America's greatest philosopher, educational thinker, and public intellectual, whereas Snedden is now largely forgotten" (p. 163). The question then becomes: How could a formidable thinker like Dewey have lost a debate to a minor intellectual like Snedden? The consequences have been immeasurable. Contemporary American education is now dominated by the agenda set by Snedden and the social-efficiency philosophers, an agenda that features the placing of students in life-determining tracks, the measurement of student learning as outputs, the standardization of assessment, and the constant drive for more efficiency. Not only did Dewey lose this specific debate, his conception of education as a student-centered, pedagogical social and moral imperative has disappeared almost entirely from the educational stage. There is currently no recognizable mainstream narrative for liberal education as part of mass schooling and no narrative for adult leisure learning that would reflect Dewey's liberal democratic tradition.

Educational historians have seen the debate between Snedden and Dewey as a kairotic moment in American education. Snedden and his social-efficiency colleagues had their vision enshrined in the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which shaped educational policy going forward. This act allocated federal money for education, but specified that for school districts to accept it, education in the public schools should be vocational in nature. Prosser created "sixteen theorems" to guide such vocational education. Generally, these theorems specified that education should mir-

ror as much as possible the actual workplace conditions for which students were being prepared. These guides included: theorem 1—replicating the work environment; theorem 2—replicating the tools and machines of the job; theorem 3—replicating the habits of the work under training; theorem 7—that instructors should have specific experience in the jobs that they were training students to do; and theorem 9—that the market should dictate what was taught based on the available jobs (Camp & Hillison, 1984, p. 15). Throughout the theorems, students are seen as "in training" for specific jobs needed at the moment of their education, with efficiency in creating functioning workers dominating the pedagogy. William Camp and John Hillison (1984) raise a salient question about the efficiency movement and the sixteen theorems that underlie the philosophy of vocational education. In the emerging environment of the "information age," when "information literacy" forms a key part of lifelong learning, how much can we rely upon theorems that were created a hundred years ago in an earlier industrial era, which were themselves vigorously contested at the time of their creation?

Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning

As interest in information literacy began to emerge in the late 1980s, we see a sharpening of this question of vocational learning for the information age. Within the professional literature of librarianship, we see increased efforts to claim such learning (and teaching) as the domain for libraries. Maura Seale (2013) takes a long, critical look at the ALA's 1989 Presidential Committee on Information Literacy report, effectively locating a strong continuation of what we might recognize as administrative progressivism. The report claims that the information age creates a kind of national crisis. Seale quotes the report at length to capture its rhetorical focus on information literacy as essential to both the economy and jobs: "What is true today is often outdated tomorrow. A good job may be obsolete next year. To promote economic independence and quality of existence, there is a lifelong need for being informed and up-to-date" (ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy report, qtd. in Seale, 2013, pp. 46–47). Within the same paragraph, the report nods toward a more pedagogically progressive approach, suggesting that "within America's information society, there also exists the potential of addressing many long-standing social and economic inequities" (p. 47). Seale identifies the ideological approach in this document, and indeed of much library philosophy since then, as *neoliberal*, following David Harvey's (2005) use of the term.

Much of this bifurcated language is reproduced in a later ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) digest (1993) authored by Vicki Hancock, which defines information literacy and continues to claim it as part of the professional domain of librarians. Like the ALA's Presidential

Committee report, this library-oriented document also reflects the tension between early twentieth-century pedagogical progressivism and administrative progressivism (now matured into "neoliberal managerialism"). In a nod to the historical moment, the digest's introduction declares that "education systems and institutions must take seriously the challenges of the Information Age" (Hancock, 1993, p. 2). In describing the pedagogy of information literacy the document seems very student-centered and idealistic. Learning is described as "active" and "self-directed"; students pose questions and reflect on their learning; instructors in this process "have given up the view that teaching is telling, that learning is absorbing, and that knowledge is static. . . . They constantly make difficult choices about old curriculums . . . [and] they look beyond classrooms for resources that will enrich the learning environments" (p. 3). Hancock declares that information literacy instruction should "counteract the information dependency created by traditional schooling" (p. 4). Indeed, one sees throughout this language a kind of Deweyan focus on human growth and engaged citizenship; information literacy is clearly a progressive agenda.

However, in its closing section, the ERIC digest makes an overt rhetorical shift by discussing in separate paragraphs the benefits of information literacy for, respectively, "citizens" and "workers." For citizens, information literacy can lead to lengthened lifespans and increased leisure time by enabling people to "evaluate newscasts, advertisements, and political campaign speeches." Such citizens "are equipped to be lifelong learners because they know how to learn" (Hancock, 1993; p. 5). The benefits for workers are presented with much more urgency: the information-rich workplace is characterized by a "deluge of information [that] must be sorted, evaluated, and applied, and workers must be able to gather, synthesize, interpret and evaluate." Hancock laments the lack of employees with these skills, noting that their absence "currently costs business billions of dollars annually in low productivity, accidents, absenteeism, and poor product quality." The section ends with the resoundingly imperative statement: "Workers must be information literate" (p. 6).

Hancock defines *information literacy* in performance-based terms, what information literate people can *do* rather than who they *are* (a crucial though subtle managerial distinction). Information literacy is defined as the individual's ability to

- recognize a need for information;
- identify and locate appropriate information sources;
- know how to gain access to information contained in those sources;
- evaluate the quality of information obtained;
- organize the information; and
- use the information effectively. (1993, p. 2)

Looking for linkages between the view of information literacy and the empowered citizen becomes very difficult in this ERIC digest, but finding

how information literacy maps to the workplace proves quite easy. Indeed, the qualities of the information-literate person contribute to the needs of the workplace for those who can "gather, synthesize, interpret and evaluate" (Hancock, 1993, p. 6). Coming on the heels of this digest, the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (2000) directly echoes the definition of information literacy from Hancock's defined outcomes; indeed, this series of formative documents (and others) positioned information literacy from the earliest stages as an imperative economic challenge to be met by libraries and librarians. Taken together, they created an interconnected web of definitions and commitments that seem both obvious and very narrowly focused on economic development. We might do well to remember here that the very term *information literacy* was created by industry representative Paul Zurkowski during his time as president of the Information Industry Association to articulate precisely this need for information-literate employees in the workplace. The National Forum on Information Literacy website notes that "Zurkowski views information literacy skill development as a critical stepping stone in the creation of wealth, a key element in the blueprint for our national economic recovery" (n.d.).

As for the more Deweyan versions of information literacy and the way in which librarians might strive to meet the idealistic promise of information literacy in the public sphere, finding this kind of discussion in the ALA's literature proves much more difficult. Indeed, the official voice of both the ACRL and ALA has been by and large the voice of the progressive administrator, not the pedagogical progressive. At least in part a reaction against initiatives like the ALA's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy report, the ERIC digest on information literacy, and the ACRL's "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," we witnessed during the 2000s a rising interest in critical library practice, with several publications focused on issues of critical pedagogy and critical literacy connecting information literacy to more Deweyan ways of thinking about practices surrounding teaching and learning. These publications expressed growing discomfort with the ALA and ACRL leadership and the proliferation of outcomes metrics as an argument for library value. Many of these publications focus attention and criticism on the transactional and instrumental way that information literacy has been defined in official standards documents and public discourse, and they call for more focused attention to what has been called *critical information literacy* (see, for example, Accardi, Drabinski, & Kumbier, 2010; Elmborg, 2006; Holschuh-Simmons, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; Swanson, 2004). Many publications have followed and built on these early statements, and in the process, critical practice has become increasingly sophisticated in its rhetoric and more prominent in the discourse of academic librarianship.

As the tensions between administrative progressivism and pedagogical

progressivism have become more focused and clear in academic librari-anship over the past decade, one might ask how they relate to the larger question of Lifelong Learning as a library Core Value. Are these debates in academic libraries really about lifelong learning, or are they too intensely focused on the issues of the college library? Focused almost exclusively on a very small window of time in the lives of students and focused on aca-demic success more than lifelong human development, probably the most that academic libraries can claim is that they encourage habits of mind that future economic or cultural elites (college graduates) might adopt to remain lifelong learners, and to encourage these values in employees or communities. Perhaps they can also aim to influence the values of these cultural and economic elites (through service-learning or community-engagement pedagogies) so that social justice becomes a part of what they value going forward.

Lifelong Learning in Public Libraries

As noted earlier, the natural home for a lifelong-learning agenda in librar-ies remains the public library. However, and perhaps for obvious reasons, the public library has lagged far behind in pursuing a pedagogically pro-gressive version of information literacy as a central part of its mission. Un-like libraries in schools and universities, public libraries have complex nar-ratives that harken back to their founding, as chronicled by Harris (1975). They still report to governing boards, which often represent the interests of the economic elites in their communities. Library budgets are allocated by library boards, which can dismiss directors over disagreements about the direction of the library. Unlike academic and school libraries, public libraries lack an institutional imperative to engage in teaching and learn-ing, even though this imperative is implicit in much of the rhetoric sur-rounding the "people's university." Rachel Hall (2010) has written persua-sively about the natural connections between public libraries and critical information literacy in libraries. She notes that the "ALA has struggled to define a coherent strategy for promoting information literacy," describing how the Public Library Association (PLA) devised a strategic plan in 2005 with the assistance of outside consultants: "Part of the strategy was to iden-tify a 10 to 30 year 'Big Audacious Goal,' and the PLA settled on: 'Make the library card the most valued card in every wallet.'" Hall bemoans the lack of audacity in the "Big Audacious Goal," positing instead that "perhaps a more visionary 'Big Audacious Goal' that could unite public libraries would be to 'Make the public library a central agent in empowering an informed and democratic society'" (p. 171).

She advocates that public libraries develop "problem-posing educa-tion" based on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), and argues "that information literacy is not a neutral skill that can be 'deposited' into library patrons" (Hall, 2010, p. 167). Therefore librarians

must take up this challenge as information literacy educators—to become partners with the members of their communities, pose problems, and act upon the world in order to change it. Problem-posing public libraries will actively seek out issues of concern within the community and create spaces for these conversations to happen. They will address controversial topics and ask challenging questions. These conversations can include library-sponsored events, panels, conferences, speakers, even blogs and wikis—any forum that will include community members in the exchange of ideas and give them the opportunity to pose questions and problems, too. (p. 167)

Can the public library realistically pursue this kind of agenda in support of lifelong learning? Will library administrators and their boards value or even allow such political "activism" on the part of their libraries? In contrast to the ongoing initiatives to use public libraries as engines for economic development and job training with a view to serving "customers," this kind of Deweyan/Freierean vision of lifelong learning seems daunting, complex, and inefficient for the majority of public libraries.

Indeed, most publicly funded institutions have now implemented a culture of ongoing continuous assessment that advances the connection between public institutions and business practices. In today's climate, where we are told that everything should be run "like a business," we now are subjected to economic-style audits of even the most uneconomic practices. "Audit culture" is a technique of modern administration, borrowed from the business sector to bring accountability to public institutions. As Cris Shore (2008) notes,

The official rationale for [audit culture] appears benign and incontestable: to improve efficiency and transparency and to make these institutions more accountable to the taxpayer and public (and no reasonable person could seriously challenge such commonsensical and progressive objectives). The problem, however, is that audit confuses "accountability" with "accountancy" so that "being answerable to the public" is recast in terms of measures of productivity, "economic efficiency" and delivering "value for money." (p. 281)

When such an approach is taken to educational institutions, what often results is "the transformation of the traditional liberal and Enlightenment idea of the university as a place of higher learning into the modern idea of the university as corporate enterprise whose primary concern is with market share, servicing the needs of commerce, maximizing economic return and investment, and gaining competitive advantage in the 'Global Knowledge Economy'" (p. 282). In this "audit culture" we see the legacy of the social-efficiency philosophers and their increasing control of the educational (and national) agenda for most of the past hundred years.

The assessments mandated by social efficiency are both time consuming and not so subtle in serving a specific philosophy—a philosophy we can easily identify as the legacy of progressive administration. Harris (1975)

describes the first efforts to assess the success of public libraries. Assessment was conducted to determine whether the introduction of public libraries reduced crime or unemployment. When it became obvious that no correlations could be drawn between social management and the public library, the library was deemed to be failing in its mission (p. 17). The moral of this story is simple: the power of assessment lies in defining outcomes, making them appear obvious and incontestable, and then auditing organizations and individuals to encourage their progress toward the outcomes. In today's culture of assessment, the general parameters of outcomes are rarely agreed on; instead, they are provided to us by progressive administrators who have predetermined those outcomes. The ACRL's "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" caused the resistance it did because of two related factors: first, its roots are in the founding documents that defined information literacy in workplace terminology (emphasizing job skills and efficiency) that Snedden would have endorsed; and second, the standards were early converted into assessment outcomes that forced everyone to adopt their underlying ideology of efficiency and workplace readiness. In this "double move" we have no space to debate what information literacy is or why it matters. That debate was apparently resolved in 1915.

If we posit that the core internal conflict within theories of learning remains the conflict between Deweyan liberal learning and Snedden's social efficiency, then we can see that nearly all educational outcomes being defined for us today are based on social efficiency, which has evolved into a more sophisticated philosophy, currently called neoliberalism. As Seale (2013) persuasively claims, "Dominant notions of information literacy reinforce and reproduce neoliberal ideology, which is invested in consolidating wealth and power within the upper class through the dispossession and oppression of non-elites. Neoliberalism is fundamentally antidemocratic and actively works against social justice" (p. 57). Neoliberalism as a concept began to crystalize during the last quarter of the twentieth century. As defined by its most notable theorist, Harvey (2005), neoliberalism involves removing the government from its traditional social roles and allowing the free market to solve all social problems. Seale (2013) has relentlessly examined the ways in which the library has abandoned its traditional values, including Lifelong Learning and Social Responsibility, in an effort to play the neoliberal game—a game that evolved more or less directly from progressive administration.

Assessment for outcomes derives from progressive administration in that it focuses our attention on short-term, measurable goals that resemble bottom-line accounting. When assessment becomes as pervasive as it has in our audit culture, how can we not help focusing our attention on those things that are easy to assess? To ask a more pointed question: How do we design an outcome for something as open-ended and diffuse as lifelong learning? A colleague of mine once facetiously asked whether we

should identify people on their death beds and ask them if they had kept on learning. Indeed, the problems with outcomes assessment are many: assessments that privilege the easily measured over the intangible; assessments designed to discipline and punish are disguised as assessments designed to facilitate improvement; and for our purposes most problematic, assessments that take a side in favor of social efficiency while pretending that such assessments are value-neutral or masking their agenda with feel-good phrases like "lifelong learning." Perhaps nothing in society right now is more threatening to Lifelong Learning as a library Core Value than the relentless insistence that everything we do must be designed as an outcome, and be measurable as such. In this kind of assessment regime, lifelong learning cannot be assessed, so its importance must by definition be diminished. Instead, we focus on short-term assessments of specific programs, specific instructional sessions, or specific classes with the naïve expectation that the longer term will take care of itself if we focus on these short-term assessments.

CONCLUSION

In tracing the story of Lifelong Learning as an ALA Core Value, what has emerged is a long history with a narrative, themes, and a central conflict. As American education struggled to find its direction through the twentieth century, we returned to the question of Americanism. What does it mean to be an American, especially when "American" becomes the defining quality of the twentieth century? And how should our educational systems support and develop that twentieth-century American character? Dewey and Snedden defined a fundamental choice. We could focus on human development and try to build Americanism into each person (the pedagogical approach, which is time-consuming though powerful), or we could develop an administrative apparatus that would manage people toward the needs of society, especially the needs of the economy (the administrative approach, which is efficient though superficial). This tension remains strong in the minds of some educators, but clearly the choice that America made in the early twentieth century—to make education the engine of the economy—has remained the consensus choice, both for America and the world. Throughout the twentieth century, the American economy and its corporate advocates have become increasingly good at organizing the nation's resources to serve its interests. This approach has not always served libraries well. Harris (1975) unmasked the reality behind the myth of the public library. Rosenzweig (2000) protested the framing of the ALA's Core Values for their lack of concern with social justice. Seale (2013, p. 57) declares that the neoliberal library is "fundamentally anti-democratic and actively works against social justice." A growing number of writers and thinkers in librarianship now ask whether the neoliberal agenda will be the death of libraries as we know them. The jury remains out on this question.

In thinking about the choices that America made in the early twentieth century, we can productively return to the idea of *kairos*—the pivotal moment in time where much is at stake, when speaking must persuade, when choices are made based on arguments articulated. In 1915 America's most renowned philosopher, Dewey, lost a high stakes debate with Snedden, whom Labaree (2011, p. 180) describes harshly as a "stock pedagogue-philistine . . . half-educated, anti-intellectual, and instinctively hostile to humanistic culture." With so much at stake, how could such a thing happen? As academics we place great value in arguments. We have been trained to believe that in the sphere of public opinion, the best argument will naturally prevail because reasonable people will agree to adopt the best opinion or view. Labaree contrasts Dewey's argument with Snedden's, noting that there are several reasons why Snedden's vision for American education proved more compelling than Dewey's. First, Snedden's "message of educational utility and social efficiency had great appeal to policymakers of the early twentieth century in a manner that was in line with their own top-down orientation and social location." Second, Snedden's "administrative progressives grounded their proposals on the authority of science" in ways that allowed for "measuring ability and classifying students"—an approach based on the belief that science to could be relied upon science to provide "credible answers to central emerging problems of modern life" (p. 181). They were able to counter Dewey's "romantic" pedagogical approach with one that was "data driven." Consequently, the utilitarian vision promoted by the administrative progressives was "easier to sell politically than a romantic one" (p. 181). While Dewey and his followers promoted "a richer understanding of the world, and making a more just American society, . . . [t]he [administrators] talked about fixing social problems and expanding the economy" (p. 181). Finally, Snedden and the progressive administrators had a powerful connection to the structure of schools. Public school administrators were "both receptive and empowered to serve as the troops on the ground in putting these reform ideas into educational practice," while Dewey and the pedagogical progressives "had to rely on individual teachers to adopt their vision and implement it one class at a time." When they tried to do this on their own, these teachers "found themselves trapped within an organizational and curricular structure of schooling that was shaped by the administrative progressive vision of social efficiency" (p. 181). In summarizing the choice put before American schools in this debate, we can see the origins of many of the forces at work in American institutions today: the push toward science-based research, the strengthening of an administrative class, and the use of data to define outcomes and measure standardized student achievement.

Seale (2013) has written eloquently about the ways in which librarians have become trapped in the discursive formation surrounding informa-

tion literacy. Assessment in particular seems to find a way to bring every-thing into its feedback loop. We can draw a straight line from the choice in the Dewey–Snedden debate and the challenges of our contemporary age: the choice between an idealistic Deweyan vision of lifelong learning as an empowering, citizen-centered pedagogical initiative, and a vision derived from Snedden's view of education as science based, standards compliant, and data driven. The output for Snedden was unquestionably the "skilled worker." This mantra has only intensified in the neoliberal educational agenda. Throughout our public discourse, education is funded primarily (if not exclusively) as a jobs program; even at the level of graduate educa-tion, students regularly use phrases like "return on investment" to express their concerns about educational value.

Labaree (2011) concludes his analysis of why Dewey lost as follows: "The ideas that shape history are those that history is ready for, the ones that resonate with the concerns of the time and help frame a response to those concerns" (p. 182). In describing how the debate between Dewey and Snedden played out in the twentieth century, Labaree notes that Dew-ey's vision of education as "child-centered, inquiry based, and personally engaging . . . is a *hothouse flower* trying to survive in the stony environment of public education. . . . It requires committed, creative, energetic and highly educated teachers who are willing to construct education to order for students in the classroom" (emphasis in original). On the other hand, Snedden's "vision of education—as a prudent investment in a socially ef-ficient future—is a weed. It will grow almost anywhere." Indeed, the "weed of social efficiency grows under difficult conditions, because its primary goal is to be useful in the narrowest sense of the term" (p. 185).

If we move to extrapolate the lessons of the Dewey–Snedden debate to the larger issues of lifelong learning in America in the twentieth century, we see that what was true of schools has become true of American society in general, and especially true of its public institutions like libraries. Life-long Learning is enshrined in the consciousness of librarians through the ALA's Core Values. However, bundled in this phrase are two concepts that exist in great and probably irresolvable tension: there is the "hothouse flower" of idealistic values, the vision of the "people's university," critical consciousness, and critical practice; and there is the "weed" of progressive administration, narrow and unambitious in terms of its impact on individ-uals but able to construct an inescapable domain of discourse that places all value within the context of economic development and the assessment of data-driven outcomes. We might say that these two strong themes in American education coexist in uneasy tension and need to be maintained in a kind of equilibrium that can easily become unhinged. To maintain balance we need to recognize the political and ideological agendas that motivate both themes, and we need to recognize what is at stake when one or the other dominates the discussion.

During the fifteen years since the enshrining of the ALA's Core Values, we have seen an increasingly muscular effort to drive librarianship and information literacy through a philosophy most closely aligned with Snedden and progressive administration—the philosophy of neoliberalism and its market-driven logic. We have also come to see a strong reaction to this form of management and an effort to bring pedagogical progressivism back into the professional discourse of libraries and library practice. Advocates of this approach have been articulating a counternarrative that has come to be called "critical practice." Lifelong Learning as an ALA Core Value means something different depending on whether we see it through the lens of administrative progressivism or progressive pedagogy. From the administrative point of view, lifelong learning is most easily translated into a task-driven, programmatic initiative that can be easily assessed and measured for short-term success. From the pedagogical point of view, lifelong learning is translated through great effort into the problem-posing, one-on-one exploration whose outcomes are fuzzy and may not be measurable for years to come. It might be naïve to suggest that libraries should defy the spirit of the age, denounce neoliberalism, and make a pure stand for social justice and democratic pedagogy. However, it seems equally unwise to embrace a neoliberal worldview that is openly hostile to almost everything that libraries profess to represent in their core values.

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