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The forgotten learner : an investigation into the involvement and participation of the older adult in public education.

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THE FORGOTTEN LEARNER: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
THE INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF THE
OLDER ADULT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented

by

JOSEPH MAURO

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THE FORGOTTEN LEARNER: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
THE INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF THE
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Approved as to style and content by:

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Atron Gentry, Chair

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Frank Fletcher, Member

_____
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I dedicate this work to my wife, Anita,

and to all those older adults

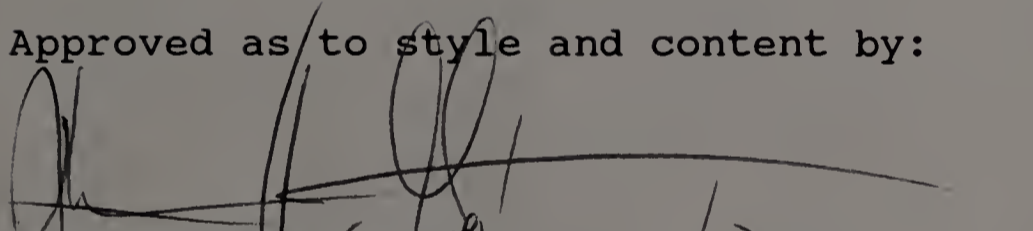who shared with me their spirit, their thoughts,

and, in particular, their humor.

ABSTRACT

THE FORGOTTEN LEARNER: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
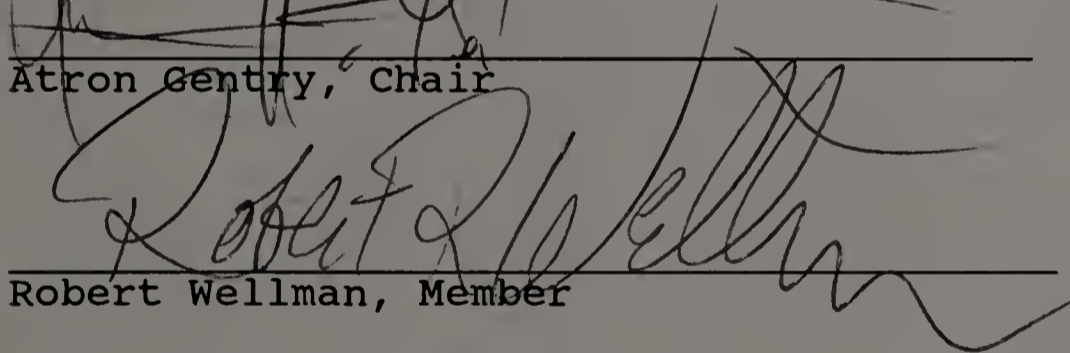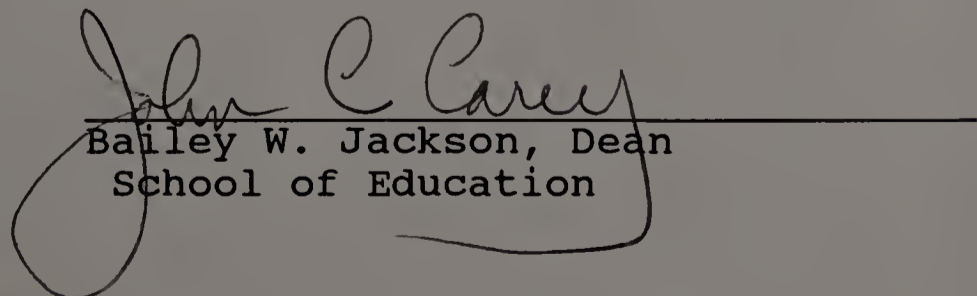THE INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF THE
OLDER ADULT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

SEPTEMBER 1994

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The purpose of this study was to determine if elders
are alienated toward public education and, if so, what is
the present impact of their alienation on the public
education system? Data obtained from the older adult
population of the town of Winthrop, Massachusetts was
analyzed. Three major objectives were incorporated into
the survey. The first objective was to measure older
adults' beliefs toward public education. The second
objective was to apply that measure in order to identify
patterns of beliefs, and any differentiations within
patterns, which might exist according to groups of older
adults. The third objective was to attempt to provide a
clearer understanding of older adult attitudes toward
public education, thereby allowing public educators the

opportunity to serve the needs of older adults in a more effective, expedient and expanded manner.

A sample of 120 older adults was surveyed using a 26 item instrument -- The Older Adult Participation in Public School Education Assessment Survey -- developed by the investigator. The initial section of this instrument gathered specific demographic data. This data provided independent variables which were utilized in the analysis of pertinent information. The second section of this instrument reflected older adults' attitudes toward public education.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, slightly more
than one-fifth of the current population is 55 years of
age or older. The proportion of older to younger aged
groups has increased steadily during this century. There
will be a dramatic increase in the population of older
adults in less than 15 years with the maturation of the
baby boom generation. By the year 2010 fully one-fourth
of the total population is expected to be 55 or older
(U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983).

As a result of this shift in population, we must
anticipate changes that will affect all aspects of
society.   As the older segment of the population grows,
it will be viewed as an increasingly important one.
Socially and politically there will be less emphasis on
youth and more interest in the needs and concerns of our
older adults.

The graying of America presents a unique set of
issues that no society has yet to come to terms with.
Throughout history the young have outnumbered the old.
The number of adults who supply the tax base and support
the very young and very old is decreasing, whereas the
proportion of older adults is increasing rapidly. This
raises issues that impact directly on the economic,
political and educational concerns and practices of our
society. Unfortunately, our traditional institutions and
practices are not yet organized to effectively deal with
this concern or effectively tap this growing but unused
resource. How our society responds to this trend will
greatly influence the quality of our lives. It is
crucial to set an agenda now that recognizes the
importance of this population and the human potential and
political power it embraces.

A fundamental requirement for such an agenda is
society's investment in enhancing the educational
achievement, learning experiences and involvement in
public education of all age groups. This goal would be
partially attained through various educational
opportunities and involvements across the life span,
instead of providing public education primarily in the
first quarter of one's lifetime. The future well-being
and quality of life for all will depend on the thinking

of all of our society relative to initiatives that promote lifelong public education.

This study proceeds from the assumption that the aging of American society has direct consequences for our public education system. It is the responsibility of public school administrators to learn more about the aging public and the best way to meet its needs. The attitudes of the adult population toward public education and older adult participation in public education must be examined. A model is needed to effectively bridge the gap between the older adult and public education.

Whether public education succeeds or fails will depend on whether it generates sufficient public understanding and support by the community it is intended to serve. The progress of public schools in serving the total community depends on the philosophical and financial support of the total community. This is a hard fact acknowledging obvious signs of dissatisfaction and lack of support accorded public education today.

One of the reasons for the rising criticism and declining support for public education is the wide gap between the public school and the community it serves. Too often the schools are not an integral part of the community; its professional administrators and staff are somewhat self-centered as to what is best for their

immediate clients -- young students. Successful

education must not leave out any segment of its

population. It must redefine the process of school

governance to include parents and the elderly. The gap

between educators, parents, elders and tax payers can

only be bridged by a planned two-way communication

program. Notifying and empowering the public is the

essence of school-community relations.

The failure of public school administrators to take

all segments of the community population into partnership

originates in the techniques of public education

administration. Much of the instruction in schools of

education has its origins in the scientific management

theories of Taylor and Weber. The traditional

organization theories of <u>Scientific Management</u> by Taylor

or <u>Administrative Management or Bureaucracy</u> by Weber have

tended to view the human organization as a "closed

system" (Cutlip, 1973). The tendency has led to a

disregard of differing organizational environments and

the nature of organizational dependency on environment.

It has led to an overconcentration on principles of

internal organizational functioning, with consequent

failure to develop and understand the processes of

feedback essential to survival. The closed system

approach treats human beings as machines or units,

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creates dependence on material and tangible rewards, and assumes that rational, scientific management can fully control the environment within the closed school system (Cutlip, 1973). The ultimate goal of any community should be to develop a democratic, educated, and participatory citizenry. Building communities of independent, thoughtful, and autonomous learners is one way to sustain the democratic process. Educational leaders play an important role in this process by realizing the educational opportunities available and then assisting learners of all ages to recognize the potential for participation. In doing so, adult learners make a direct contribution to the community by supporting the public welfare and by providing a different voice in a common tradition. Former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sydney Marland stated that if innovative educational programs are to succeed, "The first attitude we should change, I suggest, is our own. We must purge ourselves of academic snobbery." Shedding the all too common academic snobbery requires taking the public into partnership. Nothing less will insure its success.

All too slowly the closed system approach in public school administration is being displaced by the more realistic open system approach. Even though the public school system has properties of its own, it shares many

properties in common with all of society. Public school
administrators must aggressively seek and include
continuous input from the external audience, transforming
this input into some product form which improves the
system as well as society at large. This permits
community opinions to flow freely into the public school
system and public school administrators' opinions to flow
back into the community. A planned, constructive, and
continuous program of school-community relations is
consistent with the open systems theory of
administration. The open system theory emphasizes the
feedback function of obtaining adequate information about
changes in the environment. In no other way can the
public school programs and policies be kept adaptable
within the diverse views and needs of a public that the
schools were created to serve. Thoughtful consideration
of the "open" versus "closed" system of administration
gives additional importance to school-community
relations.

Entrapment in the closed system theory of
administration with its resulting insularity and
insensitivity to public opinion and need is not unique to
school personnel. All public institutions today -- city,
state, and federal governments; corporations; colleges;
churches; community agencies -- are under heavy assault

from articulate and sometimes angry sectors of the
public. Central to the growing public criticism is that
these institutions, including the public schools, are no
longer responsive to the needs of the public's policies.
Only by encouraging a free flow of idea and opinion input
from the community can all public institutions become
responsive to changing community needs and values.
Public schools are no exceptions.

Public school administrators and members of the
school board are responsible for revising school
curriculum to meet the goals of the community. Unless
they believe in the worth of involving all segments of
the community in establishing these goals, no commitment
to education by a total community will be achieved. Its
goals will not succeed. Public school administrators and
members of the school board, most of whom are generally
set in their ways, must adopt new goals and new
instructional methods which reflect the concerns of the
community.

Building internal support is a first step and
primarily the task of public school administrators. To
accomplish this they must be aided by a supporting
well-organized internal information system. The primary
goal of this community relations system must be to advise
and assist all administrators, all school board members

and all public school staff with consistent internal
information; with community opinion feedback; and with
counsel on ways of enlisting organizational and community
support. All those involved in the internal educational
structures need to serve as interpreters and salesmen for
the public school system. An intensive training program
in communications and in community relations for all
internally involved in the public schools may be a viable
vehicle to accomplish this goal. Formal attention to the
coordination of this effort has not been a high priority
of public education in the past. This must change.
Public education will require community involvement and
support to an unprecedented degree. This means
establishing effective and knowledgeable lines of
communication with the influential groups of the school
community power structure inside and outside the school
setting.

Another of the fundamental elements of the community
structure is the network of influences existing among
individuals and organizations involved in the community's
decision-making process. The superintendent of schools,
members of the school board, and all members of the
community at large must understand this network if they
are to act as intelligent observers and effective
communicators in the school system and school community.

Too much public relations practice today ignores the significance of the community power structure and its components. Research has shown that social systems of all types -- family, organization, and community -- have individuals who predominate in the decision-making of that system. These individuals may be referred to as leaders, influentials, or legitimatizers (Cutlip, 1973). They are the ones who can and do influence the changes to be made in the social system. They do this by exercising their social power. The manner in which power actors react to proposed changes often depends on (1) _what_ the proposal involves, (2) _when_ they were informed, (3) _how_ they were informed, and (4) _who_ informed them. Needless to say many members of any society (elders in particular) have earned, inherited or otherwise influentially gained a tremendous deal of social power. Information and its timing is the key, and it must be taken into full account in dealing with the community's educational power structure (Cutlip, 1973).

Dahl found that there are different power structures for different community issues and problems. The Yale political scientist writes:

> Any investigation that does not take into
> account the possibility that different elite
> groups have different scopes is suspect...there
> is no doubt that small groups of people make

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key decisions. It appears to be the case,
however, that the small group that runs urban
development is not the same small group that
runs public education, and neither is quite the
same as the two groups that run the two
political parties. (1958, p. 137)

Determination of and establishment of communication
with the power structures in the school community is a
matter of highest priority.

Form and Miller offer the following list of
community power components:

1)   The institutional power structure of
      the society, which refers to the
      relative distribution of power among
      societal institutions.

2)   The institutionalized power
      structures of the community, which
      refers to the relative distribution
      of power among local institutions.

3)   The community power complex, a power
      arrangement among temporary or
      permanent organizations, special-
      interest associations, and informal
      groups emerging in specific issues
      and projects.

4)   The top influentials, which refer to
      the persons reputed to be of most

influence and power in community
decision-making. Particular
decision-makers are drawn into
various systems of power relations
according to the community issues or
projects that arise.

5)   The key influentials, who are
      acknowledged leaders among the top
      influentials. (1960, p. 142)

While the public school administrator may not always
be able to identify each of these components and their
parts, he or she should at least have some general
understanding of how they function in the decision-making
process. Ideally, he or she would be working towards
building a power structure model of his community. In
this sense, the process of identifying influentials can
be considered as one step toward achieving a thorough
understanding of a community's power structure.

Needless to say, once the key publics in the
community have been determined and their leaders
identified, public school administrators should schedule
a series of background briefings to explain the goals and
objectives of public education and the ways in which the
school system will move to achieve them. Citizen
committees to advise and assist with development of the
education program and assist with the instruction once it

gets under way are a useful bridge to the community power structure. Hamlin states:

> The principal, useful purpose a citizen committee can serve is to share with a board of education, a school staff, and others in the development of policies a board will enact. If a committee functions well as a partner in policy development, it has an opportunity to serve four other purposes...These other purposes are to share in planning school programs, to make studies of community needs and the effects of schools on the community, to help in providing effective communication between school and community, and the obligation to support recommendations in which the board and committee have concurred. (1960, p.86)

Constructive use of citizen committees is an example of successfully facing the reality of the open system. As stated above, public school administrators have a responsibility to understand and respond to the key publics they serve. However, little research has been performed analyzing the patterns of participation by the older adult population in public education activities. In particular, understanding the degree to which this particular segment of the community has been alienated from participating in the public school system may be of significant consequence.

Sociological variables such as age, income and educational attainment have long been identified in research literature as important predictors of participation by older adults. It is equally important to focus on the attitudes of older adults toward themselves, their environment and active participation. Findings indicate that self-directed participation is correlated with a person's affirmation of self and its accomplishments, sense of satisfaction and pleasure, and a high level of enthusiasm and ego involvement in activities (Fisher, 1988). These findings also reinforce the need for a strong social dimension in order to integrate the effects of personal isolation or anomie. Thus understanding the nonparticipant as an expression of anomie, alienation or powerlessness is important.

There is much controversy among theorists and researchers about alienation. A current theme in literature questions whether alienation is a subjective state of the individual or whether it is an objective condition of societal processes with repercussions for the individual. Anomie and alienation are essentially synonymous terms, especially in social attitude research. Both terms refer to the subjective state of the individual.

Anomie is the social state of normalessness or
anarchy influenced by the relationship between social
control and its effect on individuals. Seeman pioneered
empirical research in the area of individual alienation.
In his 1976 review of empirical alienation studies he
stated that a majority of studies has been conducted
"within the social psychological framework, employing
subjective measure cast variously in terms of attitudes,
values, sentiment or expectancies..." (Seeman, 1976).
Seeman theorized that an alienated person has a sense of
low control over events (powerlessness), has a sense of
incomprehensibility of personal and social affairs
(meaninglessness), rejects commonly held values in the
society (cultural estrangement), and has a sense of
exclusion or rejection (social isolation) (Seeman,
1976).

Another analysis of alienation variables is one in
which individuals are treated as systems interacting with
the environment (Geyer and Schweitzer, 1976). Although
the systems model was not used by Seeman to build a
theoretical construct of alienation, his dimensions of
alienations do fit well into Geyer's model. For
meaninglessness, the failure is due to the system's
inability to process information. For normalessness, the
failure is due to the system's inability to adequately

process stimuli. For powerlessness, the failure is due to the system's inability to recognize behavior alternatives. For cultural estrangement, the failure is due to the system's consequential breakdown of interaction with the environment. Thus, the system/individual becomes isolated from the environment.

Unfortunately, the public system of education is at the same time a barrier in reducing the effects of alienation experienced by the system or the individual. Schools are typified by a set of social controls which, from the start, reinforce a separation of adolescents from adults and in particular our elders.

The social system in public school emphasizes a custodial function. Control is a pervasive aspect of the interaction of students with their teachers. The factors of age difference and control may initiate alienation. Also, the social organization of the school exists because of state laws, operates with social controls based on laws and has characteristic compulsory-based regulations. This hidden curriculum may negatively affect a reunion of older adults with the schools. To further complicate this alienation, there is a social expectation that, in order for an individual to be successful, that person must have at least earned a high school diploma. Therefore, those individuals who had

left school or did not earn a diploma are reluctant to involve themselves in public education. Many students remained with the hope that persistence in school would have great rewards at a future time. These students tolerated or adjusted to these social controls and graduated from high school still not realizing gratification and thus remain highly alienated. It certainly is time to examine the attitudes of our elder population in regard to reducing any acquired alienation and nonparticipation. Educators and community members must attempt to understand life as experienced by many older adults. Meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and powerlessness of this segment of the population must be addressed formally.

Purpose of the Study

It is imperative that public school administrators investigate alienation as it applies to all members and segments of a community. The purpose of this study is to determine if elders in a community are alienated toward public education, if some groups of elders are more alienated than others and if accessibility to public education and/or public education programs increases or decreases alienation by elders. This study will identify

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specific dynamics and demographics of an aging

population, older adults' participation in public

education, older adults' participation in lifelong

learning, and the future involvement of older adults in

and impact of older adults on the public education

system. The study will identify specific problems

relevant to a range of inhibitors which diminish or

prevent involvement and participation of the older adult

in public education. The study will propose solutions to

eliminate or at least diminish said alienation.

Significance of the Study

The study will have immediate impact on the

community at large as well as the researcher. A better

understanding of the perspectives of our older adults

will be of great importance. A study and insight into

these perspectives are certainly overdue, especially as

these perspectives relate to our shared concerns for

enhancing the educational achievement, learning

experiences and involvement in public education of all

age groups.

A summary of all data collected will be analyzed.

Implications of the study will be discussed in relation

to: the role of beliefs as motivational determinants in

older adults' involvement in public education; the role of opportunities as motivational determinants in older adults' involvement in public education; and the need to provide motivational opportunities to older adults in order to alter values and reduce alienation toward public education.

In the ultimate analysis, this study will provide a focused direction and effort to be undertaken by public educators out of respect for the causes and effects of older adults' alienation toward public education and to determine the best solutions to eliminate or at least diminish said alienation.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to certain limitations which need to be recognized from the outset. The survey items were written by the novice researcher and pilot tested for comprehension utilizing a sampling of older adults in one particular community. Subsequent researchers might consider revising the vocabulary in order to improve the comprehension of each specific question.

Also, any findings from the study will be capable of replication only with subjects demographically similar to those used in this sample. The socioeconomic and

background/experience mix of the subjects' participation
in this research must be recognized as a limitation. The
results of the study cannot be generalized to other
populations where the subjects are dissimilar with
respect to these variables.

Another limitation of note is that the respondents
were immediately made aware of the fact that the
interviewer was a public school administrator. The
reaction to this may have biased the responses in some
manner.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In the past twenty years an increasing amount of research has been conducted and literature written on attitudes toward the elderly. Society's attitudes toward the elderly and conversely the elderly's attitudes toward society are dramatically influencing public education. Stereotypic ideas and beliefs about the elderly may not only affect individual's behavior toward the relationship with older people, but may also influence social policies, the types of services available and the mental and physical health care the elderly receive. Grabowski and Mason in <u>Learning for Aging</u> relate that we would be naive if we maintained that the appreciation by the general public (i.e. the 90 per cent of the general public under age 65) of older persons as a significant resource will come about easily and soon.

>   Such an outcome is a long way off...But
> someday it will come for three very forceful
> reasons. First, older persons are a resource,
> a facet solidly rooted in reality. Second,
> older persons are currently in the process of

discovering themselves as a resource and when
this is fully accomplished, they will amply
demonstrate the validity of their discovery.
Third, society needs the contribution which
older persons are capable of making. Society
will make such a contribution possible when the
resources on the one hand, and the needs on the
other, are identified and matching of the two
are consummated. (1971, p. 127)

Murphy-Russell, Die and Walker (1986) in Changing

Attitudes Toward the Elderly: The Impact of Three

Methods of Attitude Change investigated attitudes of

alienation our society has toward the elderly. Berliner

(1993) in Mythology and the American System of Education

states that myths about American public schools are

undermining American people's confidence in the public

education system. Direct experience with the elderly was

considered the most effective means of attitude change.

Similarly, direct experience with the educational system

is the most effective means of attitude change.

Understanding the attitudes of various adult populations

was the emphasis of the Impact of Anomie and Life

Satisfaction on Adult Learners, a study by Fisher (1988).

Findings called for an understanding of nonparticipation

in education-related activities as an expression of

anomie, alienation or powerlessness. Seeman (1976) in

Empirical Alienation Studies: An Overview theorized that

alienated persons have a sense of lower control over events, have a sense of total incomprehensibility of personal and social affairs, reject commonly held values in the society and have a sense of separation. Geyer and Schweitzer (1976) in Theories of Alienation also present a systems model which builds a theoretical construct of alienation.

Psychosocial representations associate aging with social retirement and withdrawal from the system of production. The elderly themselves sometimes internalize these representations and no longer manage to maintain the feeling of their own values. Chene (1991) in Self-Esteem of the Elderly and Education uses psychological references to analyze how an aging person succeeds in maintaining self-esteem throughout changes and losses occurring in life. The quest for the self is linked to the quest for knowledge and feelings with regard to personal values are focused on in the context of relationships with peers and educators.

Goffman (1963) in his book Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity indicates that a stigma is defined as the situation of an individual who is disqualified from social acceptance. More specifically, Spicker (1984) in Stigma and Social Welfare refers to the stigma to adult illiteracy as an embarrassment and a loss

of dignity, resulting in alienation. A related study by Beder (1990) titled Reasons for Nonparticipation in Adult Basic Education demonstrates that adults who are eligible for adult literacy education, but who never participated, found that low perception of need was a main reason for nonparticipation. Illiterates and low literates are collectively blamed for causing social ills. By comparison, Quigley (1991) states in Exception and Reward: The History and Social Policy Development of the GED in the U.S. and Canada that the respect, acceptance and reward aspects of the General Educational Development Program introduce alternatives to the deficit model of adult literacy education. In modeling the GED learner-centered program and all its successes, all learners are viewed as responsible adults who have chosen to learn. In this learner-centered model, all learners are helped by educators and educational administrators to become critically aware of the social forces which have resulted in their literacy or low literacy. As a result, older learners are empowered to engage in all aspects of society and to cast off learned alienation and stigmatization. Self-confidence was also highlighted as a cause for alienation in older adults as determined by Mesirow, Darkenwald, and Knox (1975) in Last Gamble on Education. Seaman, Dutton and Ulmer (1972) in their book

The High School: Establishing a Successful GED Program
notes that older adults possess unrealistic anxieties and
feelings of inferiority relative to their specific
learning abilities.

Moments in the life of an elderly person may have
been missed because of inaction or disinterest at a
crucial time; indecision may have been a factor; other
lost opportunities may have been the result of a poor
choice or a wrong choice. Some elders may not have had a
choice at all. DeCosta (1990) in the article Head Start
--Later Start: Retrieving Education and Identity
provides an ethnographic study which was prompted in part
by the disruption of education caused by circumstances
beyond the control of the individual.

Recent demographic changes in marriage and family
increasingly compel older adults to seek further
education to ensure economic security. According the
Cornwall (1991) in an article Forgotten Students:
Women's Experience in a Proprietary School many women are
unable for financial and personal reasons to commit to
the time and effort for additional schooling. The study
Great Expectations: Hallmark of the Midlife Woman
Learner by Price (1991) examines older women's
participation and their motivations for lifelong learning
through the experience of affective involvement in the

process. Implications are made for public educators to respond to the midlife woman learner with appropriate attitudes, curricula, and teaching methods. Harrison (1991) states in <u>Older Women in Our Society: America's Silent, Invisible Majority</u>, that an expanded view of developmental potential contradicts the philosophical and cultural bias reflected in the traditional linear view of development (e.g. education, career, retirement) in favor of the cyclical life plan. This study suggests the need for an integration of the reproductive processes of learning in educational institutions with the learning associated with preparing persons to contribute to the productive processes of society. It is Lowy and O'Connor's (1986) assertion in the book <u>Why Education in the Later Years</u> that education must be viewed as a broader field of social welfare. Within this context education with, for and by people in their late years is examined and analyzed. They argue that through education the well-being of the older population is enhanced and the well being of society is also improved. Individual and societal values must be examined and understood. The authors feel that older adults can be a national resource economically, socially, culturally and spiritually, and that education can be a means to develop this resource as a part of the social welfare of our nation.

Of particular interest is a study by Novak and
Thacker (1991). This study, Satisfaction and Strain
Among Middle-Aged Women Who Return to School: Replication
and Extension of Findings in a Canadian Context,
identifies a series of variables that influence older
adults (women) who return to school. Analysis of survey
data shows that both satisfaction and strain in the
student role correlated significantly under a number of
demographic and support variables. Aronberg and
Robertson (1973) in The Older Individual as Learner note
that experimenters have examined important theoretical
problems concerning age differences in cognitive
performance. The following principles derived from these
studies have been used in the development of suitable
forms of learning programs which play an important part
in promoting employment opportunities for older adults.
Specifically the research indicates: performance is
benefitted by self pacing; the organization of
information into secondary memory improves learning for
the older individual (secondary memory is relatively
indirect and typically involves a search
process);learning by the older individual is especially
susceptible to interference; retrieval of information,
which includes the search of secondary memory, is
difficult for the adult learner; conditions which

maximize the likelihood that cues for coding information into secondary memory will be available at the time of retrieval should improve learning for the older person;conditions which reduce that likelihood, such as information overload, fast presentations, insufficient time to respond, or interference from other sources usually are deleterious to learning by the older individual.

Barriers which prevent older people from participating in activities regarding the education of the general public and the education of this population is worthy of analysis. Drawing on data derived from a national survey undertaken in 1978, particular variables such as age and former schooling are noted as key concerns in the participation of older people in education (Tobias, 1991). Beder and Valentine (1990) in Motivational Profiles of Adult Basic Education Students state that motivation is a most important factor. Parkyn (1973) in Towards a Conceptual Model of Lifelong Education writes that pragmatic, problem-oriented adults shy away from child-like treatment in formal school settings. Physical barriers such as locomotion and handicapped limitations are an equally important factor in the integration of the older population in public education.

Technological advances such as teleconferencing via satellite centers (Rose, 1988), long distance learning (Clark and Verdenis, 1989), interactive television (Guerilette 1988), and computer assisted instruction (McNeely, 1991) have proven to be viable alternatives in overcoming locomotion and handicapped limitations relative to education for the older adult learner. Recent research indicates that seven years of administrative support, staff development and planning time are required before teachers fully integrate technology into their repertoires (Sheingold and Hadley, 1990). Research results indicate that student performance in distance education depends heavily on the way that students are selected, courses are planned and how sessions at the remote sites are facilitated (Knott, 1993).

In the 1980s, reform efforts tried to improve students' performance by increasing course requirements. Reformers did not, however, examine the way that teaching and learning unfold. Today's reform efforts, in contrast, must strive to change the education system by fostering a different style of learning (David and Shields, 1991). Radically stated, in School's Out, Perleman (1992) in Edutrends suggests that school is a failed institution and doesn't need to exist.

Conversely, Thornburg (1992) states in _Edutrends_ that
learners are social creatures. They need to congregate
with their peers and communicate with others in person.
They need a physical place where they can do that. He
also suggests that we ought to view our entire lifetime
as providing opportunities for learning. Technologies
will emerge and become transportable empowering students
to take more proactive roles in the acquisition of
education. Thus, we are moving toward decentralizing
education from a school setting to the home, senior
citizen centers, libraries and other community centers.
This decentralizing will impact our older adult
population in its involvement and participation in public
education. Hopefully, this impact will prove to be a
positive one.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Sample

Data was collected from the elder population of the town of Winthrop, Massachusetts. A questionnaire had been designed and developed by the investigator. The proposed instrument was composed of two components. The initial section focused on the gathering of a variety of demographic information relating to the respondents being surveyed. The data provided independent variables which were utilized in the analysis of pertinent information. The second section of the questionnaire surveyed elders' attitudes toward public school education.

Design

The specific design of the instrument (survey) was simplistic in style. Questions focused on the present and past involvement and participation of the older adult

in public education and the attitudinal opinions of this population toward an expanded involvement and participation in public education. The answers were controlled through a predetermined multiple response structure, thereby reducing unnecessary ambiguity. Utilizing demographic data collected, a descriptive overview of the population studied was generated.

To minimize the development of hostile attitudes by any members of this population who may sense a preclassification, a cover letter and a verbal introduction by the investigator accompanied each individual study that indicated "this investigation is a survey of your past, present, and future involvement and participation in public education. This study is being conducted with the implicit objective of providing a clearer understanding of older adult attitudes toward public education, thereby allowing all public education institutions as well as private education institutions the opportunity to serve the needs of older adults in a more effective, expedient and expanded manner."

A pilot study was evaluated and the instrument proved to be viable. The total investigation was carried out. An appropriate incentive device was utilized to improve the rate of response. So that each respondent was identifiable and to insure the highest possible rate

of return, personal visits by the investigator were utilized.

Data Analysis

The study identified the needs of the older adult community. For the purpose of this study, the investigator had determined that the older adult population consists of those individuals 55 years of age and older. The rationale for this determination is based upon the fact that the likelihood of anyone in this age group having direct contact with public education (i.e. children currently in the public school system) is minimal. A sample of 120 older adults was surveyed using a 26 item instrument designed by the investigator -- THE OLDER ADULT PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT SURVEY.

A summary of the data collected has been reported and analyzed. All figures have been reported as raw figures as well as percentages in each table analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Collection of Data

Questionnaires were hand delivered by the
investigator to 60 males and 60 females over the age of
55. All respondents were residents of the town of
Winthrop, Massachusetts. To minimize the development of
hostile attitudes by any members of this population who
may sense a preclassification, a cover letter and a
verbal introduction by the investigator accompanied each
study. A pilot study was evaluated and the instrument
proved to be viable. The total investigation was carried
out. An appropriate incentive device was utilized to
improve the rate of response. So that each respondent
was identifiable with respect to sex and age and to
insure the highest possible rate of return, personal
visits by the investigator were utilized. The
investigator was available to clarify any concerns or
answer any questions relative to the questionnaire. The

questionnaires were directly submitted to the
investigator upon completion.

Presentation of Data and Tables

This study is an attempt to examine the attitudes of
our older population in regard to reducing any acquired
alienation and elected nonparticipation in our public
school system. It is also an attempt to understand
lifelong learning as experienced by older adults.

Table 1

Ages of Older Adults

AGE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
55 - 60	25
60 - 65	15
65 - 70	23
70 - 75	18
75 - 80	18
80 - 85	7
85 - 90	3
TOTAL	109

A total of 109 or 97% of the respondents chose to state their age. Of those who stated their age, the youngest was 55 years. The oldest respondent was 89 years of age. Of the 109 who gave their age, 63 or 57% were between the ages of 55 - 70 and 81 or 74% were between the ages of 55 - 75.

Table 2

Sex of Respondents

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
FEMALE	60
MALE	60
TOTAL	120

A total of 120 or 100% of the respondents stated their sex. An equal number of respondents was chosen by the investigator to participate in the survey.

Results have confirmed that there exists a range of feelings of alienation among older adults in the community studied. The demographic results have not permitted identification of specific subgroups of older adults who are more alienated than others. The variables

of age and sex were both found to have no significance on the degree of alienation. Survey questions identified alienation variables in the following categories:

Category 1 - Illiteracy/ Low Literacy

Table 3

Potential of Enrollment
in Reading and/or Writing Programs

_____

_____

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, WOULD ENROLL	75
NO, WOULD NOT ENROLL	25
UNDECIDED	17
--	
TOTAL 117	

_____

_____

Question 24 asked if the older adult would enroll in a continuing education program that is designed to improve his or her reading and/or writing skills. A total of 117 or 97% responded to the question. Of the 117 who responded, 75 or 64% answered in the affirmative, 25 or 21% answered in the negative, and 17 or 15% were undecided.

The subgroups containing non-readers and those without high school diplomas presented themselves as having a significantly higher degree of alienation. Further quantitative research should be directed to testing each of the last two variables in order to determine their specific effects on alienation. In general, immediate direct assistance to the older adult in the areas of reading and writing are most important. The stigma of adult illiteracy and low literacy is a prime reason of alienation for some older adults. As defined by Goffman (1963), a stigma is "the situation of an individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance." Stigmas are marked by attitudes which may be physical, moral and sociological. As Spicker (1984) notes, "stigma has been identified with loss of dignity, ill-treatment, deterrence, the denial of citizenship, shame, embarrassment, disadvantage, an imputation of failure or inadequacy, the reluctance to claim benefits, labelling, and feelings of inferiority." All of these conditions connote alienation.

Unfortunately, our public schools stand out as a reminder to these illiterate and low literate adults that they have been stereotyped as being socially and educationally deficient. It became evident during the interviewing process that some of the interviewees and

potential interviewees attempted to conceal their
illiteracy or low literacy. It would seem obvious that
these adults would shy away from direct contact with
educators and schools.

When faced with a discreditable stigma, Goffman
(1963) claims that the stigmatized illiterate and low
literate adult would respond with two basic defensive
strategies -- passing and covering. In passing,
illiterates and low literates attempt to conceal their
illiteracy and low literacy at all costs. Those who
engage in passing face the continuous anxiety of
disclosure. The psychological toll can be devastating to
the individual on a personal level as well as his or her
relationship to the community. In covering, illiterates
and low literates confide in a small circle of intimates
who provide assistance with daily activities which
require literacy. More importantly, low literates may
claim that literacy is simply not important or not
needed. A study of Iowa adults who were eligible for
adult literacy education, but who had never participated,
found that low perception of need was the major reason
for nonparticipation (Beder, 1989).

In respect to the stigmatization of illiterates or
low literates, it has become acceptable to depict
illiterates or low literates as being economically

unproductive and incapable of making informed decisions. Illiterates and low literates are collectively blamed for causing social ills, crime as well as our nation's inability to compete in a world economy (Beder, 1990). This suggests that the most pervasive component of illiteracy and low literacy is the powerlessness, meaninglessness, low self-concept and low self-esteem associated with this deficiency.

It should be noted that there are many illiterate and low literate adults who display a wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as a fully developed language system. However, the stigma society attaches to illiteracy and low literacy causes this population to be alienated from society in general and alienated from public schools in particular. Even the 1988 Adult Education Act reflects the stigma in its opening statement of purpose, "It is the purpose of this title to assist the States to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack the level of literacy skills requisite to effective citizenship and productive employment" (Public Law 100-292, Section 311).

In the techniques of passing and covering, the literate and low literate older adult conceals his or her illiteracy and not only defers participation in literacy education but also defers participation in the public

education process. Ironically, this stigma causes

illiterates and low literates to remain alienated from

the very resource that might successfully serve them, not

only in the context of reading and writing skills, but in

the realms of lifelong learning and association with

public education.

The stigma of illiteracy and low literacy increases

the meaninglessness, social isolation and powerlessness

of this segment of our adult population. As a result,

this stigma is a form of social control which perpetuates

alienation. This is further exacerbated by the fact that

the traditional social system in public education

emphasizes a sense of custodial care. Control is, again,

a pervasive aspect of interaction between student and

teacher. No student or potential student wants to

subject themselves to an environment which does not

foster a sense of self worth. Educators must be viewed as

facilitators not controllers.

Primarily, educators must become sensitive to these

issues. Furthermore, educators must encourage society to

view illiteracy and low literacy, not as an individual

failure, but as a social challenge. Our professional

methodologies must undergo a process of reform which will

ensure that this population will be met with utmost

respect. We must draw attention to the inhibiting

factors of adult illiteracy and low literacy without stigmatizing them.

Category 2 -- Earned High School Diploma

Table 4

Potential of Enrollment in High School Diploma
or High School Diploma Equivalency Program

_____

_____

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

YES, WOULD ENROLL	8
NO, WOULD NOT ENROLL	2
UNDECIDED	2

TOTAL   12

_____

_____

Question 23 asked if the older adult would enroll in an educational program which would enable one to attain a high school diploma or high school diploma equivalency. A total of 12 or 10% responded to the question. Of the 12 who responded, 8 or 66% answered the question in the affirmative, 2 or 17% answered in the negative and 2 or 17% were undecided.

As indicated, subgroups containing nonreaders and those without high school diplomas presented themselves

as having a high degree of alienation to public schools. The stigma of not earning a high school diploma is another prime reason of alienation for these older adults.

This is again an unfortunate circumstance. Our public schools stand out as a reminder to those nondiploma earning adults that they have been stereotyped as being socially and educationally deficient. Ironically, this stigma causes nondiploma earning adults to remain alienated from the very resource that might successfully serve them, not only in the context of earning a diploma, but in terms of lifelong learning and a positive lifelong association with public education. Similarly, it became evident during the interviewing process that some of the interviewees and potential interviewees attempted to conceal the fact that they had not earned a high school diploma. Similar to the condition of illiterate and low literate adults, it would seem obvious that these adults would shy away from direct contact with educators and schools.

The research indicates that distinct degrees of alienation toward public education and public schools surround both the issues of illiteracy/low literacy and nondiploma earning adults. A comparison of each of these variables is worthy of discussion.

Quigley states in the study titled <u>Exception and</u>
<u>Reward: The History and Social Policy Development of the</u>
<u>GED in the U.S. and Canada</u>:

The history of adult literacy education
from Britain to North America reveals episodic
crusades and campaigns to impart the knowledge
expected to help solve such social problems.
In sociological terms, the policy debate has
historically centered on human capital and
cultural investment questions, such as the
extent to which society should invest in
illiterate adults, what they "need" to be
taught, and the extent to which illiterates are
even capable of learning. These have been
critical questions through time because an
investment in illiterates has always expected a
"payback" to society: an increased tax base,
fewer social program expenses, improved
employment figures, more patriotic citizens, or
better Christians (Beder, 1990, Carlson, 1970;
Graff, 1979).

Illiterate adults have historically been
seen by federal governments as both a burden
and an implicit threat to society. As early as
1871, in a <u>Special Report of the Commissioner</u>
<u>of Education</u> to the President of the U.S.
Senate (Leigh, 1871), adult illiteracy was
described as an "immense evil" threatening the
very moral fabric of the new Republic.
Entering the 20th century, literacy as social
policy was given a major role at the federal
and state levels in the Americanization

movement whereby, as the YMCA put it, "Unless we Americanize them they will foreignize us" (cited in Carlson, 1970, p. 449). During the 1930s, literacy and vocational training became the central educational purpose of the Civilian Conservation Corps camps for the (male) unemployed. Literacy was used as a vehicle for ensuring patriotism in the 1940s when literacy education was looked upon as a social policy means for warding off Nazism (Cook, 1977; Studebaker, 1940). Literacy as social policy has been used for manpower mobilization since the 1950s and has gained a particular focus on improving the economy and addressing unemployment since the early 1970s. Heading into the 1990s, literacy education promises to recall its earlier 1920s and 30s Americanization history as it is being called upon to preparing America for its "demographic destiny" (Chisman, 1989, p. 3); namely, the "threat" of growing minority groups.

Literacy social policy has historically been implemented in a politically charged milieu, often in the midst of assertions that the nation is on the brink of social, moral, economic -- or of late -- demographic crisis. It is also typical that the illiterate adults themselves are called to act -- speaking "about" them but, as the history clearly shows, never "with" them. The recent <u>Jump Start</u> report, for example, warns the Bush Cabinet that illiterate adults have responsibilities far beyond reading and writing: "Without their best efforts...there is little hope for the

economic and social future of this country"
(Chisman, 1989, p. 3). As Harman (1977) has
noted, "An acceptance of the recipient's world
view as legitimate and a sensitivity to the
dynamics of nonliterate cultures have eluded
literacy programming without its unhappy
history" (p. 446).

By contrast, the less politically volatile
history of the GED (Tests of General
Educational Development) founded on the
governmental/public belief that certain adults
have acquired knowledge valued by the dominant
culture, with or without schooling. For the
GED, certain adults are understood to be "the
same but different" -- exceptions, victims of
circumstance, solid citizens who possess status
knowledge. Unlike literacy programs of
"rescue," the GED has been a program of reward.
Although the two student target groups and
programs in fact have much more in common than
their respective social policy histories would
suggest, the two educational programs differ on
social policy in the value placed on normative
knowledge and the implicit value of the
learner. While GED candidates are seen as
needing a chance to demonstrate that they
possess valued knowledge, illiterates are
typically seen as processing little or real
value to society. In 1871, illiteracy was "our
weakness and our disgrace" (Leigh, 1871, p.
802); over a century later, illiteracy is a
"national shame and a national waste" (Chisman,
1989, p. 35). By contrast, through history,
the GED has enabled adults to demonstrate that

they have acquired "a level of learning comparable to that of high school graduates" (GEDTS, 1988, Preface). History often reveals that the perception becomes reality. ...Social policy guiding the GED saw students very differently based on the value of their acquired knowledge.

The blurring of reality and perception, as suggested here, indicates that the closer one is to possessing measurable normative knowledge, the closer one is to fuller acceptance in the dominant culture. Due to their very different beginnings and the nature of their ongoing social policy formation and administration, literacy as social policy remains a program of social policy rescue and intervention; the GED, by contrast, remains a program of social reward (pp. 31-33).

The GED testing program has provided high school equivalency to over ten million adults in the United States and Canada since its inception in 1942. Today, it constitutes approximately 18.7% of all high school diplomas awarded in the U.S. annually. Furthermore, it has proven to be a viable vehicle which diminishes alienation of older adults toward public education and offers a support system to further enhance continued active involvement. The respect, acceptance and reward aspects of the GED program are basic to any alternatives to the deficit model of adult literacy education. In

modeling the GED learner-centered program and all its successes, all learners will be viewed as responsible adults who have chosen to learn in order to meet personal and societal needs.

As in the GED model, the learner's prior experiences are respected and utilized as a base from which instruction is drawn. In mirroring this learner-centered model, potential lifelong learners, helped by educators, would become critically aware of the social forces which have resulted in their illiteracy or low literacy. As a result, this segment of adults would be empowered to cast off learned alienation and stigmatization and would be empowered to engage in all aspects of society.

Category 3 -- Image of the Public Schools

Table 5

Satisfaction with the Present Image
of Public Schools

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
SATISFIED	22
NOT SATISFIED	80
UNDECIDED	16
TOTAL	118

Question 7 asked whether the older adult was
satisfied with the present image of the public schools.
A total of 118 or 98% respondents answered the question.
Of the 118 who responded, 22 or 18% answered in the
affirmative, 80 or 67% responded in the negative, and 16
or 13% were undecided.

Table 6

Satisfaction with One's
Public Grade School Education

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

SATISFIED	83
NOT SATISFIED	16
UNDECIDED	6

TOTAL   105

Question 8 asked whether the older adult was
satisfied with his or her public grade school education.
A total of 105 or 88% responded to the question. Of the
105 who responded, 83 or 79% answered in the affirmative,
16 or 15% responded in the negative, and 6 or 6% were
undecided. The relatively high number of no responses
(15 or 13%) were a result of those who were enrolled in
private grade schools.

Table 7

Satisfaction with Total Formal Education

_____

_____

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
SATISFIED	104
MODERATELY SATISFIED	12
DISSATISFIED	4
TOTAL	120

_____

_____

Question 2 asked whether the older adult was satisfied with his or her formal education. A total of 120 or 100% of the respondents answered the question. Of the 120, 104 or 87% answered that they were satisfied, 12 or 10% were moderately satisfied, and 4 or 3% were dissatisfied with their formal education.

Table 8

Contact with Public Education

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
OFTEN	40
SELDOM	64
NEVER	16
TOTAL	120

Question 5 asked the older adult to state the frequency of contact with the public school system. A total of 120 or 100% of the respondents answered the question. Of the 120, 40 or 33% answered that they were often in contact with the public schools, 64 or 53% indicated that they were seldom in contact, and 16 or 14% responded that they were never in contact with the public school system.

Table 9

Future Involvement in Public Schools

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, WOULD LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED	40
NO, WOULD NOT LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED	56
UNDECIDED	24
TOTAL	120

Question 6 asked whether the older adult would like to more involved with the public schools. All 120 or 100% of the respondents answered the question. Of the 120, 40 or 33% answered in the affirmative, 56 or 47% responded in the negative, and 16 or 14% were undecided.

Table 10

Past Participation in Continuing Education

53

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, HAVE PARTICIPATED	56
NO, HAVE NOT PARTICIPATED	64
TOTAL	120

Question 4 asked whether the older adult had
participated in a continuing education course sponsored
by a public school or community agency. All 120 or 100%
respondents answered the question. Of the 120
respondents, 56 or 47% stated that they had participated
and 64 or 53% stated that they had not participated in a
continuing education program. Most of the affirmative
responses were accompanied by statements of involvement
with community agencies, not public schools.

Table 11

Future Participation in Continuing Education

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE	32
NO, WOULD NOT LIKE TO PARTICIPATE	79
UNDECIDED	7
TOTAL	118

Question 18 asked whether the older adult would be interested in participating in continuing education in the future. A total of 118 or 98% of the older adults answered the question. Of the 118 who responded, 32 or 27% answered in the affirmative, 79 or 66% answered in the negative, and 7 or 5% were undecided.

Stigmatization, again, rears its ugly head when one considers these questions and their relationships. The public education system at large is stigmatized by criticism by many constituents. As a result, American people have lost confidence in public schools. This time it is our public education system, not the individual, who is being disqualified from full social acceptance. Passive alienation, addressed in Category 1, is now

augmented by reactive alienation by the older adult. It
is not a surprise that affiliation by the older adult
with a perceived discreditable second party (the public
education system) is at risk. Alienation created and
fueled by individual and group criticism is apparent.
Apathy and anomie on the part of our older adult
population directly results in nonparticipation and
alienation from the public school system.

It is unfortunate that misinformation and myths
about American public schools are misleading the majority
of our citizenry and undermining American people's
confidence in the public education system. For example,
"today's youth do not seem as smart as they used to be."
The fact is that today's students actually average 14
I.Q. points higher than their grandparents did and 7
points higher than their parents did.

Another example, "the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
has shown a marked decrease in mean score over the last
25 years indicating the failure of our schools and our
teachers to do their jobs." The fact is the decline has
been only 3.3% of the raw score total. This translates
to an average of 5 fewer items answered correctly over
this period of time (Berliner, 1993). Also, a much
greater number of students in the bottom 60% of their

graduating class have been increasingly taking the SATs since 1960 (Carson, Huelskamp, and Woodall, 1991).

Another example, "today's youth cannot think as well as they used to." The major gains in performance in intelligence tests have been primarily in the areas of general solving skills and the ability to handle abstract information of a decontextualized nature. In fact, in 1978, 90,000 high school students took the advanced placements for college credit. In 1990, 324,000 students took the test. This is an increase of 255%. Although the population taking the tests changed markedly over this 12 year period, the mean score dropped only .11 of a point. It is evident that public schools are continually producing increasingly larger numbers of very smart students (Berliner, 1993).

Still another example, "the performance of today's students on standardized achievement tests reveal gross inadequacies." The National Assessment of Educational Progress tests are given to national samples of 9-, 13- and 17-year-old students in the areas of mathematics, science, reading, writing, geography and computer skills. Summaries of these tests over the last 20 years indicate that our students are performing the same over time. In fact, it now takes a higher raw score to reach the 50th percentile than it did 20 years ago. The same trend is

found in the renorming of the California Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Test, the Metropolitan Achievement Test and the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (Linn, Graue and Sanders, 1990).

Furthermore, it is incredibly difficult to keep academic achievement constant or to improve it with increasing numbers of poor children, unhealthy children, children from dysfunctional families and children from dysfunctional neighborhoods. Yet the public school system of the United States actually has done remarkably well as it receives, instructs and nurtures all children representing every socioeconomic condition (National Commission on Children, 1991).

Another example, "our high schools, colleges and universities are not supplying us with enough mathematicians and scientists to maintain our competitiveness in world markets." The myth of the coming shortage of technically able workers has been debunked by many economists (Mishel and Texeira, 1991). It has been estimated that, if the entering workers had an average of only one-fourth of a grade level more education than those retiring from the labor force, all the needs of the future economy would be served. Also, when demand and supply are examined together, our present

economy is not able to absorb all the scientists and engineers that we produce. Given the reduction in military spending, the surplus is likely to be even more serious. Moreover, the National Science Foundation recently apologized to Congress for supplying it with phony data. The National Science Foundation admits that its predictions of shortages in supply were grossly inflated (Berliner, 1993).

Another myth, "American schools are too expensive. We spend more on education than any other country in the world, and we have little to show for it." The United States, according to UNESCO data, is tied with Canada and the Netherlands, and all three fall behind Sweden in the amount spent per pupil for K-12 education and higher education. What these data fail to specify is the comparatively higher amount of money spent by the United States on post secondary education. In 1988, the United States ranked ninth among 16 industrialized nations in pupil expenditures for grades K-12, spending 14% less than Germany, 30% less than Japan and 51% less than Switzerland. Thirteen of the industrialized nations spend a greater percentage of per-capita income in K-12 education than the United States. In order to meet the average percentage of per-capita income spent on education K-12 by the 15 other industrialized nations,

our commitment would be an additional $20 billion per year (Rasell and Mishel, 1990). Former President George Bush perpetuated the myth when he declared at the Education Summit of 1989 that the United States "lavishes unsurpassed resources on (our children's) schooling." What he should have said was that we are among the most cost-efficient nations in the world, with an amazingly high level of productivity for the comparatively low level of investment that our country makes in K-12 education (Berliner, 1993).

Still another, "the American public school system is a bureaucracy, top heavy in administrators and administrative costs." The fact is that with 14.5 employees for every one administrator education is leaner than most industries, for example the transportation industries (9.3 to 1), the food product industry (8.4 to 1), the construction industry (6.3 to 1), and the communications industry (4.7 to 1). If all supervisory personnel were eliminated and their salaries were redistributed to reduce class size, the size of the classes, nationwide would be reduced by one student (Robinson and Brandon, 1992).

There is no doubt that qualitatively and quantitatively these myths and rationales will be continuously questioned and debated. Any description of

how bad things are can be justified only if it is
accompanied by reliable data. It is the things that are
perceived to be wrong with our public schools, whether
real or imagined, that have directly led to the
alienation, apathy and anomie that are inherent among our
older population.

Public educators must support an educational
information network which reflects unbiased, objective
and worthwhile data. This information and networking
system must be the foundation from which all community
members acquire knowledge and make well founded decisions
relative to public education and the community at large.

Building internal support is a first step and
primarily the task of public school administrators. To
accomplish this they must be aided by a reliable,
well-organized internal information system. The primary
goal of this community relations system must be to advise
and assist all administrators, all school board members,
school councils, parents' groups, student associations
and all public school staff with consistent internal
information. Community opinion and feedback must be
solicited and utilized in enlisting organizational and
community support. All those involved in the internal
educational structures need to serve as interpreters and
salesmen for the public school system. An intensive

training program in communications and in community
relations for all internally involved in the public
schools may be a viable vehicle to accomplish this goal.
Formal attention to the coordination of this effort has
not been a high priority of public education in the past.
This must change. Public education will require both
internal and community involvement and support to an
unprecedented degree. This means establishing effective
and knowledgeable lines of communication with the
influential groups of the school community power
structure inside and outside the school setting.

Category 4 -- Self-Actualization

Table 12

Access to Continuing Education

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, SHOULD HAVE ACCESS	120
NO, SHOULD NOT HAVE ACCESS	0
TOTAL	120

Question 10 asked whether persons of all ages should have access to continuing education. A total of 120 or 100% responded. All 120 or 100% answered in the affirmative.

Table 13

Status of the Older Adult
as a Natural Resource and Contributor

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, ARE CONTRIBUTORS	120
NO, ARE NOT CONTRIBUTORS	0
TOTAL	120

Question 11 asked whether the older adult believes that he or she is a natural resource and contributor to society. A total of 120 or 100% responded. All 120 or 100% answered in the affirmative.

Table 14

Perceived Concern of Public School Administrators

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, THEY ARE CONCERNED	48
NO, THEY ARE NOT CONCERNED	56
UNDECIDED	10
TOTAL	114

Question 9 asked if the older adult believes that public school administrators are concerned about the education of older adults. A total of 114 or 95% of the respondents answered the question. Of the 144 who responded, 48 or 42% answered in the affirmative, 56 or 49% answered in the negative and 10 or 8% were undecided.

Table 15

Older Adults' Perceived Control
Over Public Education Policy

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, HAVE CONTROL	31
NO, DO NOT HAVE CONTROL	88
UNDECIDED	8
TOTAL	117

Question 12 asked whether the older adult perceives that he or she has control over public education policy. A total of 117 or 97% of the older adults answered the question. Of the 117 who responded, 31 or 26% responded in the affirmative, 88 or 75% answered in the negative, and 8 or 7% were undecided.

The data supports the belief that the older adult perceives himself or herself as a natural resource and has a great deal to offer society. He or she also feels that the older adult should have access to the resources available to all members of society. It is enlightening to view our older age population as one who sees education as a lifelong process rather than limited to children and adolescence. Unfortunately, the

participation of the older adult in actually accessing

these resources provided by the public education system

is limited. Perhaps the older adult views public schools

as child-centered institutions. Parkyn (1973) suggests

that pragmatic, problem-oriented adults, leading their

own lives cannot be treated like dependent children. The

older adult is less likely to relate to the principles of

formal schooling but rather determine his or her own

course of educational development through a process of

flexible educational approaches.

Adulthood should become the longest and the most

gratifying period of learning and re-learning. It is

imperative that public school administrators develop

methods of education that are appropriate to the concerns

and needs of lifelong learners. In this respect,

accessibility must be viewed by public school

administrators, teachers and officials as a major reform.

Category 5 -- Accessibility

Table 16

The Effect of Physical Barriers
on Participation in Public Education

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, PHYSICAL BARRIERS PROHIBIT PARTICIPATION	87
NO, PHYSICAL BARRIERS DO NOT PROHIBIT PARTICIPATION	32
TOTAL	119

As indicated in Table 12, accessibility is a factor
in the participation of older adults in public education.
Question 14 further asked whether physical barriers are a
factor in preventing older adults from participating in
public education. A total of 119 or 99% of the older
adults responded to the question. Of the 119 who
responded, 87 or 73% believed that there are physical
barriers that prevent or, at least, prohibit older adults
from participation. Conversely, 32 or 26% did not
believe that physical barriers had any negative effect on
participation.

Table 17

The Effect of Emotional
or Psychological Barriers
on Participation in Public Education

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS PROHIBIT PARTICIPATION	91
NO, EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS DO NOT PROHIBIT PARTICIPATION	28
UNDECIDED	1
TOTAL	120

As indicated in Table 12, accessibility is a factor in the participation of older adults in public education. Question 15 further asked whether emotional or psychological barriers are a factor in preventing older adults from participating in public education. A total of 120 or 100% of the older adults responded to the question. Of the 120, 91 or 76% believed that there are emotional or psychological barriers that prevent or, at least, prohibit older adults from participation, 28 or 23% did not believe that these factors had any negative effect on participation, and 1 or less than 1% was undecided.

Table 18

Participation in Continuing Education
via Public Broadcasting System

_____

_____

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, HAVE PARTICIPATED	8
NO, HAVE NOT PARTICIPATED	112
TOTAL	120

Question 16 asked whether the older had participated
in a televised continuing education course. All 120 or
100% of the older adults responded to the question. Of
the 120, 8 or 7% had indicated that they had participated
and 112 or 93% responded that they had not participated.

As indicated, older adults feel that there are
physical, emotional, and psychological barriers that
prevent older adults from participating in public
education. Inviting older adults to take part in adult
learning centers in our schools or educational satellite
programs supported by our schools can prove to be a
comforting experience only if school administrators
guarantee environments which are physically adequate and
emotionally responsive. Seaman (1972) notes that older
adults possess unrealistic anxieties and feelings of

inferiority relative to their specific learning abilities. This is further complicated by the fact that older adults experience responsibilities which compete for their time and cannot easily adapt to changes in environment or distractions.

Facility accessibility in a formal school setting can be an obvious deterrent to handicapped older adults' participation in adult education programs. Facility accessibility is not limited to school buildings alone. Our society's constant reorganization and rapidly increasing commitment to advanced learning technologies suggest that the facilitating agency may, in fact, not need a formal meeting place. Computerized data retrieval systems, telecommunications, text to speech programs, speech to text programs, long distance learning, multisensory interactive media, multi-user dimensions, virtual reality programs, Internet, computerized adaptive testing, and mass communications suggest that the public school administrator must stay abreast of the ever-changing technologies. The public school administrator must make every effort to find the most accessible, efficient and effective technologies and viable means of introducing the older adult to their use without restriction. Staff development must be guaranteed in order that our teachers and future teachers

can experience, learn and facilitate these teaching/
learning options. These technologies must be
continuously evaluated. Modifications, refinements, and
total revisions must be planned for and accepted as
standard operating procedures. The infusion of new
technology applications must be adopted as a formal
learning activity continuum from pre-school to death.

Category 6 -- Quality of Life

Table 19

Effect of Continuing Education
on the Public Education System

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
POSITIVELY AFFECT	101
NEGATIVELY AFFECT	6
UNDECIDED	11
TOTAL	118

Question 19 asked whether older adults agreed that
continuing education for older adults would positively
affect public education. A total of 118 or 98% of the
older adults responded to the question. Of the 118 who

responded, 101 or 85% answered in the affirmative, 6 or 5% responded in the negative, and 11 or 9% remained undecided.

Table 20

Effect of Continuing Education
on the Relations Between Older Adults
and the Public Education System

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
POSITIVELY AFFECT	104
NEGATIVELY AFFECT	8
UNDECIDED	5
TOTAL	117

Question 20 asked older adults whether continuing education could serve as a mechanism to improve relations between the older adult population and the public schools. A total of 117 or 97% of the older adults responded to this question. Of the 117 who responded, 104 or 89% agreed that relations would improve, 8 or 7% did not agree that relations would improve, and 5 or 4% remained undecided.

Table 21

Continuing Education as a Factor
in the Quality of Life

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, LIFE WOULD BE MORE REWARDING	107
NO, LIFE WOULD NOT BE MORE REWARDING	3
UNDECIDED	6
TOTAL	116

Question 21 asked older adults whether continuing education for older adults would make life more rewarding. A total of 116 or 97% of older adults responded to the question. Of the 116 who responded, 107 or 90% answered in the affirmative, 3 or 2% answered in the negative and 6 or1026$5$e undecided.

Table 22

Effect of Increment Credit
on Enrollment in Continuing Education

	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
YES, WOULD ENROLL	88
NO, WOULD NOT ENROLL	16
UNDECIDED	13
TOTAL	117

Question 25 asked the older adult if he or she would
enroll in a continuing education course if retirement
benefits, social security benefits, and/or tax credits
were enhanced by way of increment credit. A total of 117
or 97% of the older adults responded to the question. Of
the 117 who responded, 88 or 75% answered in the
affirmative, 16 or 14% responded in the negative and 13
or 11% remained undecided.

Based on the data the older adult suggests that his
or her affiliation with continuing education is
potentially a rewarding one. This affiliation would
directly improve relations between the older adult
population and the public schools. The benefits of

education as a lifelong activity has positive impact for individual older adults as well as society as a whole.

An older adult who is confronted with daily threats to basic survival because of low income, illness, or lack of adequate shelter may find some assistance in meeting these basic needs through education which enhances basic survival skills. Many older adults have found that a low income can be stretched a bit further with improved budgeting skills; still others have found that knowledge of income assistance or resources and/or decrease their financial expenses or social debits. Information about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, acquired through reading a brochure in the library or grocery store, talking with case managers or social workers, or attending a community forum, can be quite helpful in older adults not only in enhancing their own survival but in freeing them to pursue different, if not high goals. Similarly, education which provides job skills can equip some older adults to increase their income through part- or full-time employment, even on a temporary basis...Society also benefits from educating older adults. One of the major benefits frequently cited is that older adults are a largely untapped source of human potential which can make significant contributions to the productivity of the nation...Older adults can transfer acquired skills to non-family members as well, such as

friends, neighborhoods, community service
centers and civic organizations...The output
can become advantageous to social institutions
in the private and public sectors, directly
benefitting society...Given the demographic
trends noted, it is clear that education of
older adults has another important societal
function: preparation for an aging society.
Older adults are our most valuable teachers
about what it is like to be old. With a
growing population of older adults, the society
must learn how to adapt its institutions and
policies to best serve the needs of future
generations of older adults. (Lowy and
O'Connor, 1986, p. 163)

No research has been found which entertains the

possibility of a tangible monetary value awarded to any

individual older adult who participates in a generic (not

career related) continued (lifelong) education program.

Perhaps retirement benefits, Social Security benefits,

SSI benefits and/or tax credit benefits could be enhanced

by our federal government, state government and/or

employers for those individuals who have accrued lifelong

learning educational increment credit (LLLC).

Tangible rewards via LLLC are not intended to

replace the needs of an individual with respect to

achieving a sense of fulfillment, strengthening an

individual's sense of personal control, achievement,

esteem and self-actualization through educational activities. Tangible rewards are offered simply as an incentive to ensure an increase of the participation of the older adult in public education. Eventually this investment in the empowerment of the older adult may serve as a tool which provides for maximum participation of older adults in the planning, development, financing and evaluation of educational systems and programs in which they willingly participate. In this way, we can create a public school system which pragmatically, as well as intrinsically, has value to the older adult.

Our federal and state governments could issue a list of sanctioned courses which are merited upon successful mastery. This would result in an immediate or potential differential tax credit, pension benefit, or social security benefit to that person who has successfully completed a particular course of study. The goal of these courses would be to maximize the social functioning of adults after secondary schooling or to remediate lower academic functioning citizens. This suggests that these courses should provide a wide range of preventive, remedial and developmental services for any, especially older adults. Suggested courses could possibly deal with health care, community development, job reentry skills, literacy, advocacy, consumer education, death and dying,

inflation, fraud, crime, abuse and other issues of concern. Corresponding curricula and mastery tests administered through sanctioned testing centers could facilitate accreditation upon completion. Our federal and state government should provide the leadership and the funding necessary for the development of such curriculum materials and provide adequate monitoring to assure and facilitate the implementation of these materials. Why not make it clear that older adults who never depart from or reenter the educational system can continue to benefit society, receive tangible rewards and personal recognition and satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

Summary of the Study

The first step was to collect responses to each
question and to record each response in whole number
form. The second step was to analyze the responses to
each question and to calculate percentages of respondents
who answered each question and the percentage of
respondents answering in a similar way in an effort to
establish viable information or to establish the
existence of trends. The third step was to reflect on
the percentages and what literature says about the
involvement and participation of the older adult in
public education.

Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations which
need to be recognized from the outset. The survey items

were written by the novice researcher and pilot tested

for comprehension utilizing a sampling of older adults in

one particular community. Subsequent researchers might

consider revising the vocabulary in order to improve the

comprehension of each specific question.

Also, any findings from the study will be capable of

replication only with subjects demographically similar to

those used in this sample. The socioeconomic and

background/experience mix of the subjects' participation

in this research must be recognized as a limitation. The

results of the study cannot be generalized to other

populations where the subjects are dissimilar with

respect to these variables.

Another limitation of note is that the respondents

were immediately made aware of the fact that the

interviewer was a public school administrator. The

reaction to this may have biased the responses in some

manner.

Conclusions and Implications

The study was designed to determine if older adults

are alienated toward public education and, if so, what is

the present impact of their alienation on the public

education system? Older adults have disassociated

themselves from public education due to a number of variables.

The data collected through the questionnaires and the research by other investigators suggest that a new educational model which directly empowers older adults to assume direct responsibility for their own lifelong learning is needed. The older adult must be directly vested in a public education system which is responsive to the societal and educational needs of our older adult population. Public policy at every government level must include and encourage a new focus on the interdependence of all members of society. This study suggests that specific strategies are needed that challenge educational and institutional policies in order to promote the economic, social and personal growth of older adults.

Six integral parts/categories are suggested as alienation variables and barriers. Each of these categories reinforce the interdependence of all members of society and, also, reinforce the interdependence of public schools and community. We must recognize that all community members should be informed and involved in all aspects of community life. This information and involvement are the foundations in making the older adult a direct contributor to the community and society at large. This information and involvement will serve to

expand the locus of control the older adult experiences

as active contributors to his or her own destiny and the

destiny of others. All variables considered, our older

adult population has not reached its potential as a

contributor in this context.

The results of the survey have indicated that older

adults have expressed a strong desire to have access to

beneficial resources in our society. Then why do they

choose not to be part of the very system which can

maximize these resources? Older adults are alienated

from our educational system. They have chosen not to be

vested. This must change.

The strategies outlined below suggest that lifelong

learning is the catalyst which will help reshape our

public schools and educational systems. These strategies

include requisites which promote lifelong learning in our

society:

1.   The destigmatization of illiteracy
      and low literacy is the first step in
      reducing alienation and increasing
      the direct involvement of older
      adults in lifelong learning.

The stigma of adult illiteracy and low literacy is

one of the prime reasons of alienation for some older

adults. As defined by Goffman (1963), a stigma is "the

situation of an individual who is disqualified from full

social acceptance." Unfortunately, our public schools stand out as a reminder to these illiterate and low literate adults that they have been stereotyped as being socially and educationally deficient. It has become acceptable to depict illiterates or low literates as being economically unproductive and incapable of making informed decisions. Illiterates and low literates are collectively blamed for causing social ills and crime. They are blamed for contributing to our nation's perceived inability to compete in a world economy (Beder, 1990). When faced with this discreditable stigma the illiterate or low literate adult often responds with two basic defensive strategies -- passing and covering. In passing, individuals attempt to avoid the consequences of stigmatization by passing as "normal." In covering, while the stigmatization attribute is acknowledged by the individual, steps are taken to minimize its negative aspects. The negative consequences of these strategies are directly related to the unwillingness of both illiterates and low literates to participate in formal schooling programs, the resistance to support public education programs and the increased alienation toward public education. The stigma society attaches to illiterates and low literates causes this population to be alienated from society in general and alienated from

public schools in particular. The illiterate and low

literate adult conceals his or her illiteracy and, not

only defers participation in literacy education, but also

defers participation in all aspects of the public

education process. Ironically, this stigma causes

illiterates and low literates to remain alienated from

the very resource that might successfully serve them, not

only in the context of reading and writing, but in the

realms of lifelong learning and lifelong association with

public education.

   As educators, we need to encourage society to view

illiterates and low literates, not as an individual

failure, but as a social challenge. We need to convey

the understanding that this population must be met with

utmost respect. Educators, including educational

administrators, must be viewed as facilitators not

controllers. More importantly, we as educators must

attempt to expunge the stigma of illiteracy and low

literacy as a form of social control which increases the

meaninglessness, social isolation and powerlessness of

this segment of our adult population.

   2.   The destigmatization of the
         nondiploma earner is the next step in
         reducing alienation and increasing
         the direct involvement of older
         adults in lifelong learning.

The stigma of not earning a high school diploma is another prime reason of alienation toward public education for these older adults. Our public schools again stand out as a reminder to those nondiploma earning adults that have been stereotyped and stigmatized as being socially and educationally unacceptable. Similar to the conditions of illiterate and low literate adults, it is obvious that these adults would shy away from direct contact with educators and schools. As in the case with illiterates and low literates, the stigma causes nondiploma earning adults to remain alienated from the very resource that might successfully serve them, not only in the context of earning a diploma, but in terms of lifelong learning and lifelong association with public education. The research indicates that distinct degrees of alienation toward public education and public schools surrounds both the issues of illiterates/low literates and nondiploma earning adults.

Illiterate and low literate adults have historically been seen as both a burden and a threat to society. Literacy, as social policy, has been implemented in the form of social or political control often in times of social, moral, economic or demographic crises. By contrast, there is a less politically volatile history surrounding the degree earning program associated with

the GED (Tests of General Educational Development). The

literate, nondegree earning adults are understood to be

solid citizens who possess a measurable degree of

knowledge. Unlike literacy programs of "rescue," the GED

has enjoyed a more prestigious reputation and is referred

to as a program of "reward." Although the two groups

have much in common relative to their affiliation with

public education, the two educational programs differ in

the potential of social acceptability. The two

educational programs differ because of implied social

policy and the values placed by society on normative

knowledge and the implicit value of the learner. The

nondegree earners are seen as potentially worthwhile

individuals who need a chance to demonstrate that they

possess valued knowledge. Illiterates and low literates

are seen as possessing little value to society (Quigley,

1991).

The belief system of a dominant society has afforded

the non high school degree earner the GED program, a

stable and effective program for uneducated adults. This

program is built upon acceptance and "reward." As a

result, the effects of alienation are significantly

reduced. By comparison, a higher degree of

stigmatization of "rescue" and resulting alienation still

surrounds illiterate and low literate adult education

programs. This is most unfortunate. There is no reason why public school administrators, and society in general, cannot define illiteracy simply as the inability to read and write. Illiterate and low literate adult education programs must become learner-centered programs mirroring the same fundamental nonpolitical and noncontroversial learning concepts and incentives enjoyed by adults participating in the GED program.

      3.   Valid and reliable information facilitated by way of internal and external networks is a fundamental resource for older adults. This information provides the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed quality decisions about their public schools and community.

Public education will require community involvement and support to an unprecedented degree. This means establishing effective and knowledgeable lines of communication with the influential groups of the school community power structure inside and outside the school setting. Unfortunately, there is a wide gap between the public school and the community it serves. Too often the schools are not an integral part of the community. Successful education must not leave out any segment of its population. It must redefine the process of school governance to include the elderly. The gap between educators, parents, elders and taxpayers can only be

bridged by a planned two-way communication network.
Notifying and empowering the public is the essence of
school-community relations.

The failure of public school administrators to take
all segments of the community population into partnership
originates in the techniques of public education
administration. All too slowly the traditional closed
system approach in public school administration is being
displaced by the more realistic open system approach.
Public school administrators must aggressively seek and
include continuous input from the external audience,
transforming this input into some product form which
improves the system as well as society at large. A
planned, constructive and continuous program of school-
community relations is paramount.

Building internal support is the first step in the
development of a viable community relations system. To
accomplish this, public school administrators must
establish a supportive, well-organized internal
information system. The primary goal of this community
relations system must be to advise and assist all public
school administrators, all school board members and all
public school staff with consistent internal information;
with community opinion feedback; and with counsel on ways
of enlisting organizational and community support. All

those involved in the internal education structures need to serve as well-informed interpreters and salesmen for the public school system. An intensive training program in communications and in community relations must be provided for all personnel internally involved in the public schools.

A fundamental element of the community power structure is the network of influentials existing among individuals and organizations involved in the community's decision-making process. Too much public relations practice today ignores the significance of the community power structure and its components. Once the key publics in the community have been determined and their leaders identified, public school administrators should schedule a series of background briefings to explain the goals and objectives of public education and the ways in which the school system will move to achieve them.

Constructive use of citizen committees is an example of successfully facing the reality of an open system. Public school administrators have a responsibility to understand and respond to all key public they serve. A primary key public is the older adult population in any community. However, little research has been performed analyzing the patterns of participation by the older adult population in public education activities.

Understanding the degree to which our older adult population of the community has participated or has been alienated from participation in the public school system is of significant consequence to all public school administrators, public school educators, public school systems and the students they serve.

> 4. The adult learner requires pragmatic, educational services within non-oppressive environments which foster personal and intellectual growth. Procedures must be established for advising older adults in regard to lifelong learning program options available to them. Adaptive methods must be made available so that the older adult can participate in and profit from education.

Sociological variables such as age, income and educational attainment have long been identified as important predictors of active participation in society by older adults. It is equally important to focus on the attitudes of older adults toward themselves and the impact of environment in relation to active participation. Findings indicate that self-directed participation is correlated with a person's affirmation of self, accomplishments, sense of satisfaction, a high level of enthusiasm and ego involvement in activities (Fisher, 1988). The findings also reinforce the need for a strong social dimension in order to integrate the

effects of personal isolation or anomie. Thus,

understanding the nonparticipant as an expression of

anomie, alienation or powerlessness is most important.

Anomie and alienation are essentially synonymous terms.

Anomie is the state of normalessness or anarchy

influenced by the relationship between social control and

its effect on individuals. Seeman theorized that an

alienated person has a sense of low control over events

(powerlessness), has a sense of incomprehensibility of

personal and social affairs (meaninglessness), rejects

commonly held values in the society (cultural

estrangement) and has a sense of exclusion or rejection

(social isolation) (Seeman, 1976).

Many communities have already established lifelong

learning programs for adults. Unfortunately, the public

system of education is at the same time a barrier in

reducing the effect of alienation experienced by the

individual learner. Schools are typified by a set of

social controls which, from the start, reinforce a

separation of adolescents from adults and, in particular,

elders. The social system in public schools emphasizes a

custodial function. Control is a pervasive aspect of the

interactions of students with their teachers. The

factors of age difference and control may initiate and

reinforce alienation. Also, the social organization of

the school exists because of state laws; operates with social controls based on these laws and has characteristic compulsory-based regulations. This hidden curriculum may negatively affect a reunion of older adults with the schools. To further complicate this alienation, there is a social expectation that, in order for an individual to be successful, that person must have at least earned a high school diploma or have the ability to read and write. Therefore, those individuals who had left school without basic skills or did not earn a high school diploma are reluctant to reinvolve themselves in public education. Also, many students remained in school with the hope that persistence in school would have great rewards at a future time. These students tolerated or adjusted to these social controls and graduated from high school still not realizing gratification and thus remain highly alienated.

It certainly is time to examine the attitudes of our elder population in regard to reducing any acquired alienation and nonparticipation. Educators and community members must attempt to understand life as experienced by many older adults. Meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and powerlessness of this segment of the older population must be addressed.

The data support the belief that the older adult
perceives himself or herself as a natural resource and
has a great deal to offer society. He or she also feels
that the older adult should have access to the resources
available to all members of society. It is enlightening
to view our older age population as one that sees
education as a lifelong process rather than limited to
children and adolescents. Unfortunately, the
participation of the older adult in actually accessing
these resources provided by the public education system
is limited. Perhaps the older adult views public schools
as child-centered institutions. Parkyn (1973) suggests
that pragmatic, problem-oriented adults leading their own
lives cannot be treated like dependent children. The
older adult is less likely to relate to the principles of
formal schooling, but rather is more likely to determine
his or her own course of educational development through
a process of flexible approaches which would include
telecommunication, long distance learning, computerized
adaptive testing, data retrieval systems and multisensory
interactive media.

Adulthood should become the longest and the most
gratifying period of learning and relearning. The adult
learner requires pragmatic, educational services within
non-oppressive environments. It is imperative that

public school administrators continue to foster such
environments and make readily available adaptive methods
of education that are appropriate to the concerns and
needs of all lifelong learners.

> 5.   Physical, emotional and psychological
>   barriers which inhibit inclusion of
>   older adults in the public education
>   system must be eliminated.

Inviting older adults to participate in learning
programs and learning centers in our public schools or
any educational satellite location proves to be a
worthwhile experience only if the learning environments
are physically and emotionally responsive to the needs of
the older learner. School administrators must be
sensitive and responsive to the fact that the older adult
learner will positively respond and interact with
environments which make them feel comfortable. Facility
inaccessibility in any school setting can be an obvious
deterrent to handicapped older adults' participation in
educational programs. Less than obvious is the fact that
even healthy older adults will shy away from environments
which do not reach out to meet their physical and
emotional needs. Educators must be trained to be
sensitive to both conditions and look beyond minimal
physical comfort and/or compliance with state and federal
environmental codes.

Seaman (1971) notes that older adults possess unrealistic anxieties and feelings of inferiority relative to their specific learning abilities. The public school administrator/educator must be responsive to the emotional needs of the older adult. The public school administrator/educator cannot underestimate his/her personal role in interacting with the older adult learner. The quality of older adult education programs and the delivery of services depends directly upon the quality of the educational personnel who provide them. The professional educator is the catalyst which will draw the older learner to any learning environment.

The public school administrator/educator must seek out the most accessible, efficient and effective teaching environments, methods and technologies to accommodate the older learner. Staff development must be made available in order that our educators can experience learning and facilitate all possible teaching/learning options. Increased financial and policy support at the local, state and federal level must be provided to prepare educators to serve the older learner. Computerized data retrieval systems, telecommunications, text to speech programs, speech to text programs, long distance learning, multisensory interactive media, multi-user dimensions, virtual reality programs, Internet,

computerized adaptive testing and mass communications

suggest that the public school administrator must stay

abreast of the ever-changing technologies. The public

school administrator must make every effort to find the

most accessible, efficient and effective technologies and

viable means of introducing the older adult to their use

without restriction.

> 6.   Tangible rewards will serve as an
>   incentive to encourage the
>   participation of older adults in
>   lifelong learning.

In all, data analysis suggests that the older adult

would directly benefit from his or her affiliation with

the public schools. The benefits of older adult

education has positive impact for the individual as well

as society. Basic survival skills, job skills training

and academic enlightenment are not only helpful to older

adults, but can free this population to pursue different

and possibly higher goals. Our society must learn how to

prepare for future generations of aging adults and learn

how to adapt its institutions and policies to best serve

the needs of future generations of lifelong learners

(Lowy and O'Connor, 1986).

The intrinsic value afforded by education to

individual older adults and society may not be enough to

attract the number of older adults needed to support our

public school system. The primary reason is that the number of adults who supply the tax base and presently support the very young and very old is rapidly decreasing. This raises issues that are beginning to impact directly on economic, political and educational concerns and practices of our society. Unfortunately, our traditional institutions and practices are not yet organized to effectively deal with this concern or effectively tap this growing, but unused resource.

This study has proceeded from the assumption that the aging of American society has direct impact and consequences for our public education system. A pragmatic and realistic model is needed to effectively bridge the gap between the older adult and the public education system.

No research has been found regarding immediate incentives for participation of older adults in public education. Nor has research been found which entertains a system of tangible monetary rewards to any individual older adult who successfully completes a lifelong education program. This model does not suggest that older adults are not self-motivated, curious or enthusiastic about learning. The tangible rewards offered are not intended to replace the needs of an individual with respect to achieving a sense of

fulfillment, strengthening an individual's sense of personal control, achievement, esteem and self-actualization. Tangible rewards are offered as an incentive to ensure an immediate increase in the participation of older adults in public education. This model will serve as an investment in the empowerment of the older adult. It would also serve as a tool which provides for immediate maximum participation of older adults in the planning, development, financing and evaluation of public educational systems and programs in which they willingly participate. In this way, we can develop a public school system which pragmatically, as well as intrinsically, has immediate and long lasting value to the older adult. Why not make it clear that older adults who never depart from or who reenter the educational system can continue to benefit society and receive tangible rewards, as well as personal recognition and satisfaction.

Finally, the federal government, state government, local community and local schools must consider the importance of lifelong learning in creating conditions for full participation of the older adult in all aspects of the educational process. This concept must be adopted as a core value in the development of national, state, and local education and social policies.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE LETTER TO OLDER ADULTS

ADULT PARTICIPATION IN
PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Dear Participant,

This survey is part of a study conducted by Winthrop
High School Principal, Joseph Mauro. It is designed to
identify attitudes of adults toward public education.
Your response to this survey is very important and will
be utilized in establishing directions for public
education on the town, state, and national levels. The
questions specifically pertain to your past, present, and
future involvement in public education. This study is
being conducted with the implicit objective of providing
a clearer understanding of older adult education
institutions, as well as private education institutions,
the opportunity to serve the needs of older adults in a
more effective, expedient, and expanded manner.

Please be advised that all responses will be kept in
strict confidence and will not be reported on an
individual basis. Also, please be advised that there is
no "right" or "wrong" answer to any of the following
questions. These are your own, personal opinions.

Thank you very much for your participation in this
study.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph Mauro

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

ADULT PARTICIPATION IN
PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Responding #   Age   Sex

1. What formal education have you had?

    _____ a. did not complete high school
    _____ b. 12th grade
    _____ c. G.E.D.
    _____ d. trade program
    _____ e. 1-2 years, college
    _____ f. 3 yrs. of college
    _____ g. undergraduate degree
    _____ h. masters
    _____ i. doctorate
    _____ j. no response

2. Were you satisfied with your formal education?

    _____ satisfied
    _____ moderately satisfied
    _____ dissatisfied

3. Was your education disrupted by circumstances beyond
    your control?

    _____ yes
    _____ no

4. Have you participated in a continuing education
    course sponsored by a school or community agency?

    _____ yes
    _____ no

5. How often do you come in contact with public
    education?

    _____ often
    _____ seldom
    _____ never

6. If given the opportunity, would you like to more
    involved with the public schools?

        _____ yes
        _____ no

7. In general, are you satisfied with the present image
    of the public schools?

        _____ yes
        _____ no

8. When you were enrolled in grade school were you
    satisfied with the public schools?

        _____ yes
        _____ no

9. Do you believe that public school administrators are
    concerned about the education of older adults?

        _____ yes
        _____ no
        _____ undecided

10. Do you believe persons of all ages should have
    access to continuing education programs?

        _____ yes
        _____ no
        _____ undecided

11. Do you believe that older adults are a natural
    resource of the community and can contribute to
    society?

        _____ yes
        _____ no
        _____ undecided

12. Do you feel you have control over public education policy?

_____ yes
_____ no

13. Were you ever enrolled in a continuing education program sponsored by a prior place of employment?

_____ yes
_____ no

14. Do you believe that there are physical barriers that prevent older adults from participating in public education?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ undecided

15. Do you believe that there are emotional and/or psychological barriers that prevent older adults from participating in public education?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ undecided

16. Did you ever formally or informally participate in a televised continuing education course (via public broadcasting)?

_____ yes
_____ no

17. Where did you receive most of the training that you needed for your major employment?

_____ a. high school
_____ b. college
_____ c. special training program
_____ d. on the job
_____ e. continuing education course

18. Would you like to participate in a continuing
    education course?

    _____ yes
    _____ no
    _____ undecided

19. Do you agree that continuing education for older
    adults will positively affect public education?

    _____ yes
    _____ no
    _____ undecided

20. Do you agree that continuing education could serve
    as a mechanism to improve relations between the
    older adult population and the public schools?

    _____ yes
    _____ no
    _____ undecided

21. Do you agree that continuing education for older
    adults would make life more rewarding?

    _____ yes
    _____ no
    _____ undecided

22. Do you agree that continuing education for older
    adults would enhance the prospects of their return
    to the work force?

    _____ yes
    _____ no
    _____ undecided

23. If you have not attained a high school diploma, would you be interested in enrolling in an educational program which would enable you to attain a high school diploma or equivalency?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ undecided
_____ not applicable

24. Would you enroll in a continuing education program that would improve your reading and/or writing skills?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ undecided

25. Would you enroll in a continuing education course if your retirement benefits, social security benefits, and/or tax credits were enhanced via increment credit?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ undecided

26. Which of the following do you consider to be most important in your decision to take a continuing education course? Rank in order of priority your top three items (1 being the most important and 3 being the least important).

_____ a. meet new people
_____ b. work toward a degree or certificate
_____ c. improve income
_____ d. prepare for a new job
_____ e. fulfill a job requirement
_____ f. get a promotion
_____ g. improve skills for job
_____ h. learn more about how to solve community problems
_____ i. develop a new interest or hobby
_____ j. increment credit

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

THE OLDER ADULT PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS

1. What formal education have you had?

   24 a. did not complete high school
   56 b. 12th grade
    0 c. G. E. D.
    2 d. trade program
   26 e. 1-2 years, college
    5 f. 3 years, college
    7 g. undergraduate degree
    0 h. masters
    0 i. doctorate
    0 j. no response

2. Were you satisfied with your formal education?

   104 satisfied
    12 moderately satisfied
     4 dissatisfied
     0 no response

3. Was your education disrupted by circumstances beyond your control?

   24 yes
   96 no
    0 no response

4. Have you participated in a continuing education course sponsored by a school or community agency?

   56 yes
   64 no
    0 no response

5. How often do you come in contact with public education activities?

   40 often
   64 seldom
   16 never
    0 no response

6. If given the opportunity, would you like to be more involved with the public schools?

   40 yes
   56 no
   24 undecided
    0 no response

7. In general, are you satisfied with the present image of the public schools?

   22 yes
   80 no
   16 undecided
    2 no response

8. When you were enrolled in grade school were you satisfied with the public schools?

   96 yes
   16 no
    6 undecided
    2 no response

9. Do you believe that public school administrators are concerned about the education of older adults?

   48 yes
   56 no
   10 undecided
    6 no response

10. Do you believe persons of all ages should have access to continuing education programs?

   120 yes
     0 no
     0 undecided
     0 no response

11. Do you believe that older adults are a natural resource of the community and can contribute to society?

    120 yes
      0 no
      0 undecided
      0 no response

12. Do you feel you have control over public education policy?

    31 yes
    88 no
     8 undecided
     3 no response

13. Were you ever enrolled in a continuing education program sponsored by a prior place of employment?

    42 yes
    68 no
    10 no response

14. Do you believe that there are physical barriers that prevent older adults from participating in public education?

    87 yes
    32 no
     0 undecided
     1 no response

15. Do you believe that there are emotional and/or psychological barriers that prevent older adults from participating in public education?

    91 yes
    28 no
     1 undecided
     0 no response

16. Did you ever formally or informally participate in a televised continuing education course (via public broadcasting)?

      8 yes
    112 no
      0 no response

17. Where did you receive most of the training that you needed for your major employment?

     43 a. high school
     25 b. college
     17 c. special training program
     25 d. on the job training
      6 e. continuing education course
      4 f. no response

18. Would you like to participate in a continuing education course?

     32 yes
     79 no
      7 undecided
      2 no response

19. Do you agree that continuing education for older adults will positively affect public education?

    101 yes
      6 no
     11 undecided
      2 no response

20. Do you agree that continuing education could serve as a mechanism to improve relations between the older adult population and the public schools?

    104 yes
      8 no
      5 undecided
      3 no response

21. Do you agree that continuing education for older adults would make life more rewarding?

    107 yes
      3 no
      6 undecided
      4 no response

22. Do you agree that continuing education for older adults would enhance the prospects of their return to the work force?

     39 yes
     47 no
     26 undecided
      8 no response

23. If you have not attained a high school diploma, would you be interested in enrolling in an educational program which would enable you to attain a high school diploma or equivalency?

     18 yes
      2 no
      2 undecided
      2 no response

24. Would you enroll in a continuing education program that would improve your reading and/or writing skills?

     75 yes
     25 no
     17 undecided
      3 no response

25. Would you enroll in a continuing education course if your retirement benefits, social security benefits, and/or tax credits were enhanced via increment credit?

     88 yes
     16 no
     13 undecided
      3 no response

26. Which of the following do you consider to be most
     important in your decision to take a continuing
     education course? Rank in order of priority your
     top three items (1 being the most important and 3
     being the third most important).

1	2	3		
21	25	17	a.	meet new people
15	4	11	b.	work toward a degree, etc.
20	6	8	c.	improve income
6	0	15	d.	prepare for a new job
0	5	12	e.	fulfill a job requirement
5	5	16	f.	get a promotion
4	20	0	g.	improve skills for job
15	10	3	h.	learn to solve community problems
25	12	4	i.	develop a new interest or hobby
20	15	3	j.	increment credit

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