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THE ARCHIVE OF EDUCATIONAL BIOGRAPHY

The **Archive of Educational Biography** is a research project being organized under the auspices of the Institute for Research on Teaching Adults in the College of Education at Michigan State University. The goals of the project are to provide fresh resources for and to help guide inquiry into adult development, aging, and learning. Unlike the study of human development, adult learning has not had the benefit of longitudinal studies. To help fill this gap in educational research, and to advance understanding of adult learning, the Archive will be a place for biographical inquiry into education across the lifespan with particular attention to the stages of adulthood.

The Archive's initial activities (for the academic year 1993-94) include: a) making a case for educational biography as a research method and genre for the study of adult development, aging, and learning; b) preparing research interview protocols for use in writing educational biographies; c) conducting sample research interviews; d) writing sample educational biographies; e) compiling a glossary of essential terms for the study of educational biography; f) compiling an annotated bibliography of essential scholarly resources in the fields of biography and autobiography, other kinds of life history narrative, and adult development and learning; and g) exploring the feasibility of external funding for new research initiatives in educational biography and adult development and learning.

Biography will be the chief interest of the Archive but its research will rely also on autobiography, life-history, life-review, and related methods of narrative inquiry in the social and behavioral sciences and the humanities. Some well known autobiographies--Benjamin Franklin's and Henry Adams'--have education and learning as their theme. Still, the scholarly study of autobiography has rarely highlighted the mature educational interests of its subjects, or at least presented them in ways that would illuminate the character of learning across the lifespan. Recent texts like Patricia Hampl's *A Romantic Education* (1981), Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988), and Mary Catherine Bateson's *Composing a Life* (1989) show how the study of lives can address this theme, especially forms of learning shaped by history, politics, place, and gender.

The Archive borrows the idea of educational biography from the work of Lawrence Cremin (1925-1990), the leading historian of American education. "Individuals," he said in *Public Education* (1976), "come to educational situations with their own temperaments, histories, and purposes, and different individuals will obviously interact with a given configuration of education in different ways and with different outcomes." An educational biography focuses on the lifelong experience of education from the perspective of the subject. Such experience results from "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts of others to transmit [or of the subject's own efforts to gain] "knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities."

In Cremin's authoritative three volume history of American education he offers samples of educational biography based on autobiographical and biographical accounts of obscure and well known subjects: for example, the nineteenth century mill worker Lucy Larcom (Cremin 1980) and the twentieth century philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen (Cremin 1988). Work done for the Archive, like Cremin's, will make use of such print sources but will also employ the research interview for what it may reveal about the meanings of education in the construction of personal narrative (Cohler 1982), about the role of gender in epistemology (Belenky et al. 1986), and other themes.

Scholars have used the biographical approach in the study of the careers of teachers (Goodson 1992) and physicians (Kaufman 1993) but the Archive represents a unique effort to focus research on the lifespan experience of education in many walks of life. Biography is a form of case study, a research method gaining in recognition in K-12 educational inquiry (Sykes and Bird 1992) and in studies of scientific and scholarly creativity (Wallace 1989), but so far neglected in the study of higher and lifelong education (e.g. in the latter, influential work by Cross [1981] and Willis [1985]). The Archive will be a resource for new explorations of the relations between adult learning and: developments in the academic disciplines and the professions in the curricula of colleges, universities and professional schools, work and careers, family and public life, the mass media, cultural and religious institutions, and other elements of what Cremin names the "configuration" of educational activities in history, society, and individual lives.

Sociologist Norman Denzin (1989) and others (e.g. Epstein 1991) have shown that biography is a revealing but demanding form. Denzin insists on the priority of "interpretive" biography focusing on complex turning points in an individual's life, and on the need for authors of biographies to be self-conscious about the peculiarities of the research genre. In light of the goals of the Archive we are invited to ask: What unique opportunities does the form and language of biography provide for understanding adult learning? And conversely, how does the vocabulary of education contribute to the (re)construction of a life?

How representative of educational history and processes are educational biographies? The psychoanalyst and biographer Erik H. Erikson said early in his career, speaking of the psychological case history, that "Illustrations can only convince him who already believes that those selected are representative." Cremin believed that if educational biographies were not always representative they were at least "archetypal," or illustrative of the variable dynamics and forms of maturation, education, and growth.

Work for the Archive will reflect several theoretical orientations. For example, the life-span perspective, with its emphasis on individual variability, growth throughout the life-span, and the significance of context, is now indispensable for inquiry in the behavioral and social sciences (e.g. Baltes 1987; Lerner 1984). But research in this vein rarely focuses on the single case. Leading psychologists working from allied points of view (e.g. White 1952; Levinson 1986; Bruner 1990) have proposed that studying individual lives is the most revealing form of inquiry in human development. The same may be said for research on adult learning. Speaking as a developmental psychologist Levinson has asked that biography be recovered from the "limbo" to which his field has relegated it. Accordingly, he supplies a useful rationale for biography that may be used in its educational applications:

The biographical method is an effort to reconstruct the life course by interviewing the person and by using various other sources, much as the biographer does in writing a book-length life story. Like the cross-sectional and longitudinal methods, it is not a single entity but a broad approach, with many variations in research design, techniques, and aims. It, too, has inherent limitations, especially in its reliance on memory and reconstruction. It is not ideal for all purposes and to the exclusion of other methods. . . .[But] the biographical method is the only one that enables us to obtain a complex picture of the life structure at a given time and to delineate the evolution of the life structure over a span of years. It is well suited for gaining a more concrete sense of the individual life course, for generating new concepts, and in time, for developing new variables, measures, and hypotheses that are rooted in theory and are relevant to life as it actually evolves.

For Levinson the "life structure" means the underlying pattern in a person's life at a particular time. Cremin favored biography for what it displays of a person's "educative style." Archive sponsored work could explore this suggestive idea in relation to the lifespan implications of work on learning styles in higher education and career choice (Kolb 1981) or perhaps to the ambitious format for explaining fundamental cognitive differences in Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind* (1983).

Because the methods of educational biography rely on integration of research from overlapping fields that have, paradoxically, often been isolated from one another the Archive will provide bibliographic resources to help guide research, as well as a discursive glossary signifying, for the special purposes of educational biography, the uses of terms from developmental psychology, gerontology, cognitive science, education and learning theory, and literary and narrative inquiry.

As Cremin acknowledged, educational biographies share many interests and methods with traditional biography, a form with meaning for the study of adult development and aging generally (Weiland 1989). Writing an educational biography means exploring the role of education--formal and informal--in an individual's mature years. But stories of individual lives may still be approached with the goals proposed by Henry James: "To live over people's lives is nothing unless we live over their perceptions, live over their growth, the change, the varying intensity of the same--since it was by these things they themselves lived."

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