



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
GRAHAM SCHOOL
CONTINUING LIBERAL AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Group Therapy with Great Books: On the Remaking of Adults through Lifelong Liberal Re-Education

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Lecture Description

Since 1946, the University of Chicago Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults has provided opportunities for intellectually curious adults to read and discuss selected “great books” under the guidance of staff instructors. Why? And why have intellectually curious adults continued to take advantage of these opportunities? In this lecture, I will attempt to answer these and related questions as part of a general reflection on the ends and means of lifelong liberal learning. My starting point will be a 1958 observation by Warren Winiarski, then a Basic Program staff instructor, that: “Adult education of this kind is not a continuing of their education; it is the possibility of their being re-educated. For to be educated in this way means ... to be de-educated or to unlearn what we learned before.”



Acknowledgement & Disclaimer

- Many people have contributed to my thinking:
 - Teachers Past
 - Colleagues Past and Present
 - Students Past and Present
 - Liberal Education Theorists Past and Present
- The views expressed in this lecture are my own. They are not (yet?) the views of the University of Chicago or the Graham School.



Basic Program 70th Anniversary

- 1946–2016
- Founding
- Evolution
- Essence
- Self-Examination
- Renewal





- 3 May 1946
- Initial Proposal by University College
- “the problem of collegiate liberal education for adults at University College”

TENTATIVE
5/3/46

A Proposal for
AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM IN THE LIBERAL ARTS
at University College

This memorandum attempts, first, to state the problem of collegiate liberal education for adults at University College, and then to propose a solution in the form of a program of studies.

The word "collegiate" is stressed to differentiate what is here proposed from a program of truly adult liberal education. Collegiate liberal education for adults can be justified for some, not all adults, and only on the grounds that some adults were deprived of such education in their youth. In contrast adult liberal education is a necessity for all adults regardless of the amount or quality of prior institutional training.

In addition to describing the content of a unit curriculum of collegiate education for adults, this memorandum will discuss the teaching methods to be used, and the administrative requirements of such a program.

The Problem of Liberal Education at University College

Liberal education should begin in youth and should continue throughout life. The formal schooling of children, in the grades and through college, should provide the basis for continuing learning, whether in the form of self-education carried on individually or organized institutionally and socially. In fact, the A.B. degree should signify nothing more than preparation for the completion of education in adult years.

If the schools do not provide this basis for adult learning, or if for any reason some adults have been deprived of this preparation, there arises the peculiar educational problem of having to supply during adulthood what should have been acquired during childhood. It is with this special problem that this report is concerned.



- 8 May 1946
- Central Administration Reacts
- “[T]he proposal offers no real justification at all for the program it purports to sponsor.”

The proposal states that the program can be justified “only on the grounds that some adults were deprived of such education in their youth.” It further asserts that “the Great Books Seminars represent a true program of adult liberal education.” It is my observation that anyone is admitted to the Great Books Seminars who is interested, regardless of his possession or lack of collegiate, liberal education; and I expect that the practice will continue. Mulling these things over in my mind, I come regretfully to the conclusion that the proposal offers no real justification at all for the program it purports to sponsor.

What I am interested in is a broad program of adult liberal education, of which the Great Books Seminars are an important part, but only a part. The introductory phase or curriculum serves the purpose of bringing all students together on a common preliminary ground regardless of their formal or informal educational preparation, and preparing and motivating them for further study. The question of the relationship between such a program and the Great Books Seminars can be answered by declaring that the Great Books Seminars constitute a course or sequences of courses in the Great Books, and as such have a place in both the introductory and later phases of the adult liberal education program.



- 20 May 1946
- University College Pushes Back
- “In our present society, the great majority of the people have not had an opportunity to secure a liberal education.”

Several persons commented on the document's insistence that the liberal arts should be obtained in college and that the aim of the proposed program could be said to be truly adult educational. This point was included in an attempt to be painfully clear about the character of the program. It would obviously be only in an ideal society that all young people could achieve the goal established. In our present society, the great majority of the people have not had an opportunity to secure a liberal education. It is too bad that they did not have this opportunity but they can start at no earlier time than now. It is hoped that the proposed program would have several values which are of crucial importance. It would give some people a liberal education. It would set a pattern for other adult educational institutions and encourage them, even if they did not find our program acceptable, to develop special programs to meet this end. It would encourage colleges for young people to rethink some of their own programs.



- 2 July 1946
- What's in a Name?
- “Mr. Barden said that the title did not ‘sing’ but that he could not think of a better one.”

Mr. Cutler said that he was somewhat stumped in thinking of a good name for the program. He offered as his suggestion “The Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults” and requested the staff to make further suggestions. Mr. Houle suggested that the article “A” might be substituted for the article “The” in order to avoid pretentiousness. Mr. Barden said that the title did not “sing” but that he could not think of a better one. Since the program would soon have to be named Mr. Cutler requested that any suggestions from the staff should be brought to his attention in the near future. Mr. Cutler also said that as soon as he had completed the first draft of the program he wished to pass it around among the staff for their criticisms and suggestions.



- 19 August 1946
- *Newsweek*:
“Great Books
for Grownups”
- “a new basic program of liberal education for adults centering about the ‘great books’”

ter Crimes,” Eddie Dowling and Louis Singer, producers of “The Glass Menagerie,” bought the American rights to the opera. As of last week, they still intend to bring it to Broadway before the end of the year, but admit that it will probably be a prestige-making, rather than a money-making, production.

DANCE: Steps and Attitudes

It was early July in the Berkshires, and the 50-odd students at the Jacob's Pillow University of the Dance near Lee, Mass., were busy with their attitudes and techniques. Suddenly, from outside the rehearsal barn, a blast shattered the air. Seventeen of the young men froze.

They were the school's CIs, there because they had chosen to spend their Bill of Rights education money for dance instruction. Although they had been told earlier since their arrival in June that the first in question was only dynamiting for the theater's new parking lot, it still never failed to catch them off guard.

These seventeen CIs at Jacob's Pillow were studying dancing for the same reason as the veterans are taking law, engineering, or even sculpturing—to go on with what they had been interested in before, to prepare themselves for an entirely different career. Those who had danced previously are now limbering up long-used muscles and getting caught up in special skills grown rusty. Those who had not thought seriously about dancing have their eyes on Broadway, on the concert stage, on ballet, or on the founding of schools.

Pillow for Dancers: At Jacob's Pillow the veterans take daily lessons in many and varied dance styles. From Ted Shawn, the school's famous director, they

get the benefit of the American dance forms Shawn created first with his own family. An American dancer who has made herself an authority on Hindu and Spanish dance techniques, teaches them with a thoroughness and wit which fascinate many a student who has never before taken neck-jerking or heel-tapping seriously.

José Limón, who instructs the modern dance classes, is a veteran himself, as is Barton Mumaw, Shawn's distinguished graduate and now associate director of the school. Jess Meeker, the Shawn men's group composer-accompanist who emerged from the war a field artillery captain is also back at his old chores.

At the two weekly performances in the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Theater, the men also get actual stage experience. Last week, for example, they donned *dhotis*, the involved wrap-around pants of Hindu male dancers, and joined Shawn and La Meri in an East Indian production.

Most of the ex-CIs live about a mile from the school proper, up on a hill in a house which one season's students after another have called “The Ark.” Here, the evening bull sessions are not often centered around talk of the blond waitress at the nearest tavern (about 2 miles away). Mostly the students talk about their classes, what they learn, and what they will do with it.

As Bennie RiChard, veteran of the Pacific from Australia to Tokyo, said: “We've lost a lot of time, and we have to make it up fast.” Besides his Silver and Bronze Stars, Bennie has three Purple Hearts and a badly machine-gunned left leg which still needs treatment. But he and his wife have two dancing schools in Tampa, Fla., and that's why he's at Jacob's Pillow this summer.



CIs in the Jacob's Pillow classes take their dancing seriously

Great Books for Grownups

For culture-hungry people with two evenings a week to spare during the next four academic years, the University of Chicago last week had impressive, if frankly experimental, plans: Come fall it will introduce in University College a new basic program of liberal education for adults centering about the “great books.”

Devised by Dean Cyril O. Houle of University College, the new course for grownups will package five “learning activities.” The principal one, patterned after the famous Chicago seminars formerly conducted by Chancellor Robert M. Hutchins and Prof. Mortimer J. Adler, will be informal round-table discussion of assignments in Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Kant, Hegel, Darwin, Marx, Freud, and some two score more of the pacemakers of thought.

In addition to the seminars, where instructors' questions will be designed to stimulate argument rather than to see whether students have done their homework, the program schedule offers: (1) lectures to block in historical contexts, (2) “communications workshops” for practice in handling words, (3) “laboratory workshops” to furnish actual experience in such things as solving mathematical problems, conducting scientific experiments, and listening to music, and (4) “problems workshops” to measure the impact of the great books on contemporary issues.

Foreseeing that they may have to cope with unexpected problems of adult learning, Dean Houle and his co-workers have been careful to chart the course only in a general way. Grading methods have yet to be evolved, but students who successfully complete the four years are promised a certificate defining their accomplishment and they may, by special examination, qualify for a bachelor's degree.

There will be no age limit for students and no particular academic prerequisite; the only hurdle is the usual University College entrance examination, largely a test of reading, writing, and psychological aptitudes. Nevertheless, Chicago dons are proceeding cautiously. This fall, while yet-undesignated teachers log the shoals, only 70 students will be admitted. University officials hope that the ageless drawing power of the great books will double enrollment each year thereafter.

Tanks Into Scholars

When the battle haze of the second world war lifted, the United States found on its hands a troublesome liability in the shape of billions of dollars' worth of unwanted surplus property strewn to the four corners of the world. A part of that liability was being converted last week into a valuable and continuing asset: a grand-scale scholarship system which, in the next two or three decades, will shuttle an estimated 150,000 students and



- October 1946
- First meeting of
**The Basic Program
of
Liberal Education
for Adults**



(Not 1946 😊)



- 4 November 1947
- Weekly Program
- “a program midway between the Basic Program and the great books seminars”

Mr. Cutler reviewed that situation in regard to the Basic Program enrolment this year and discussed the new proposed program which would consist of weekly seminars, a program midway between the Basic Program and the great books seminars in qualitative and quantitative differences. In this program the weekly seminars would probably be supplemented by a companion activity such as an intensive examination of a smaller portion of the text. The Basic Program staff is considering the question of concentrating on this weekly program, in order to make some comparisons with other programs now in operation. Plans have been made to start one or two classes in the winter quarter as a try-out to determine whether to carry two separate programs, concentrate on one or the other, or to consider the two kinds of activities as organically part of the same thing.



Evolution of the Basic Program

- Ongoing Revision of the Four-Year Reading List
- Alumni Courses & Alumni Sequences
- Summer, Open-to-All & Online Courses
- Weekend Study Retreats & Symposia
- First Friday and Works of the Mind Lecture Series
- Spring Break in Greece
- Elimination of Twice-a-Week Program, Natural Science & Social Science Tutorials, Course Credit



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Essence of the Basic Program

Intellectually curious adults from all walks of life engaging in rigorous, empathic, collaborative close readings of classics of the Western tradition under the guidance of professional staff instructors.



Ongoing Self-Examination & Renewal

- What, exactly, do we do?
- Why do we do what we do?
- How can we best do what we do?
- Are there new ways of doing what we do?
- Are the old ways of doing what we do still useful?



- 30 January 1959
- “On the Objectives of the Basic Program”
- “[E]ducation for adults is education of those who are ... already educated; it is the attempt to educate those who have been educated and are beyond education.”

January 30, 1959

To: Marvin Zetterbaum

From: Warren Winiarski

Preliminary Report on the Curriculum of the Basic Program, Section II

The Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults is confronted with something like a paradox. It is a program of study in the liberal arts, a program for the educating of those who participate in it. But its students are adults; they are mature human beings who are recognized to be fully grown, fully developed members of society. Society, recognizing them as full citizens, able to participate in all rights, duties and privileges of citizenship, recognizes them as being already educated. The paradox, therefore, consists in this: education for adults is education of those who are, because they are adults, already educated; it is the attempt to educate those who have been educated and are beyond education.

The first task of any program of education for adults would be then to resolve this paradox in so far as it admits of resolution: to justify the education of those who have been educated. It would be the task of the Basic Program, in particular, to justify its specific kind of liberal education for adults: to show that here there is not a superfluity or a repetition or a harmless and trivial pastime. The Basic Program, in particular, must say what kind of education it is, and thus distinguish itself from the kind it is not. It must show that it is education, and worthy to be thought of as education, even for those who have been educated.

I shall try to do this by an examination of the parts of the title by which we are known: Liberal Education for Adults. I shall partially invert the order of the words as they stand so that what they mean may become clearer, discussing first education, then liberal, and finally adults. Proceeding in this way, I shall be enabled to speak about what we are, namely, a basic program of liberal education for adults.

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[W]e reopen the universal problems and questions, and thus call into question the particular and specific answers which constitute the adulthood of adults; we unmake adults — we make adults into children. Adult education of this kind is not a continuing of their education; it is the possibility of their being re-educated. For to be educated in this way means, in so far as the principles, answers and beliefs constitutive of adulthood are questioned — to be de-educated or to unlearn what we learned before. It is in this sense then that liberal education for adults — of the sort we have described — is a danger to the adults we educate.

— Warren Winiarski, “On the Objectives of the Basic Program”



FUNCTIONS	LIBERAL EDUCATION				
	JUVENILE	COLLEGIATE	REMEDIAL	CONTINUING	TRANSFORMATIVE
			LIFELONG		
			ADULT		
Skills of Learning*					
Transmission of Culture*					
Understanding the World*					
Engaging the World*					
Self-Actualization*					
Self-Remaking					GROUP THERAPY WITH GREAT BOOKS

* Drawn from: DeNicola, *Learning to Flourish* (2012)



Liberal Re-Education [for Adults]

- Self-remaking by “getting back to basics” and “working one’s way out again” (new particulars)
- Re-evaluate self as object of inquiry (externally)
 - Add new paradigms of understanding (“perspectives”)
- Re-evaluate self as subject of inquiry (internally)
 - Remove barriers to understanding (“blind spots”)
- Lifelong
 - Multiple serial personalities
 - YOU ~~2.0~~, ~~3.0~~, ~~4.0~~, ~~5.0~~, ...



“Know Thyself!”

[The] Socratic quest for self-knowledge is perhaps the single most difficult and problematic of all human endeavors. Probably the most difficult aspect of the enterprise is to understand that, appearances to the contrary, we are not knowledgeable but profoundly ignorant of ourselves. It is this profound ignorance of ourselves that was Socrates’ greatest discovery.

— Herman Sinaiko, “Socrates and Freud: Talk and Truth”



Philosophy as “*Psyche* Therapy”

In several of Plato’s *Dialogues*, Socrates likens his activity to the work of doctors. But whereas doctors treat the body, correcting its deficiencies and malfunctions, Socrates wishes to treat the soul and correct its disorders. [...] For Socrates the sickness of the soul [was ...] the essential ignorance from which we all suffer, ignorance of ourselves.

— Herman Sinaiko, “Socrates and Freud: Talk and Truth”



Socrates as a “*Pysche* Therapist”

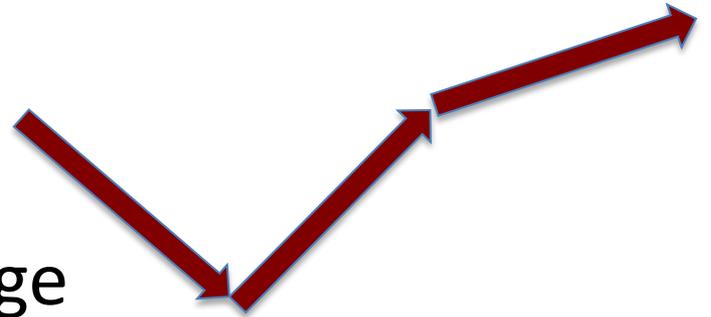
Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (463a–466a, 521d–522a)			PROACTIVE	REACTIVE
BODY	HEALTH (REALITY)	RATIONAL ART(S) DEVOTED TO THE GOOD	[Unnamed Art]	
	FLATTERY (ILLUSION)	IRRATIONAL TRICK(S) DEVOTED TO THE PLEASANT	Gymnastics	Medicine
SOUL	HEALTH (REALITY)	RATIONAL ART(S) DEVOTED TO THE GOOD	Political Art	
	FLATTERY (ILLUSION)	IRRATIONAL TRICK(S) DEVOTED TO THE PLEASANT	Legislation	Justice
			Sophistic	Rhetoric



Socrates' Method

“Now watch how [the slave boy] recollects things in order — the proper way to recollect. [...] [H]e will discover by seeking the truth in company with me, though I simply ask him questions without teaching him.” — Plato, *Meno* (82e, 84d)

- 1) Unlearning of False Opinions
- 2) Arousal of True Opinions
- 3) Anchoring of [True] Knowledge





“The Talking Cure” for Ignorance

One can learn without being taught. This possibility makes conversation — dialogue — the human activity most suited to the growth of wisdom in the soul. The greatest block to learning is our ignorance of our own ignorance [...]. The block can be removed most effectively in a free, intimate conversation in which any participant can raise objections, demand clarification, or request further information.

— Herman Sinaiko, “Dialogue and Dialectic”



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Plan B: Read Great Books

“The best which has been thought and said”

— Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*



Plan B: Read & Discuss Great Books

Solitary reading will enable a man to stuff himself with information; but without conversation his mind will become like a pond without an outlet — a mass of unhealthy stagnature. It is not enough to harvest knowledge by study; the wind of talk must winnow it, and blow away the chaff; then will the clear, bright grains of wisdom be garnered for our own use or that of others.

— William Mathews, “Literary Clubs”



Plan B: With Professional Educators

“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.”

— Mark Van Doren, *Liberal Education*



Basic Program Teaching as Mastery of:

- 1) Texts
- 2) Contexts (“Horizontal” and “Vertical”)
- 3) Students
- 4) Self
- 5) Pedagogies
- 6) Mediums of Instruction
- 7) Real-Time Socratic Integration of 1–6



Group Therapy with Great Books

- Course Structure
 - 1) “Sage on the Stage” (Orienting)
 - 2) “Guide on the Side” (Facilitating)
 - 3) “Out of a Job” (Observing)
- Class Structure
 - 1) Unguided Discussion (Diagnostic)
 - 2) Didactic Mini-Lecture (Framing and Reframing)
 - 3) Guided Discussion (Assisted Discovery)



Group Therapy with Great Books

- Group Dynamics
 - What & how each is saying (Present [Para-] Verbal)
 - What & how each has said before (Prior [Para-] Verbal)
 - What each is not saying (Non-Verbal)
- Mutual Facilitation of “Aha!” Moments of Discovery
 - Transforming what is seen into what could be seen
 - “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17 NIV)



The Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults at 70 (1946–2016)*

A Voluntary Discomfort Zone
at the Forefront of Flourishing and therefore
at the Forefront of Perplexity —
Remedial, Continuing, Transformative.

** According to Adam Rose*