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Lifelong Learning in the United States and Japan

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Abstract

Assuming learning to be a lifelong process, it is important to provide older adults with the opportunities to pursue educational activities. The growing number of older adults in America and globally has led to an increased demand for educational programs in many nations. As a concept, lifelong learning emphasizes the potential to provide useful learning opportunities for older adults. Lifelong learning has become an international issue; many countries have developed lifelong learning policies. The United States and Japan represent two nations that have taken very different approaches in implementing lifelong learning for older adults. This paper examines the programs available to older adults in the United States and Japan. It is suggested that variations in lifelong learning policy and programs are explained by cultural and social structural differences between the United States and Japan. Recommendations for expanding and improving existing programs are also considered.

Introduction

Learning is a significant force in people's lives. In many societies, children become familiar with formal education at a young age, although the role and content of their education varies with cross-cultural variations in education-related values. In many nations students transition to some form of optional higher (e.g., postsecondary) education after completing compulsory education. It is often assumed that once a diploma or degree is obtained, one has learned all that is necessary to function successfully in adult life. Learning, however, continues throughout adulthood. The desire and need for new learning experiences does not diminish with age.

Humans do not stop learning because they age; the desire to learn can remain strong across the lifespan. Unfortunately, the educational needs of older adults (in this article defined as age 65 and over, unless otherwise noted) are often overlooked due to prejudicial and typically inaccurate beliefs that they lack the interest and/or abilities to continue education. But because the ability to learn does not cease at any particular age, older adults deserve opportunities to continue their education commensurate with those of younger adults. Many elders need opportunities to express themselves and under-

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stand the limitations and uncertainties of aging, and their reactions to these. In any society, educational opportunities for older adults become increasingly salient as its elderly population continues to expand.

In the United States the size of the older population has grown dramatically. In 1900, people over age 65 comprised 4 percent of the United States population. By 2000, this age group made up over 12.4 percent of the population. In 2011 the first Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) turn 65, and it is predicted that by 2030 Americans 65 and older will account for 19.6 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, 2004).

However the growth of the older population is not confined to the United States; the vast majority of nations is now experiencing or will soon experience rapid growth in their older populations. People over age 65, now seven percent of the world's population, is expected to increase considerably by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). For example, Japan is aging more rapidly than any other industrialized country. In 1900, people age 65 and over comprised 5.4 percent of the population. By 2000, the elderly represented 17.3 percent of Japan's population, and may comprise as much as 29.6 percent by 2030 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2005).

As populations continue to age at home and abroad, adult education becomes increasingly important. By allowing older adults to sustain self-efficacy and cope with the aging process, such programs can provide older adults with the resources to maintain their standard of living and can assist them with managing life changes related to the process of aging.

In the United States the growth of the older population, as well as generational traits (e.g., younger generations have more years of education than do older generations), have led to increased demand for educational programs that cater to the needs of this group of learners. Educational programs that allow adults to continue their development and express themselves in creative ways are especially needed in a society like the United States, which has a history of valuing youth and denigrating old age. Adult education and lifelong learning are means for responding to the educational needs of older adults and for providing more accessible learning opportunities.

The terms education and learning are often used interchangeably, one result being that education and, by implication, learning are often considered to occur only in formal settings. There are, however, differences in the meaning of *adult education* and *adult learning* and where each of these activities takes place. *Adult education* is concerned with specific learning outcomes and the processes required for assisting students in achieving those outcomes (Thomas, 1991, as cited in Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 6). *Adult learning*, on the other hand, is a cognitive process internal to the learner and encompasses the unplanned, incidental learning experiences that are part of everyday life (Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 6).

That said, it is also possible to disaggregate *adult education activities* into formal learning activities, non-formal learning activities and informal learning activities. Formal learning occurs in educational institutions and usually leads to credit or a degree. Non-formal learning refers to organized activities occurring outside the formal system in settings such as churches, senior centers and voluntary associations. Informal learning refers to that which is learned from the experience of everyday living (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 21).

Adult education and the variety of contexts in which it occurs are considered to be a part of lifelong learning; however, even when widely defined, lifelong learning encompasses much more than adult education. Lifelong learning, conceptualizing education and learning as a lifetime pursuit, has as its overall goal the restructuring of existing educational systems to better develop the potential for education outside formal settings; thus lifelong learning promotes education across the lifespan and provides everyone with opportunities for educational development.

Implementing or expanding lifelong learning is one way to improve social conditions for older adults whose status and authority have been eroded, often by the forces of modernization. Cowgill (1986) argued that modernization has become the major force undermining the social status and power of the elderly (p. 181). Modernization theory asserts a systematic inverse relationship between the breadth and level of modernization in a society and the status and condition of its older population (Cowgill, 1986). Improvements in health and economic technology, increasing urbanization and education, and a faster rate of social change are the most significant factors contributing to the declining status of the aged.

Social exchange theory provides another perspective to help to explain the importance of promoting education for older adults. Social exchange theory applies a cost-benefit model to social interaction. It posits that withdrawal and social isolation of older adults does not result from individual desire, but rather from the unequal exchange between older adults and non-elderly members of society and the elders' perceived need to conserve their diminishing resources and social power for their most important needs, activities and relationships (Dowd, 1980).

Examining educational policies and their outcomes is thus a first step in determining if enhancing educational opportunities can reduce the hypothesized negative effects of modernization on the social status of older adults. Because the United States and Japan are both modern, post-industrial countries with large and increasing older populations, the forces of modernization have most likely had a dramatic impact on the status of older adults in both nations. However, cultural differences between the countries may well have played a significant role in the development and provision of educational policies affecting the elderly. An examination of educational opportunities for older adults in these countries can reveal those policies with the most potential for improving the status of older adults, and the relationship between culture, social structure, and learning opportunities for older adults.

An historical review of lifelong learning and adult education in the United States and Japan will illustrate what actions have been undertaken thus far and what remains to be accomplished in terms of educational opportunities for older adults. We also examine the impact of modernization on the status of the aged and the prospects of lifelong learning for improving the well-being and social status of older adults. This research will describe how American-Japanese variations in cultural attitudes and values enhance or inhibit lifelong learning opportunities.

Although adult education and lifelong learning can take many forms, this article focuses on learning occurring in formal settings due to the availability of information on activities occurring in these settings. Government policies for promoting adult education and lifelong learning in both countries will be of particular interest.

Educational programs that allow adults to continue their development and express themselves in creative ways are especially needed in a society like the United States, which has a history of valuing youth.

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The Concept of Lifelong Learning

The emergence of the concept of lifelong learning can be traced back to the 1960s and the radical intellectualism of the student movement, with its demand for new forms of education that promoted diversity, pluralism and individual freedom (Field, 2001). Discussions of the concept were not isolated to individual countries but occurred in international gatherings led by intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). UNESCO was the major force in promoting global discussions of lifelong learning, strongly promoting the idea that education should occur universally and across the life span, and should not merely be formal education for a “privileged few” (Field, 2001). OECD advocated lifelong learning due to its potential for developing the human capital of workers.

Lifelong learning is based on three attributes: lifelong learning, lifewide learning, and the motivation to learn (Cropley, 1981, as cited in Schuetze and Slowey, 2000). The lifelong attribute emphasizes the importance of an individual’s formative years of education and how these experiences shape not only how one learns but also one’s motivation to engage in further learning. The lifewide attribute signifies that education occurs both within and without formal school settings; all forms of education are treated as a single learning progression. Finally, engagement in lifelong and lifewide learning depends on an individual’s motivation to engage in learning beyond compulsory schooling (Schuetze and Slowey, 2000). If an individual’s educational experience has been mostly unpleasant, the likelihood of being motivated to participate in non-compulsory lifelong learning is reduced.

The concept of lifelong learning did not enter the world of educational policy making until the 1970s. Few concrete policy developments emerged from discussions of lifelong learning because the concept was overshadowed by the changing economic climate of the times. The lack of power and influence held by the intergovernmental agencies, the main proponents of the lifelong learning, also limited the impact of the early debate upon policy and practice (Field, 2001). For example, the U.S. Congress passed the Lifelong Learning Act in 1976 but did not appropriate funds to implement it because the act was proposed as a solution for a group of “ill-defined problems” (Merriam and Brockett, 1997; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). During the 1990s international interest in lifelong learning was renewed as the concept was promoted as a means for retaining economic competitiveness in a global market by increasing investments in human resources across the life span (Field, 2001). Although interest in lifelong learning continues its revival, concrete policy developments have failed to emerge in the United States.

In Japan, the concept of lifelong learning has enjoyed greater governmental acceptance. The goal of the Ministry of Education is to create a learning society in which people can learn at any stage of life, can freely select and participate in opportunities for study and can have the results of their learning appropriately evaluated. Officials want to promote the idea of engagement in learning across the life span, and to create a variety of routes to qualifications/credentials for those who ended school without them (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005a).

Adult Education in the United States

Adult education in America emerged in response to specific needs at particular times, and its growth has been episodic rather than steady (Merriam and Brockett, 1997). Historical events and cultural preferences often merged to create unique forms of adult education. What one wants to learn, what is offered, and the ways in which one learns are determined to a large extent by the nature of society at any particular time (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 5).

This is clearly illustrated by an examination of the different focus and delivery methods of education in pre-industrial and post-industrial America. In the Colonial period, adult education was based on moral and religious grounds. Because literacy was tied to salvation, it was necessary for adults to be literate, not only to ensure their own salvation, but also that of their children (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994). In early America adults were responsible for educating their children. This practice continued after the revolutionary period, when republican ideals resulted in education focused on developing children and adults to be good leaders and citizens.

In the nineteenth century, as America became an increasingly industrialized society, the growth of knowledge in the natural and social sciences changed people's understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world. For people working in an industrial society, a classical education was no longer adequate preparation. Now education began to take on an increasingly utilitarian quality, since many citizens wanted an education that would provide them with the skills to be successful in practical occupations in commerce and manufacturing.

This shift led to the founding of mechanic's institutes and lyceums. Mechanic's institutes were societies for skilled workers and apprentices. Educational reformers believed that making education functional as well as accessible to mechanics would encourage scientific and technological discoveries that would promote social and economic progress (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994). Lyceums also focused on the dissemination of useful knowledge, but they catered to a wider audience than did mechanic's institutes. Lyceums are credited as constituting "the first adult education school system in the United States" (Hayes, 1932, as cited in Stubblefield and Keane, 1994). They were a major force in the mobilization of community support for adult education (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994).

Adult education did not emerge as field of study until the 1920s. During this time the Carnegie Corporation initiated a major campaign on behalf of adult education by identifying urgent national problems that could be addressed through education (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994). Since World War II, adult education has increasingly been tied to economic forces. Increased global economic competition and the shift from an industrial society to a post-industrial or knowledge-based society spurred educational agencies to emphasize retraining for skilled workers. Today, continuing education has become a way of life for many adults and adult education has become a mode of adaptation in the post-industrial economy (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994).

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Adult Education in Japan

In Japan, adult education is considered a part of lifelong learning. The contemporary phase of adult education in Japan began in 1949 with the passage of the Act for Adult Education. The Act established adult education centers in various communities throughout Japan and provided local authorities with a partial government subsidy to achieve its provisions (Fuwa, 2001).

The concept of lifelong learning was later introduced in relation to adult education and lifelong education in Japan. The Japanese first identified lifelong education as a relevant concept in the 1970s (Wilson, 2001). In 1971 the government issued a report stressing the importance of adult education and lifelong education in a changing society. The concept of lifelong education was later re-conceptualized as lifelong learning to reflect an emphasis on individuals as agents of their own learning (Wilson, 2001). Measures to formally implement lifelong learning began in 1990 with the enactment of the Law Concerning the Development and Promotion of Lifelong Learning (Fuwa, 2001). This law established the Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau, which coordinates and promotes lifelong learning policies. Advisory committees for lifelong learning were also established in all prefectures.

Lifelong learning in Japan has focused on reviewing the education system in order to create a lifelong learning society that promotes the idea of learning at all stages of life. This idea encompasses not only formal education but also nonformal activities or social or cultural education, which is learning through involvement in sports, hobbies, recreation, and cultural and volunteer activities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005b).

The Ministry of Education has been working to expand the diversity of available learning opportunities by promoting participation in various types of education, including formal and nonformal education, and sports activities. Attempts to expand access to formal higher education have included the development of a system for the special selection procedure of adult applicants, increases in evening course offerings, and special registration systems (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005c).

Some scholars have argued that lifelong learning is a “lifeline” for Japanese society because it is a key means for addressing several issues of critical societal importance. Wilson (2001) suggests that lifelong learning can help Japan adapt to and cope with an aging society, improve community building and adjust to economic change. Like the United States, Japan has a growing number of older adults who have more income and time available for lifelong learning pursuits. Policy makers hope to minimize the physical care needs of this group by assisting them in developing a sense of purpose in life after retirement. Engagement in lifelong learning pursuits is one way of achieving this end. Social education, a component of lifelong learning, is viewed as a means to preserve and foster Japanese cultural practices that have diminished in importance with growing modernization (Wilson, 2001). Constantly changing social and economic conditions and the need to acquire new knowledge and skills to keep pace with these changes have also precipitated the need for lifelong learning in Japan. In addition, Japanese administrators view the promotion of lifelong learning as essential for remedying the harmful effects of their society’s preoccupation with academic credentials. The education system is being reformed to promote learning at all stages of life and to ensure that various types of learning are appropriately valued.

Participation in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

In order to provide the most useful educational programs, one should understand who participates in adult education and what factors motivate these individuals to participate. Understanding who participates can assist providers in determining participant needs and can provide ideas for attracting new participants. Much of the research regarding participation in adult education has focused on formal learning activities (e.g., Lamb and Brady, 2005); few studies of participation in nonformal and informal activities have been conducted (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Thus participation data in this section focus on adult education activities occurring in formal settings.

Since Johnstone and Rivera conducted the first national study on participation in adult education in 1965, the profile of the typical adult education participant in the United States has remained remarkably consistent. They found the typical adult education participant is “just as often a woman as a man, is typically under forty, has completed high school or more, enjoys an above-average income, works full-time, most often in a white-collar occupation, is married and has children, lives in an urbanized area but more likely in a suburb than large city, and is found in all parts of the country” (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965, as cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 47). This profile is consistent with that of a 2001 study, which differs from Johnstone and Rivera’s in that it found women more likely than men to participate in adult education (Kim, Hagedorn, Williamson and Chapman, 2004).

In the United States, younger people remain most likely to avail themselves of adult education, but the rate for the older population is fast catching up. While the participation rate for persons age 16-50 is 53-55 percent, 41 percent of adults age 66 and over participated in adult education in 2001. The lowest rate (22 percent) is for persons age 51-65 (Kim, et al., 2004).

Participants in Japan also appear to be middle aged or younger. According to a 1996 report from the Japanese Statistics Bureau, people aged 60 to 69 years old account for 20 percent of those engaged in learning or educational activities (Yamaguchi, 1998). A majority of learners are from middle class backgrounds and very few are from the working class (Fuwa, 2001). This suggests that participants in Japan are also in an above average income bracket and that they are more likely to be employed in white collar occupations.

Although participation in Japan and the United States favors the non-elderly, there are differences. Fuwa (2001) identified trends in Japanese adult education that elaborate upon participant characteristics. The majority of adult education participants in programs at local adult education centers are unemployed, middle-aged females, and the elderly. Adult education activities are also more widely promoted in rural than in urban areas (Fuwa, 2001). While greater participation by women is also found in the United States, the trend toward greater participation by the elderly and the promotion of adult education in rural areas may be explained by differences in administration in adult education in the two countries. The Japanese government has been very active in promoting adult education and has established and partially subsidized adult education centers throughout the country (Fuwa, 2001). The wider availability of these centers may explain why older adults and those in rural areas participate more frequently, at least in programs offered by local adult education centers.

Of any characteristic, prior educational attainment is the best predictor of participation in adult education. The 2001 Adult Education and Lifelong Learning Survey

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demonstrated that in the United States, overall participation rates increased with educational attainment. Of those who had not completed high school, 22 percent participated in educational activities, whereas the participation rate was 58 percent for those with some college education and 66 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or more (Kim et al., 2004).

The correlation between prior educational attainment and increased participation in adult education is also found in Japan. A survey commissioned by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, comparing the educational participation of older adults in six countries including Japan, found a high positive correlation between prior educational attainment and subsequent participation among older adults in each country (Ohsako, 1998).

The reasons cited for participation in adult education vary tremendously. Job-related motives are the most commonly cited reason for participation, followed closely by personal development motives (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Lamb and Brady, 2005). This is the case in both the United States and Japan. In 2001, 30 percent of adults in the United States participated in work related courses while 21 percent participated in personal interest courses (Kim et al., 2004). Yamaguchi (1998) noted that a 1990 survey, commissioned by the Japanese National Institute for Educational Research, revealed that the promotion of vocational knowledge, skills, and techniques, and the promotion of happiness, health and friendship were cited most frequently as the type of learning activities preferred by Japanese adults. Yamaguchi also found that preference for activities varied by age and sex. Younger adults exhibited a greater preference for vocational training activities, while older adults preferred personal development activities such as hobbies and cultural activities. Women exhibited a greater preference for personal development activities, while men tended to prefer vocational activities (Yamaguchi, 1998).

Just as there are commonly cited reasons for participation, there are also commonly cited reasons for nonparticipation. Barriers to participation can be external or "situational," meaning they are outside the control of the individual, or they can be internal or "dispositional," meaning they reflect individual attitudes (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965 as cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). External or situational barriers, especially the lack of time and lack of money, are the most commonly cited reasons for nonparticipation in the United States (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). These reasons are also cited by Japanese adults as factors preventing participation. In both the International Comparison of Learning and Social Participation by the Elderly survey and the Comprehensive Study on Educational Planning of Lifelong Learning Society, Japanese adults cited a lack of time as the main reason for nonparticipation (Ohsako, 1998; Yamaguchi, 1998).

Although external barriers such as lack of transportation or lack of information about available programs can limit the participation of older adults, this group often cites internal or dispositional barriers to participation (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Poor health, fear of being out at night, and lack of interest limit the participation of older Americans (Merriam and Brockett, 1997). Many of these factors were also cited by Japanese elderly. Location, lack of information, lack of interest and poor health are the main factors contributing to nonparticipation among this group (Ohsako 1998; Yamaguchi, 1998).

Much of the research on barriers to participation focuses on individual motivation, attitudes and beliefs as the main factors leading to nonparticipation. However, this focus

ignores structural barriers that limit participation, especially for older adults. One's ability to access learning opportunities is shaped by "framework conditions." These conditions include the values and attitudes of the social groups to which individuals belong as well as the economic structure of society and the features of the educational system itself (Cropley, 1989 as cited in Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 188). These framework conditions restrict the choices available to certain categories of people and open up choices for other categories. It is especially important to consider how structural barriers limit the participation of older adults.

Impact of Educational Attainment on the Social Status of Older Adults

Modernization theory posits an inverse relationship between the level of societal modernization and the social status and conditions of the elderly (Cowgill, 1986, p. 188). Cowgill (1986) defines modernization as:

The transformation of a total society from a relatively rural way of life based on animate power, limited technology, relatively undifferentiated institutions, parochial and traditional outlook and values, toward a predominately urban way of life, based on inanimate sources of power, highly differentiated institutions, matched by segmented individual roles, and a cosmopolitan outlook which emphasizes efficiency and progress (p. 185-86).

The process of modernization often creates structural barriers, especially economic and attitudinal barriers, that undermine the status of older adults, including limiting participation opportunities in education.

Advances in health and economic technology, urbanization and education are the most significant dimensions of modernization that reduce the status of the elderly. Improvements in health technology, such as public sanitation and medicine, increase life expectancy and thus the number of people living into old age. Scientific advances—the development of new products, services and occupations—result in significant changes in the economy, often rendering obsolete the skills and the knowledge of older workers. Increased productivity resulting from new technologies and the increase in the number of available workers creates competition for jobs (Cowgill, 1986). Age based retirement emerges as a remedy.

Increased urbanization also accompanies modernization, caused in large part by the massive migration to burgeoning cities of young adults in search of better jobs. This relocation dissolves the extended family and creates social distance between the generations, complicating the provision of intergenerational support (Cowgill, 1986). Modernization also requires and promotes literacy and education for younger generations. As they acquire more education than their elders and enter a modernized economy, they begin to occupy higher-status positions. Intellectual and moral differences emerge between the generations, and the older generation begins to experience reduced status and influence (Cowgill, 1974, as cited in Hooyman and Kiyak, 2005).

The result, then, is an economic structure and educational system that favor the young and disadvantage the old by restricting older adults' opportunities. These changes reflect a social system that values youth over age. Older adults are considered irrelevant to production and are pushed out of the labor force by societally institutionalized retirement. Technological developments and a youth-oriented education system leave older people with outmoded skills and fewer skill development or retraining opportunities.

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Yamazaki (1994) provides evidence, describing how modernization isolated the older generation and diminished older Japanese adults' social status.

In the process of Japan's modernization, the close relationship with the young was gradually stripped away from the elderly. The role of transmitting culture was taken over by schools and the wisdom of the elders came to be perceived as outdated and was actively avoided. Thus, the elderly gradually lost their social status (p. 455).

Social exchange theory describes how these limited opportunity structures prevent older people from maintaining and updating their skills. The basic assumptions of social exchange theory, as described by Dowd (1980) are: (a) the organization of society reflects the interests of the dominant group, (b) the dominant group attempts to maintain the institutional arrangements that are most favorable to its interests, and (c) the legitimacy of these arrangements is established through socialization, but because socialization is limited in scope and never totally effective the legitimacy given to existing arrangements may be withdrawn (p. 19). That is, societal values and beliefs enhance the power and prestige of a particular group. The dominant group perpetuates values and beliefs that preserve the status quo, thus protecting its interests. Over time in both Japan and America, what power older people had has been gradually stripped from them, making them even less able to be effective agents in increasingly ageist societies.

The possession or lack of resources determines one's experience of everyday life. Dowd (1980) elaborated upon the relationship between age and the possession/utilization of resources. Since possession of desirable resources allows one to remain independent, a decline in resources will negatively impact one's autonomy. Dowd noted five types of resources. Personal characteristics are resources such as strength, beauty, charm, integrity, courage, intelligence and knowledge. Material possessions include monetary or property resources. Relational characteristics are resources that take the form of influential friends or relatives. Authority as a resource is derived from a political position or a position within a formal organization or from another status within a group. Generalized reinforcers are resources such as respect, approval recognition, or support that reinforce one's status (Dowd, 1980, p. 38).

Access to these various types of resources declines with age. For example, diminished strength and physical appearance lead to diminished amounts of relational and personal characteristics, while the deaths of close friends and relatives lead to decreased relational power. Outmoded skills lead to social and economic dependency and prevent older adults from developing exchangeable resources. Because the individual with more resources usually dictates the terms of exchange, diminished resources place the older individual in a weaker negotiating position. This imbalance will persist or even widen, given the nature of exchange and power relations, and over time can come to be viewed as a natural result of aging. Eventually this imbalance creates an image of elderly inability and dependency.

Left with few resources to exchange for more favorable treatment or status, older adults are forced to accept these limitations and withdraw from social life. Some choose age segregation to minimize the costs of unequal exchange. When interactions are limited to age peers, the likelihood of unequal exchange is decreased, since individuals of similar ages often share similar interests and resources (Dowd, 1980).

The disadvantaged person's or group's supply of power resources has to be increased before unequal exchange relationships can be challenged. If withdrawal and isolation result

from unequal exchange processes, but if increases in educational participation promote increased social status, greater emphasis on lifelong learning has the potential to maintain older adults' activity levels and provide necessary resources for improving their image and status in society.

Lifelong Learning Efforts in Japan

The formal promotion of lifelong learning has enjoyed greater success in Japan. At the highest levels, the Japanese government is working to reform the existing educational system to provide learning opportunities at all stages of life. Lifelong learning is one avenue for meeting the societal challenges of a rapidly aging population. As popular interest in older adult education has grown, the diversity of learning opportunities available for older adults has expanded as well. Three specific types of educational opportunities exist for older adults in Japan. Education *for* the elderly includes programs directed toward the elderly and their specific educational needs. Education *about* the elderly includes educating youth about aging and older adults. Education *by* the elderly involves older persons assuming the role of educator so as to share their knowledge and experience with younger generations (Yamazaki, 1994, p. 453). Different programs have been developed to address each of these areas.

Education for the elderly is often provided through community education centers or *kominkan*. During the 1970s Japan funded local governments to establish *kominkan* in their communities. The government currently sponsors a number of programs that aim to promote continuing education among older adults. Three of the largest programs are: Senior Citizens' Colleges, which offer courses on health and recreation; The Silver Audit System, which allows senior citizens to audit college courses at local colleges, and; The Senior Citizens' Continuing Education Program, which offers a variety of courses through the local *kominkan* (Nojima, 1994). This last program offers courses on lifestyle patterns, mental and physical health, issues of importance in Japanese society, hobbies and traditional arts, and community activism and social skills (Nojima, 1994). These courses are offered with the belief and hope that elders will take what they learn and apply it within their own communities.

Other examples of education for the elderly programs are ELNET (Educators' Learning Network) Open College and the University of the Air. The both attempt to bring lifelong learning to a wider audience. ELNET uses satellite communications to transmit open lectures from universities and other institutions to citizens' public halls and other locations nationwide (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005c). The University of the Air (UAJ), established in 1983, is a four-year university that offers all of its courses via television, radio and other media to bring learning opportunities to a wider range of Japanese (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005d). The mission of the UAJ includes providing a flexible route to a college education for those who may have discontinued or never had this opportunity, such as the working class, women and the elderly (Iwanaga, 1994). The UAJ allows older persons to access the university system without encountering the entrance exam system, and the use of telecourses allows older students to complete their studies at their own pace (Iwanaga, 1994). The University of the Air is also a less expensive alternative for those on a limited income.

Education about the elderly and education by the elderly have been sponsored by the

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Ministry of Education at elementary and secondary schools to raise awareness of the impact of the aging population on Japanese society. The phenomenon whereby the older population grows faster than the younger population is known as *koreika* (Makino, 1994). *Koreika* draws attention to the importance and necessity of providing older adults with opportunities for more active engagement in society. Ensuring intergenerational relationships has been identified as one way to achieve this end (Yamazaki, 1994). Specific efforts to establish or renew such relationships have involved educating school age children about the factors contributing to the expansion of the aging population and introducing to them the necessity of expanding the existing social welfare system to offer support to this generation (Nakamura, 1994). Inviting older adults to visit schools and participate in special events, such as cultural festivals, and asking older adults to serve as educators, sharing their knowledge of cultural practices and other skills, are also common practices used to promote intergenerational interaction. In addition, the Ministry of Education has actively encouraged schools to provide more opportunities for students to participate in volunteer activities that include social contact with the aged. It has even been suggested that students' volunteer activities be reviewed as part of the university admissions process in order to encourage greater participation in these programs (Nakamura, 1994).

Lifelong Learning Efforts in the United States

Unlike Japan, the United States has no formal government policy to promote lifelong education. However, there are some notable government actions that have contributed to the growth of educational programs for older adults. In 1971, the White House Conference on Aging recognized the potential benefits of expanding educational opportunities for seniors; subsequently the 1973 amendments to the Older Americans Act encouraged senior centers to include education as part of their mission (Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995). But little else has been initiated by the federal government to promote lifelong learning. Little federal money has been directly appropriated for educational programs for seniors; the promotion of older adult education still remains a locally supported endeavor.

Even without government involvement, the growing number of older Americans has led to a growth in demand for and establishment of educational programs targeted at older adults. According to Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie (1995), there are five organizational models of older adult education programs that serve seniors at the local level. Many of these organizations work to empower seniors by allowing them to play leadership roles as teachers, administrators and planners. College and university-based Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLIs) offer members the opportunity to engage in educational activities that are designed, coordinated and taught by other institute members. Older Adult Services and Information Systems (OASIS) offer programs in the arts and humanities, health promotion and volunteer activities. Shepard's Centers is a network of interfaith community-based organizations that provide opportunities for older adults to engage in meaningful learning activities. Community colleges offer special courses for seniors at little or no cost. Senior centers offer a wide range of educational programs for older adults (Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995).

The North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement found many of these programs were developed at the local level with the assistance of national networks or host organizations such as the Shepherd's Center network, and did not result from national legisla-

tion or public policy (Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995). In fact, many of the programs were initiated by leaders within the host organization who saw a need for older adult education. Data also indicated that once the programs were established, being associated with a host organization added legitimacy and prestige to the program (Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995). These findings corroborate Knowles' finding that throughout the history of adult education in America, formal adult education programs "tend to survive to the extent that they become attached to agencies established for other purposes" (Knowles, 1977 as cited in Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 109).

Another program offering older adults the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning is Elderhostel. This program utilizes space and faculty available at colleges and universities during the summer months to offer noncredit courses on diverse topics, allowing older adults to continue to employ their intellectual and creative abilities (Hickson and Housley, 1997). Elderhostel offers nearly 8,000 programs annually in more than 90 countries to almost 170,000 older adults each year (Elderhostel, 2005). (This program was not included in the above discussion because is not a strictly local program and because it does not involve participants in curriculum and program planning [Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995].)

Inviting older adults to visit schools and participate in special events and asking older adults to serve as educators are also common practices used to promote intergenerational interaction.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the histories, programs and data above, it appears the focus on lifelong learning in Japan has served to expand educational opportunities for older adults. The promotion of lifelong learning policies on a national level has raised awareness of the importance of older adult education. While various education opportunities are available to older Americans, the U.S. has no nationally recognized policy regarding lifelong learning. To survive and gain legitimacy, many adult education programs in America have had to attach themselves to other institutions or programs that are not specifically focused on adult education. Both America and its elderly might well benefit from the development of a coordinated national policy similar to Japan's. Such a policy would raise awareness of the need for promoting further educational development among older adults, provide older adults with even greater opportunities for accessing educational opportunities that can assist them in developing new skills and resources, and provide evidence of a belief in the symbiosis of intergenerational relations.

But there are problems that can hinder the expansion of lifelong learning programs for older adults. Access is a major concern for ethnic minorities, individuals in lower socioeconomic classes, and the disabled in both the United States and Japan. In America, minority adults are disproportionately unemployed, earn lower incomes, and are less educated (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 5). Data reviewed above indicate that adult education participants tend to be employed full-time, middle-class and above, and have higher levels of educational attainment, and few programs for older adults in this country use creative or aggressive measures for recruiting minorities (Manheimer and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995).

The Japanese have also had difficulty integrating minorities and members of the lower classes into the educational system. For example, the Buraku people are a socially segregated group in Japan with a high illiteracy rate (Yamaguchi, 1998). Relying on self-selection for adult education participation will likely only widen the educational gap. Both countries need aggressive policies to integrate marginalized groups into lifelong learning pursuits.

Lifelong Learning in the United States and Japan

Inadequate facilities can also inhibit the pursuit of lifelong learning. Older persons often cite lack of transportation and limited mobility as barriers to participation. Facilities used for older adult education must be accessible for those with limited mobility or other disabilities. While transporting older learners adds significantly to the cost of adult education programs, especially in rural areas, including transportation as an element of the educational program may well increase older adult participation in lifelong learning.

Facilities must not only be accessible; they must also be able to accommodate participants once they enter the learning environment. Older adults often have diminished visual and aural capacities and may tire more easily or experience more learning-related health problems than younger adults. These conditions can affect the performance of older adults in the learning environment, and those who plan and deliver lifelong learning activities must understand this and adjust the learning environment accordingly. Program staff with formal education/training in gerontology and adult education will be an advantage.

The growth of older adult educational programs in the United States has been sporadic, apparently largely due to there being no coordinated national effort to promote lifelong learning. In Japan, efforts to promote lifelong learning have been more concerted and have received greater government support. This difference in approach to educational policy is at least in part explained by cultural differences between the two countries.

Japanese society tends to recognize, value, and respond to group concerns over individual ones. This contrasts sharply with the American emphasis on individuality. These differing cultural values are reflected in the level and nature of the approaches to policy formation in the two countries. The United States has taken a more decentralized approach, essentially allowing each state to develop its own adult education policies and programs, while the Japanese have taken a more centralized approach and developed more inclusive policies that extend standardized lifelong learning opportunities to the entire populace. This concerted effort to promote lifelong learning opportunities in Japan has helped maintain the status of the elderly against the ravages of modernization by providing them with opportunities to learn new, salient skills and develop new roles and resources. In doing so, older adults increase their resource base and become more powerful actors in social exchange situations.

With the older population exploding or poised to explode in nearly every nation, the roles and statuses available to the elderly become more important, not just to the growing number of older persons, but to the society in which they live and, to a greater or lesser degree, function and contribute. Without conscious intervention, however, modernization threatens the quality of life for the elderly in their families, communities and societies. Education is a powerful means to acquire the necessary resources (i.e., relevant knowledge and skills) to maintain social status and to negotiate favorable terms in social exchanges, both individually and as a cohort.

As noted, cultural differences between Japan and America preclude either nation adopting the other's policies and programs wholesale. Nonetheless, the more coordinated and apparently more positive response in Japan shows that empowerment through education is achievable, even (and especially) for older people. Demographically Japan is the world's oldest country. America would do well to use it as a crystal ball, a glimpse into the future, and to learn from Japan's experiences, adopting the positive and adapting it to America's own values. In five years American Baby Boomers begin turning 65. It is a highly educated generation, one that will likely want to continue active engage-

ment in society and one that is open to lifelong education more than any previous cohort of Americans. For the elderly, both at home and abroad, emphasis on and development of lifelong learning has the potential to oppose the negative consequences of modernization and maintain or increase the resources needed to combat the isolation and segregation that all too often plagues older adults, diminishing not only their enjoyment of life and their place in society, but also society's opportunity to benefit from the contributions they are still able and willing to make.

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