

Fostering Intentional Changes Among Adults

JOAN NEEHALL
ALLEN TOUGH

MANY ADULTS USE the public library during their efforts to change and learn. They use library materials and staff for implementing changes, for gaining knowledge and skill, for help with goals and planning, for advice, for encouragement and support, and for information about available resources and opportunities.

Adults, however, could gain even more from public libraries. Through understanding intentional adult changes and learning, librarians could develop improved resources, services and policies. As a result, public libraries could become even more important and useful in adult learning and change.

We have recently completed independent but related studies of adult changes. Our findings will be summarized before the major implications for public libraries are discussed.

Intentional Changes

The comprehensive study by Allen Tough focused on intentional changes among adults. To be included in this study, a change had to contain two key elements. The first element was *choice*. The person definitely chose a particular change; conscious choice and intention were clearly present; the choice was voluntary, not coerced. The second

Joan Neehall is a Ph.D. graduate student, Department of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ontario; and Allen Tough is a professor, Department of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ontario.

element was *striving* or *action*. The person took steps to achieve the chosen change.

In intensive interviews, a range of 150 adults in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom were asked about their intentional changes. Specifically, they were asked to recall their largest, most important intentional change during the past two years. The study was not focused, as some people might assume, on the adult life cycle, or on the psychology of adult development. In fact, it was found that most changes reported by adults were not particularly related to the person's age or stage in life.

Important intentional changes turned out to be particularly common in four areas: (1) job, career and training; (2) human relationships, emotions and self-perception; (3) enjoyable activities; and (4) residence location. These four areas account for 75 percent of all intentional changes. The percentages for all nine areas of change are shown in table 1.

TABLE 1
AREAS OF CHANGE

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Career, job, and training	33
Human relationships, emotions, and self-perception	21
Enjoyable activities	11
Residence location	10
Maintenance of home and finances	7
Physical health	7
Volunteer helping activities	3
Religion	3
Basic competence (in reading, driving, etc.)	3

Note: Each figure indicates the percentage of adults whose largest, most important intentional change in the past two years falls primarily within the given area. N = 144. Source: Allen Tough. *Intentional Changes: A Fresh Approach to Helping People Change*. New York: Cambridge Book Co., 1982, p. 26.

It became increasingly clear during this study that intentional change is often a natural and healthy component in a person's life, and that it should not be assumed to be a sign of severe difficulty, illness or a

Fostering Intentional Changes

highly unsatisfactory life. It seems more appropriate to empathically grasp or treasure another person's changes than to judge or criticize them. We realized during our interviews that it is rarely correct to consider one area or type of change as inherently better than all others, or inherently worse or more dangerous or unimportant.

The results of the interviews clearly showed that many adults succeed in producing significant changes in their environments, activities and inner selves. On the average these adults achieved 80 percent of their desired change. They found these changes very beneficial to themselves and to others. While it is true that people resist certain changes, they definitely seek and achieve certain other changes. It is clear that almost everyone intentionally learns and changes; this activity is not restricted to some special or elite subgroup in the population.

At the beginning of the interview, some people were quite self-deprecating about the size of their changes, but most of them felt much more positive after recalling and reflecting in detail. Apparently people have a negative stereotype about their capacity to choose and produce significant changes in themselves and in their lives.

The adult was asked who performed each of three major tasks: (1) choosing this particular change and deciding to go ahead with it, including estimating costs and benefits; (2) planning the strategy and deciding the steps for achieving the change; (3) actually taking the steps for achieving the change. For each task in turn, the person was asked, "How would you divide the credit or responsibility for performing this task? That is, what percentage of the task was performed by each resource in the list?" The average percentages are shown in table 2.

On the average, the adult assumes about 70 percent of the responsibility for all the subtasks involved in choosing the change, planning the strategy and implementing the change. A significant but smaller role is played by friends, family, neighbors, coworkers and other nonprofessionals during one-to-one interaction. On the average, interviewees gave such persons 23 percent of the credit for the various steps involved in choosing the particular change, 19 percent for planning the strategy and 16 percent for implementation. In choosing the change, for example, the interviewee may have performed most of the effort of gathering information, weighing alternatives and making a decision but may have relied on a spouse or friend to add some useful information, suggest other alternatives and confirm the tentative decision. An interviewee would be considered as performing 100 percent of the task only if he or she performed the entire task without any help, information, useful advice or encouragement from anyone else. Books, booklets,

TABLE 2
 EXTENT TO WHICH VARIOUS RESOURCES CONTRIBUTED TO
 CHOOSING, PLANNING, AND IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGES

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Choosing</i>	<i>Planning</i>	<i>Implementing</i>
The person himself or herself	68	69	73
Nonprofessionals			
In individual one-to-one interaction	23	19	16
In a group	2	2	1
Professionals			
In individual one-to-one interaction	3	7	6
In a group	0.3	1	2
Books and other nonhuman resources	4	4	2

Note: For each of the three tasks in turn, each interviewee distributed 100 percentage points among the various resources. This table presents the means of those percentages. Source: Allen Tough. *Intentional Changes: A Fresh Approach to Helping People Change*. New York: Cambridge Book Co., 1982, p. 53.

magazines, television, films, tapes, phonograph records contributed only about 3 percent.

The central importance of the person in his or her own change process emerged clearly by the end of most interviews. The attitude of the adults at the beginning of the intensive interview, however, was often quite different. They believed that they and others changed without much thought, planning, purpose, choice-making, time and effort. One man said, "Change just happens by accident or else it's caused by others. There is not much I can do about it." The adults were remarkably self-deprecating about their efforts, power, competence, and success at choosing and bringing about major changes in themselves and their lives. Many felt that their change pattern was strange or unique, and therefore did not consider it normal and effective and did not discuss it with others. By the end of a probing interview, however, their ideas appeared to have changed. They recognized that they proceeded far more thoughtfully and purposefully than they had initially believed, and had used carefully chosen, well-organized steps for achieving the change. They were surprised to discover their own planning process, competence, power, and success.

Fostering Intentional Changes

Detailed findings, along with definitions and an interview schedule, are available in a comprehensive book by Tough.¹ This study grew out of earlier studies of major learning efforts or "learning projects" focused on the help that the adult learner receives and needs,² and the frequency and importance of self-planned learning compared to learning in a group or through private instruction.³

The general picture is remarkably similar in the two sets of studies, one set focused on intentional learning and the latter set focused on intentional changes. Whether one looks at intentional learning projects or the broader array of intentional changes, one finds that the adult assumes most of the responsibility, uses friends and family more than books and professionals, achieves the learning or change reasonably successfully, and finds the learning or change of definite benefit. Many adults do, however, encounter obstacles and difficulties: they would like more and better help from books and professionals than they now receive.

Degree of Intentionality

A recent study by Joan Neehall⁴ focused on intentional and unintentional changes. The study is similar to Tough's in that it examined the degree of intentionality of adults' changes. It should be noted, however, that Tough's interviewees measured their single, most important intentional change that had occurred two years prior to the interview; Neehall's interviewees were measuring all their changes, both intentional and unintentional, over a four-year period. She interviewed 100 adults about their changes within eight change areas that had occurred over the past four years. These areas were job and career, human relationships, self-perception, assertiveness, knowledge of world, skills, basic competencies, location of residence, material possessions, maintenance, enjoyable activities, physical health, volunteer helping activities, spiritual growth, basic understanding, and religion. In this study changes were perceived as resting on a continuum: at one extreme are highly intentional changes; at the other extreme are highly unintentional changes which are not striven for or not chosen. A man, for example, gets run over by a car: he did nothing to contribute to the accident. This would be a highly unintentional change. Figure 1 illustrates the intentionality continuum.

The study concerned the areas of changes in 100 adult's lives. It specifically examined their size and importance, degree of intentionality and the unintentional and intentional benefits of these changes to self and to others.

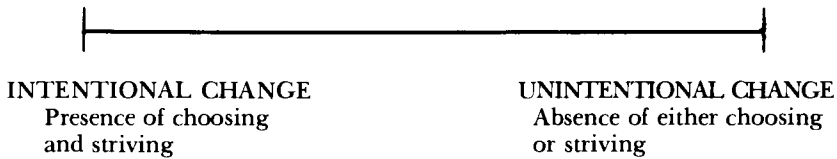


Fig. 1. Intentionality Continuum

The interviewees had experienced many large and important changes over the past four years. On the average, they had changes other than small, unimportant or zero in five change areas. Further, the percentage of intentionality for all their changes within the eight change areas combined was 67 percent. In other words, approximately two-thirds of the interviewees' changes were intentional. The findings about the degree to which they benefited from their changes were as follows:

- changes in this area caused me more harm than good (18 percent);
- of some definite benefit for me (10 percent);
- medium amount of benefit for me (20 percent);
- fairly large amount of benefit for me (29 percent); and
- very large, long-lasting benefit for me (23 percent).

Moreover, the data revealed that others reaped benefits from their changes as well. These findings were as follows:

- changes in this area caused others more harm than good (17 percent);
- of some definite benefit for others (16 percent);
- medium amount of benefit for others (25 percent);
- fairly large amount of benefit for others (26 percent); and
- very large, long-lasting benefit for others (16 percent).

The overall finding, supported by statistical data, was that intentional benefits were significantly higher than unintentional benefits.

The trend that emerges from these studies, then, is one that shows adults being remarkably capable of implementing their intentional changes and in coping with their unintentional changes. Moreover, they and others reap significant benefits from these changes.

Implications for Public Libraries

From the research on changes among adults, several major implications become evident for innovative practices and policies in public libraries. The remainder of this article is devoted to these implications.

The public library is one of the most likely institutions to be highly useful to adults. It already has an outstanding reputation for being motivated primarily by public service, for providing freedom of choice among resources, for being a useful and neutral community information agency, and for its role as a university for everyone.⁵

Perhaps the most significant implication of all is simply a different way of viewing the adult and one's own relationship with that adult. Most adults who use a public library are remarkably vigorous, competent and successful at choosing, planning and implementing the learning and changes that seem most important to them. They have a natural effective process for this and for coping with unintentional changes. They do need and seek a great deal of help, though, and would like even more and better help than they now receive. Librarians might well see themselves as helping people with their changes and learning, not just with their recreation, job and so on. Librarians are already being used by adults during their change efforts and learning projects, and will be used even more in the future if they develop fresh, innovative services. Librarians might, therefore, benefit from recognizing and exploring their place in adult change and learning.

Some librarians will also sense a kinship with the wide-ranging helping enterprise devoted to fostering the entire range of efforts to learn and change. In fact, they might feel part of an even wider enterprise: the many diverse efforts to foster the humane, creative, loving, free aspects of humankind.

The public library's responses to intentional learning and change are related to both front line public services and less visible internal management procedures. In terms of public services, librarians could help people become more knowledgeable about intentional changes in general, more aware of their own unintentional and intentional changes, and more competent in planning and managing their own changes. For example, each library could, at least at times, acquire and conspicuously display resources of different formats on adult changes and have educators talk with library users. As a result, some users will gain increased awareness and knowledge of their own changes and strategy planning. They could be helped to see the effectiveness of their own natural change process, become even more effective at performing

the various tasks and steps involved in changing, and become highly effective at getting appropriate help when needed. This could be a way to help adults overcome their self-deprecation around their skills and change processes.

Public libraries could also explore developing further ways of helping adults set their directions for change and choose broad strategies and paths appropriate for those changes. In Tough's study of intentional changes, about 33 percent of the interviewees indicated they would have benefited from better help with goal setting, and 40 percent from better help with planning their strategy.

Public libraries could continue to develop their tradition of readers' service work or readers' advisory work. They have the distinction of being one of the very few institutions already providing such services for adult learners, but there appears to be, from our perspective and studies, much scope for increased activity that is soundly based on detailed knowledge about intentional and unintentional change behavior. The provision of workshops to teach and help adults choose directions and strategies and develop a repertoire of learning how to learn skills could support and encourage the natural but too often deprecated process of learning.

Also, libraries could simply provide attractive displays of some of the most useful books and other materials for helping people plan their goals and strategies for change. Some books present a broad panorama of possible changes and opportunities.⁶ Others provide useful suggestions, principles, and resources for choosing and guiding one's learning and change.⁷

It is not enough, however, for people to have clear goals and an appropriate choice of strategy: they also need full and accurate information about the detailed resources, opportunities, methods, and paths available for this particular change. We are thinking here of very detailed information about courses, groups, films, books, and so on. There is little point in having resources and methods available if the person is not aware of them, or lacks sufficient information to choose wisely. Public libraries could be particularly helpful in expanding and strengthening the existing mechanisms for providing this detailed information, and in developing innovative new ways of providing such information.

In terms of internal management procedures, policy-setting questions could include: (1) Could our scope or mission or services be broadened to facilitate a wide range of individual changes? (2) Are there fresh creative ways in which we could encourage and assist the entire

Fostering Intentional Changes

range of intentional changes? (3) How can we be most useful in helping people cope with their relatively unintentional changes? (4) In major administrative decisions that we are facing today, which choices around staffing and tight budgets would increase the opportunities and resources for effective intentional change behavior in our readers?

Our research on adult changes may suggest some useful principles for the professional development of staff members. Each staff member is engaged in intentional job-related changes. Each staff member can choose from a variety of paths for improvement, including reading about intentional changes or about becoming an effective helper, discussing problems and methods with colleagues, attending a workshop or professional librarians' meeting, observing a colleague in action and trying to respond empathically to each client. In order to choose initial directions for improvement, a staff member can also seek constructive feedback by observing the client's reactions, by reflection after a helping session, by taping one helping session and listening to the tape a few weeks later, or by directly asking clients to make suggestions about staff behavior.

It can also be useful for library staff to have the experience of interviewing five or more library users about their recent change and learning efforts. This may be regarded initially by library staff as an intrusion into their readers' privacy, but our experience indicates that adults are usually very willing to talk, especially when the interview is handled sensitively and leisurely. The act of listening to these accounts is a powerful experience and can transform the awareness and the behavior of staff members. They will see that their readers' own ongoing efforts to change are common, normal and effective; and that many people are capable, powerful and successful much of the time. They are also willing to change, not unduly resistant or static. Through interviews, a librarian may also see how his or her helping efforts are embedded within the person's total range of intentional changes.

Another series of questions relates to the quality of interactions. Librarians might benefit by asking themselves whether they sometimes tend to overcontrol in their interaction with clients. For any given client and intended change, there will be an optimum range of control by the librarian or other helping professional. In figure 2 this ideal range of control might be 60-80 percent in one set of circumstances, 35-55 percent in another and quite different in a third situation. If the librarian and the changing person stay within this range, the intended change (and the person's future willingness and ability to choose and guide the change) will be facilitated more than if they move higher or lower on the

continuum. Many helping professionals, for a variety of reasons, tend to overcontrol; that is, they control so much that they actually become less effective. The effects of this on the adult learner are difficult to measure of course, especially in terms of the learner's ability and willingness to be self-directed.

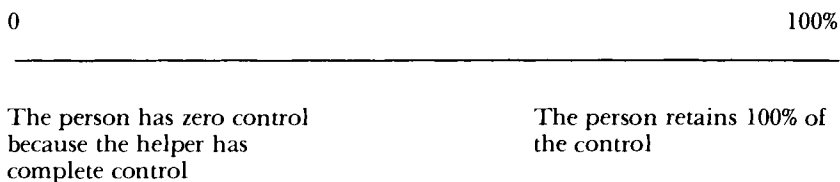


Fig. 2. Who Controls the Choice of the Change, the Strategy Decisions, and the Implementation Activities?

Along with helping professionals in many other fields, some librarians have, in recent years, been trying to control less and fit into their client's natural process of changing and learning and seeking information. Some librarians are increasingly seeing themselves as a learning consultant, a helper, a counselor, or highly flexible link between the client and various information systems and sources.

A study by Carr⁸ of the interaction between librarians and their clients underlines the importance of this shift toward shared responsibility and less control. His study concluded that the following librarian characteristics, along with several others, were especially important in distinguishing helpful episodes from unhelpful episodes: (1) the ability to attend to and know the learner as an individual with an inquiry unlike any other, (2) a willingness to explore all potential courses of inquiry, guided by a standard of optimal fit, and (3) sensitivity to the learner's need for self-esteem, autonomy, reassurance, and competence.

One research project might be especially useful in the public library field: a study of just what additional help people would especially benefit from. Research that successfully and precisely answered this question would be important in improving services and resources for adult learners. Only by grasping the greatest unmet needs can librarians dramatically increase their effectiveness in fostering adult changes. Insightful research along this line could lead to the provision of much better information, advice, services, materials, and helpers for

Fostering Intentional Changes

people choosing and implementing intentional changes, and coping with unintentional changes. Such specific research might look at the ways in which adults now use libraries and librarians for their intentional changes and learning, and simultaneously try to discover what additional help would be most beneficial.

Our recent research on intentional and unintentional change articulates what, to many librarians and other adult educators, may have been intuitive understandings or experience-based estimates of learner behavior. But it also presents a final implication that is important if librarians value the quality of their personal interactions with their clients. This implication relates to the findings in these and earlier studies that many adults do not seek help from professionals who define themselves as helpers and information resource people. We believe strongly that librarians and other professional helpers will be used much more as they improve their ability in understanding and fitting into the adult's ongoing change efforts.

References

1. Tough, Allen. *Intentional Changes: A Fresh Approach to Helping People Change*. New York: Cambridge Book Co., 1982.
2. ————. *Learning without a Teacher: A Study of Tasks and Assistance During Adult Self-Teaching Projects*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1967 (reissued with updated bibliography 1981).
3. ————. *The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning*, 2d ed. San Diego, Calif.: University Associates (Learning Concepts), 1979.
4. Neehall, Joan "Degree of Intentionality of Adult Change." Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), 1982.
5. Johnson, Alvin S. *The Public Library—A People's University*. New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1938; Monroe, Margaret E. *Library Adult Education: The Biography of an Idea*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1963.
6. Grof, Stanislav. *Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research*. New York: Viking, 1975; Lande, Nathaniel. *Mindstyles Lifestyles: A Comprehensive Overview of Today's Life-Changing Philosophies*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Price/Stern/Sloan, 1976; Matson, Katinka. *The Psychology Today Omnibook of Personal Development*. New York: Morrow, 1977; Naranjo, Claudio. *The One Quest*. London: Wildwood, 1974; and Tough, Allen. *Expand Your Life: A Pocket Book for Personal Change*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1980.
7. Bolles, Richard N. *What Color is Your Parachute?* rev. ed. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 1982; Gross, Ronald. *The Lifelong Learner*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977; Lakein, Alan. *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*. New York: New American Library, 1974; and Simon, Sidney B. *Meeting Yourself Halfway: Thirty-one Values Clarification Strategies for Daily Living*. Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1974.
8. Carr, David W. "The Agent and the Learner: A Study of Critical Incidents and Contexts in Assisted Library Learning." Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1979.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank