I am not an educator; I am not an artist; I am not an engineer; I am not a specialist in many of the programs with which the WPA has dealt in the past four years. But with my background in social work, I have always been interested in education and the problems of educators. It has seemed to me of great importance to link up education with social progress. I have seen that social reform and the improvement of economic conditions alone could not raise the low standard of living existing today for millions of men and women in this country. It has seemed to me that a broad program of education and training must go hand in hand with the crusade to make a better America.

I am doubly glad to have the opportunity to talk before this conference. In the first place, without the assistance of educational people and their years of experience, the WPA could not have attempted to do what it has done in the field of education. The whole-hearted cooperation and effort which many of you have given to the development of the WPA program cannot be overestimated. No one realizes more than I the inadequacies of our program, but I do think that we have made important beginnings. I hope that we have helped to demonstrate the need of a richer and more comprehensive program of public education.

In the second place, I am much concerned that this kind of education be carried on and developed further. I have been accused many times of boondoggling, but my prediction is that within a decade, the very people who condemned this most heartily will admit that much of this boondoggling has been a very sound investment. It is for this reason that I appear before you to discuss some of the problems which we in the WPA have met in the four years of our existence. At risk of repeating what may be familiar...
to many of you, I should like to glance back over the record of this period of emergency education.

Education was the first work project undertaken when the Government started federal relief back in 1933. Why did this happen? Primarily, I think, because as a nation we had awakened to the fact that unemployment means more than physical want and physical idleness. We saw that many of the unemployed were gradually losing their fitness for work. We were forced to change our traditional conception of relief and public works. Public works programs in the past have been chiefly devoted to construction projects - to building up our physical resources. The recent depression taught us that the conservation and development of our human resources is even more important.

A far greater number of white collar and professional workers were unemployed than ever before. One of the most serious effects of the depression was the reduction of many school budgets. And decreased budgets meant unemployed teachers. By 1933 it was estimated that nearly 200,000 teachers were without jobs. Manual labor was not the answer. Common sense told us it was not only inefficient but wasteful to put an artist to work chopping trees or a teacher to digging ditches. We had had some experience with a work program for professional groups in New York State. Here, as many of you know, with the help of the State Department of Education, we organized before 1933 an educational program primarily for the unemployed.

We decided to organize a similar program on a national scale. We did not want to duplicate or supplant the regular school system. We wanted our program to supplement what the public school teachers were doing; to discover what services the regular schools were not providing. The job of the school has been considered primarily one of teaching children. It offers educational opportunities to only a part of the many people who need educational services. Yet many adults have not had the chance for this elementary schooling. In this country where child labor is still a common condition, countless numbers of men and women have been forced by economic necessity to leave school at an early age to earn their living. There are not even enough schools to care for all the children of school age.

We had fooled ourselves into thinking that in the United States elementary education was universal. But in spite of all we had done to develop such a system, we lagged far behind our ideals. It was not until the beginning of the World War that this myth was exploded. Fifteen years
later, the Census of 1930 still showed that there were over four million sheer illiterates. And estimates point to a probable 16 per cent of our adult population who cannot write the simplest letter or understand a newspaper.

It is difficult to estimate the real cost of ignorance. I have heard it said that illiteracy alone was costing the United States more than a billion dollars a year in lost earning power. Nor is illiteracy the only educational problem. The skilled worker needs special training as well as a general background of knowledge and technique. In low earning power alone -- which means a low national income and a low standard of living -- we are obviously losing many billions of dollars a year. And when we add to this figure the cost of combating the crime, delinquency, poor health and disease resulting from ignorance, neglected character training, and lack of constructive social education, the total cost of ignorance is appalling.

We are now celebrating the 100th anniversary of our public school system. How satisfied are you with what we have accomplished? Have we conceived education to be a simpler thing than it really is? We thought that by concentrating on the young we could develop an educated nation. It seems to me that we were wrong. It is impossible to crowd into the few years of elementary and secondary schooling all the training and knowledge needed to understand our complicated and changing social system.

Under the WPA we have tried to make a beginning in the development of a broad program of social education which would meet the interests and needs of adults -- a program which would aim to make education fit the needs of our industrial democracy, which would take care of some of the countless numbers of people who are either too young or too old to be taken care of by our public schools. We do not claim, by any means, to have established an adequate program.

Adult education on a public scale as large as this had never been tried in the United States before. I do not underestimate the admirable work which has been and still is being carried on by public schools and private educational agencies, extension courses, vocational work, Americanization programs, and night schools for adults. The most recent reports show fifteen States appropriating funds for adult education. But I do think it fair to say that our public educational facilities have fallen a
long way short of meeting the educational needs of adults in this country. Our staff on the education program report that at no time have we had enough teachers to supply the demand for classes. Furthermore, the United States has lagged far behind most European countries where extensive, publicly financed adult education programs have been in existence for a number of years.

The relief administration wanted this program to maintain genuine educational standards. We wanted to correlate it closely with the public school system. We, therefore, turned for assistance and advice to the schools and to educators. State school officials helped us work out a plan of cooperation. State conferences were held, attended not only by city and county superintendents but by members of the faculties of universities and normal schools. The United States Office of Education assigned its specialist in adult education to our office, and appointed an advisory committee to work closely in the administration of the program. We wanted the schools to have a determining hand in what the program should be. Under the WPA the great majority of the educational projects are sponsored by State Departments of Education. Local school superintendents act as supervisors and classes are held for the most part in school buildings.

Our schools have been quick to respond. Many officials have said they were startled to realize the eagerness with which adult students enrolled in classes. Buildings and equipment have been generously offered; expenses of light and heat have often been supplied; valuable professional assistance and advice have been given and even personnel has been loaned. Whatever success we may claim for this program has been due in great part to the active support and cooperation of educators and school officials throughout the entire country.

I would like to give you a brief picture of what the education program is doing. In the first place, its chief purpose is of course to give jobs to the unemployed. But let me urge you not to judge the work on its employment record alone. Actually, the number of people employed on educational projects is small compared to the hundreds of thousands put to work on construction jobs. The real significance of the program is in what it has meant to the millions of students who have come to learn. Discouraged, despairing men and women have found their way from park benches to school benches; their despair has been translated into hope, their sense of futility into a feeling of usefulness.
More than four million students have attended classes during the last four years. Approximately 100,000 teachers have been given useful employment. The latest reports show that more than 42,000 are now employed, with an enrollment in classes of over two million students. More than 600 different subjects are taught in WPA classes. Any useful subject for which there is a demand and a teacher available may be taught.

The most spectacular phase of the WPA program has been its attack on illiteracy. Teachers have gone out into rural counties, remote mountain valleys, and city slums, holding classes, day and night, in public schools, mountain shacks, farm houses, and churches. Illiterate men and women from 16 to 82 years of age have enrolled. Fathers and sons and even grandparents and grandchildren are learning together in the same class. Seven hundred thousand illiterates, most of them American-born, have learned to read and write in WPA classes. Illiteracy is not restricted to our foreign-born population or to any one section of the country. It is a national problem.

We have aimed not only to teach people to read and write. Bare literacy is not enough. People must know how to understand and use what they read. Literacy classes have, therefore, included badly needed health information, principles of child care and food values, instruction in sewing and arithmetic, and understanding of simple current events and government. One class of thirteen in a Southern rural county is composed of the members of one family only -- father, mother, and eleven children -- not one of whom were able to read or write before the WPA organized a class for them. Under the WPA, illiteracy in the United States has been reduced 16 per cent.

Closely allied with the work in literacy are classes in citizenship, and preparation for naturalization. The public schools have, of course, been concerned for some time with this phase of adult education. The admission of approximately 28 million immigrants into this country since 1880 has dramatized this need. But in spite of the effective programs of our public night schools and many private institutions, there are still over four million men and women in this country who have not become American citizens.

As a relief agency, the WPA has been particularly alert to the need for vocational training of the unemployed. The Federal Government has for some years helped through grants-in-aid to finance vocational training.
With increased unemployment, however, came an increased demand for training and guidance. The WPA has organized classes in many types of vocation, from commercial subjects, industrial, mechanical, and service trades, to agricultural education. We tried to avoid training people for work in already over-crowded fields. A special attempt has been made to offer this training to relief workers and other unemployed. In addition to raising the general educational level of the students, and giving them new confidence in themselves, training in these classes in many cases had led to employment.

The old Town Hall meeting has disappeared, but the need for widespread popular discussion of current public affairs has not. You as educators have recognized that the most vital educational need today for both young and old is education for intelligent citizenship. The most intensely discussed subject at every educational conference is the problem of educating for civic responsibility.

The large forums, panel discussions, and small study groups on current economic and social topics which have been organized by the WPA have helped to meet this popular need. We have tried to make these groups community enterprises in the true sense of the word. Speakers and panel members have been drawn from such local sources as colleges, business men's clubs, newspapers, settlement houses, parent-teacher associations, labor unions, and other civic and business organizations.

Workers' Education provides classes of the public affairs type particularly for the worker in trade, industry or agriculture. The shorter working week has resulted in increased leisure for the worker. The Wagner Labor Act and other labor legislation have brought new responsibilities to organized labor, making the need for this kind of education imperative. Discussion centers directly on the practical social and economic problems bound up with the workers' daily life: labor legislation, history of the labor movement, principles of trade unionism, parliamentary law, government, war and peace, and current events.

The workers' education program is aimed at training the worker to think clearly, to understand his own problems in their larger economic and political setting, and finally to develop a sense of responsibility towards their solution. Responsible and intelligent workers are our only assurance of a continuing democracy.
More than 120,000 workers have been enrolled in these classes since the beginning of the program. The latest reports show over 60,000 workers enrolled in classes taught by more than 700 teachers.

Fundamental to home and community welfare are good health conditions. Instruction in child care, home-nursing and principles of hygiene are an important phase of our adult education program. Courses in homemaking, nutrition, budgeting, sewing and cooking are given. An extensive program of first-aid instruction is carried on.

Hundreds of thousands of men and women are making the exciting discovery that an important part of life may begin at forty, fifty, or sixty. The more task of making a living and rearing a family has given many people little chance to develop leisure-time interests. The capacity enrollments in classes in the arts, creative writing, handicrafts, and music, show that many adults are culturally starved.

Training for more intelligent parenthood is another front along which the WPA has worked. More than 60,000 parents have joined classes to study principles of child guidance, health care, and problems of family relationships. Linked with this program is the work done with pre-school children. Approximately 1,800 nursery schools have been established where over 50,000 young children are being helped to a fair start in life. These children come from over-crowded homes, where unemployment and economic want have meant undernourishment, and dangerous health conditions. Nourishing food, sun and air, rest, and healthful play opportunities are laying the foundations for the health and happiness of these future citizens.

Another effect of the depression was to prevent thousands of young people from realizing their plans for a college education. In a number of states, the WPA has helped to meet this problem by "carrying college to the student." Regular first year college courses, with credit, are being given to 12,000 students. Even would-be college students in isolated rural and mountainous districts need not forego an education. College comes by Rural Free Delivery in the form of correspondence courses.

Nearly ten per cent of the young men and women attending colleges and universities in the United States this year are earning part of their expenses through employment on the Student Aid Program of the National Youth Administration. This program was first started under the Education
Division of the FERA and was taken over by the NYA in 1935. High school, college, and graduate students, who would otherwise be unable to afford an education, are given suitable employment. The small monthly benefits thus received make it just possible for these boys and girls to attend school. The school authorities concerned assume responsibility for selecting the students and determining and supervising the type of work project. Tutoring, research, clerical and library assistance, landscaping and grounds maintenance, and community and adult education programs, are some of the activities students may undertake. Applications for student aid this year have been double the number that could be accepted under present appropriations. Over 400,000 students are now receiving student aid.

We are helping a number of states develop programs in the prisons. We find in some states about the same number of young people in prisons as in college. So far as we know, there has never been a thorough study of the educational needs of men and women who, either through crime, delinquency or mere ignorance, find themselves shut off from normal living. Surely this situation shows an obligation and a need we cannot overlook.

Since educational opportunities for the Negro are notably inadequate, special emphasis has been laid on making WPA services available to this race. Nearly five thousand Negro teachers have been employed annually in the WPA classes, and more than half a million students enrolled since the program first started.

The greatest number of WPA teachers are in classes embracing a wide variety of general academic, cultural and practical subjects. Over 7,000 people are employed in this way with a student enrollment of nearly 400,000.

If you should want to get a cross-section of opinion from the students and teachers themselves, you would have to travel far afield. You would want to drop in at a little rural school house where a group of Negro cotton pickers are gathering to learn their A B C's. You would drive along a muddy country lane to a farm kitchen where women are settling down around a flickering oil lamp to an earnest discussion of child care and family relationships. You would climb four flights of tenement stairs to find an unemployed league holding a forum on social security. You would find a few small rooms in an urban slum district made over into a cheerful nursery school.
Classes are held day and night. Many workers' education groups meet at midnight when the night shift comes out of textile or steel mill. All nationalities and races are taking part - Spanish speaking people in the western beet fields, French-Canadians from the lumber camps of Maine, Indians on government reservations. In educational background the majority of the students come from the group of 32 million adults in this country who have had less than an eighth grade education. From the economic point of view, they are also the people with the lowest income - most of them wage earners averaging less than a thousand dollars a year on which to support a family; many of them unemployed with no income but inadequate relief checks.

What are the implications of this new kind of education? What has been the effect of this program on the adult student in our classes, on the unemployed teacher, the local school superintendent, on the cities and towns and villages where these classes are held?

Even when the program first started, it was clear that people wanted these classes. Men and women appeared promptly at the doors of school buildings to register. Many with little elementary education applied timidly, thinking the classes could not be for them. When they found they could be admitted, their delight was evident. They found themselves in informal classrooms — where academic credits and examinations were unimportant or nonexistent — with teachers who were ready to consider their individual needs. Now, in the fourth year, every report, every field visit, confirms this first impression, that millions of grown people in this country are hungry for education and welcome a chance to learn.

Another theory has been well tested: people of any age can learn. Psychologists in college laboratories have often made this statement. It has been amply proven by daily experience of teachers and students in the emergency program. Our staff reports that it is unusual to find an emergency teacher who is discouraged with the ability of his students. He is more often discouraged with himself in the midst of tough problems of teaching. But the very spirit of those classrooms is heartening. Go into one of them at the beginning of the term, and again a few weeks later. Expressions have changed. The group has got acquainted and enjoys being together. The students are no longer afraid to put themselves to the test in new fields, for they find in themselves new abilities. And they are delighted to realize that what they are learning in the classrooms can be put to use at home, in their own clubs and organizations, in the general life of their communities.
What do these adult students want in education? Put in a few words, the men and women who attend these classes want to understand what is happening to them in this year 1937. They want to know how they can find security in their homes and their jobs. They hope to create a fuller, more satisfactory, life for themselves and especially for their children. This desire for better ways of living is sometimes expressed in terms of personal achievement. But often, adult students come to class to learn something which will be of use to others; to children and young people, farm neighbors, fellow members of a club, a labor organization, or some other community group.

The need for help in concrete situations -- training for a job, bringing up children, supporting families, improving home or industrial conditions -- calls for concrete material for teaching, in terms of human experience. "I thought economics was something up in the air," remarked one of these students. "I see now I've been living economics every day and didn't know it." So in many of these classrooms, the living problems of every day -- what is happening in their own homes, on their farms, in their factories -- provide the raw material of the curriculum. And what more fitting curriculum material could be found for our whole nation?

This curriculum, based upon actual experience in human lives, reveals in stark reality the dark places in our national picture. These realities are not pleasant to think about, and yet our best hope of finding means of improvement is through this very process of careful analysis.

On every hand, the bitter facts are evident from WPA reports. To quote from one on the nursery schools: "Hundreds of children two and three and four years of age have been found who had never known what it meant to have three square meals a day -- children so undernourished that only after days and sometimes weeks of careful feeding could they with safety be given the amount of food customary for a child of that age."

And this sad story of our children is repeated in adult terms by other reports from the classes, stories of parental ignorance, disease and accidents, starvation wages, wretched housing, unemployment and despair. No wonder there is said to be a vitality in the emergency education program, and a will to learn among its students. They are studying the practical problems of their daily lives. The more thoughtful are determined to bring about much needed changes, through the dynamic processes of education.

Let us look at this program from the standpoint of the teachers employed in these classes. What has been happening to them in these four
years? Over 100,000 teachers have supported themselves and their families for varying periods from the work relief wages. Without these wages we feel sure that thousands would have succumbed to physical breakdown or mental despair.

In contrast to this alternative, the present picture is encouraging. Not only have these teachers been relieved from the most acute economic pressure, but they have found a new zest in professional work. In spite of all difficulties they have carried on their classes with spirit and determination. They have tramped many miles to reach isolated farm houses, ridden horseback through snow drifts, cleaned out classrooms, and built the fires, sometimes paid travel money out of their own pockets, and often shared their relief wages with their needy students. In any record of this program, therefore, the courage and wholehearted interest of the teachers must be counted as substantial assets.

In other ways the teachers have been put to the test. Thrust into the midst of novel situations, their initiative and ingenuity have been challenged to a greater degree perhaps than ever before in the teaching profession. The teacher is no longer up on a platform, but one of a friendly group, the members of which are looking eagerly to him for practical help. The teacher has developed a sense of democracy in education; opportunity for all; the right of each to express opinions; teaching fitted to the needs of the student rather than the student fitted to the curriculum. In going back into the public schools or into private employment, as many of them are doing, the teachers believe that they will do a better job of teaching than ever before. As a rehabilitation program the WPA has been amazingly successful. About 50,000 teachers of the 100,000 employed have found employment in the regular schools or in other types of work.

The democratization of education, going on under the emergency program, is having its effects also on our community organizations. We have attempted to take education to the people wherever they are, regardless of their ability to pay fees. This plan has enlisted many community organizations everywhere to do their part, in providing meeting places and in reaching their membership with news of these opportunities. Churches and settlements have been opened for classes; community centers and social agencies have offered their services; their leaders have found themselves in demand on local advisory committees, to help select teachers and determine the policies of the new classes. To be asked to say what they want in education and to take a hand in meeting their own needs, with the help of government
departments, has been a novel and refreshing experience to thousands of citizens who had hardly bothered before to attend a school meeting.

The emergency education program is helping to lay the groundwork for a permanent adult education movement. Stimulated by the WPA classes, a few states have passed legislation to finance permanent programs. In others, similar legislation is being proposed. In the United States our system of free public education was brought about largely through the efforts of organized labor. Workers were convinced that only through such a system could their children be given a chance for education. This system, which has resulted in rich benefits for children, should be rapidly extended to meet the expressed desires of our adult population for an educational movement of their own. Adults have a double stake in the public schools -- through their taxes which support the system, and through their children who attend. Their elected representatives sit on school boards and in school offices, in the legislatures of the various states and in our national Congress. If our democracy means anything, the needs of adults in education must find expression through these elected representatives. The future of such emergency classes will then be assured.

Democracy can only be a working force if people learn how to think. And we must know how to use the tools of education, of social and political action, in order that our thinking may do some good. Who can say what the story of social progress in the United States will be when the thinking of our adult population is translated into terms of intelligent democratic action?

There are about 300,000 school plants in this country which are in use only a few hours a day. No wonder we often have difficulty in justifying school appropriations to the taxpayer. Surely we must admit that we have been derelict in the use of even our existing resources. The full use and constant development of our schools to meet the needs of all the people is education's big responsibility today. I am very much afraid people are already beginning to forget what the President said at his second inaugural: I submit to you the following quotation, "I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children. --I see one-third of a Nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope -- because the Nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it -- proposes to paint it out."
I am confident that the educational leadership of this country must respond to the strongly expressed wishes of our adult students. They have given substantial evidence that they want these WPA classes to continue and to be extended on a more permanent basis. What the people want they have means to secure through democratic political action. In meeting this plain need of the people, our schools will become genuine instruments of effective, popular education for young and old.