

## *The City as Classroom, Education Outside the School House.*

### **A CITY EDUCATION.**

Alvin Toffler once told an audience that more education was taking place in conference centers than school rooms. The same thought applies to the city. While the COVID-19 remote learning experience has shown that we do not want to get rid of face-to-face classroom education at the school house, we have come to appreciate other learning venues.

First, to get past the current learning and teaching arrangement, on-line learning has its place. That place is not at the primary point of student learning, but it has a role and after the COVID-19 emergency passes, some remnants of it will prevail and add a positive augmentation to the face-to-face classroom methods.

Second, a great deal of learning is life experience, a current catch phrase, outside the classroom. The city with its city life is big player in providing a “complete” education to a child or an adult.

*“Complete” is a term initiated by transportation planners to reflect that streets are complete only when they accommodate all modes of travel. “Complete” can be read as comprehensive in breadth, depth and longevity; a thought process with many applications, education being one.*

City education happens nearly everywhere. Certainly, city halls have many lessons to offer as do courthouses and other venues that house public functions. Streets themselves are great places to learn about people and their habits as demonstrated by William White in his classic study documented in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* [The Conservation Foundation, 1980].

### **LEARNING VENUES OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE.**

The city, especially the small city or town, has many opportunities to provide for the education of its children and adults. The challenge for the city is to decide that educating its residents, workforce and visitors is its responsibility. The city will not and should not presume to replace the school board, but the city can have a significant augmentation role.

**Displays in Public Places.** One method is to provide signs, kiosks and displays of educational material throughout the city. Par courses provide wellness information as well as an encouragement to exercise. Historic markers tell the city’s story and showcase important people and places that built the city. Interpretive signs and displays that show pictures and descriptions of the town’s flora and fauna are interesting and educational. These signs and markers are found in most cities, but they may be one-offs or random responses to someone’s personal interest rather than a concerted effort to educate and entertain the citizenry.

**Coordinated City Venues.** Another method is to organize the cities' cultural, literary and entertainment operators into a holistic education/entertainment machine. Consider the combined power of the city library, the community theater, the local history museum and the main street hotel.

- **The downtown city library** has become an information and learning source well beyond the lending of books. Many libraries are increasingly multi-faceted; they operate as business incubators, homework centers for students and genealogical research centers. Adult literacy, second language residents and child reading sessions abound in many local libraries.



**Mercer County Public Library at the foot of Main Street, Harrodsburg KY.**

- **The community theater** offers opportunities for people to participate in performances on-stage or behind the scenes. The performances themselves may be educational with Shakespeare, "fringe", dance, movie or music events. High brow or low brow, the theater is entertaining and educational.

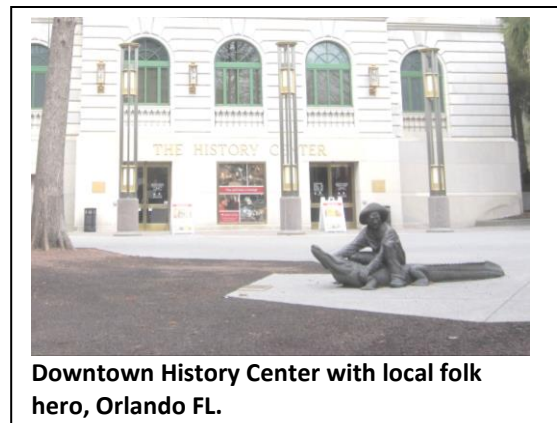


**Community Theater, Downtown DeLand FL.**



**Community Theater Box Office on main street, Cocoa Village FL.**

- **The local history center** can be a great place to learn and enjoy the history of the town and any of its past peculiarities.
- **Specialty places** such as nature preserves, public galleries and gardens, community centers, sporting clubs and medical centers all add to the completeness of the city's educational system. City parks offer a terrific opportunity to educate both children and adults.



**Downtown History Center with local folk hero, Orlando FL.**

- **The main street hotel** may not be seen as a traditional educational venue, but the bar, restaurant and meeting room can be the town’s “third place” where experiences at the library, the nature center, the theater and the history center can be shared and retold. Hotels also support local festivals by providing a place for day-trippers to become week-enders.



Character Hotel Downtown, Highlands NC.

### NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

Neighborhood associations typically do not assume a role in community education for children or adults. However, associations with an educational bent can provide resources that help the community become more aware of the natural, historic and wellness resources in their own neighborhood. Kiosks, signs and trail information programs can promote community education. Associations partnering with the city and other community organizations, can turn the neighborhood into learning environments through:

- **Nature:** Interpretive signs of local flora and fauna.
- **History:** Signs and graphics of prominent people and places.
- **Wellness:** Par courses and walking paths.



### A HOLISTIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

In combination, the city venues, streets, parks, nature centers and the school system can produce well rounded, civic minded, employable people. The key is the dedication to an outcome and the creativity to fashion partnerships between the school system, the business community and the city’s cultural venues.