

### 3. A Concept of Continuing Education

**Assuming that our society will continue to provide higher educational opportunities for an increasing population, this author discusses the content of this continued education and its contribution to a continuing self-education.**

**T**HE THINGS which are taught children are not an education but the means of education." Emerson,<sup>1</sup> writing this more than a century ago, stated succinctly the case for continuing education.

In this symposium we are actually concerned with two different things: (a) *formal education* beyond high school as *an institution* preparing for the better life and for certain occupations; (b) *the way in which formal education is utilized*—as a whetstone to sharpen the appetite for further learning, as a tool for continuing self-education.

Previous articles in this symposium are primarily concerned with the first of these interests—opportunities for formal education beyond high school. This is an increasingly important concern because of population factors and trends in the economy, but especially important if one views education as a continuing process which derives its major stimulus from previous experiences.

Despite this very legitimate concern by all of us in the profession, however, the decision as to whom we shall educate or as to whether we shall widen the base of college education lies not in our hands. Historically, the extension of educational opportunity—elementary, high school,

beyond—has been dictated by two conditions. First is the *ability* of the economy to support a large proportion of a given age group while it is preparing for, rather than contributing to, our productive life. The other is the *need* of the economy for better educated entry workers. These conditions account for the spread of elementary education in the last century and of secondary education in the first half of this century.

Present developments indicate these two conditions are increasing. The passage of a few years will bring the children born in high birth rate years into the labor market, 4 million annually in place of today's 2 million. The current tremendous investment in industrial plant is bound to result in increased productivity for each worker—again restricting the need for labor. There can be little question that colleges, junior colleges, community colleges, vocational institutes will be required by society to provide places for those whom the economy cannot absorb; will be required to provide necessary training for a more complex industry and society. If these do not, then new institutions may have to be developed such as the National Youth Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps of the depression years. Most educators would rather see educational needs provided by educational institutions less directly influenced by politics.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for this quotation to Edgar Dale of The Ohio State University. See *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson: with Annotations*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1909, II, p. 412.

## The Real Issue

This means that the really live issue is not the *provision* of higher levels of education but the content of this continued education and its contribution to a continuing self-education. Accordingly, our major concern is not buildings, budgets and staff resources. We must focus attention on programs to meet the continuing educational needs of a majority of the nation's college-age youth. The dynamic nature of our society and economy indicates that the most important need is development of individual resources for continuing self-education.

Continuing education for most young people beyond grade 12 should involve consideration of basic values in programs of universal education below that level. Continuing in school is not in itself a guarantee of continuing education. There is need for genuine analysis of the needs of 19 and 20 year olds (at least) in our society and the differentiated programs necessary to meet these needs. Certainly we have to look at the need for personal involvement in true learning—a sense of commitment on the part of the learner to educational goals, a degree of participation in selection of goals and methods through which to pursue them. In view of the non-functional nature of many high school and college programs, "more of the same" may not be a very valid prescription.

### Goals of Continuing Education

It seems to me that the goals of continuing education should be these:

1. Building interest in, and skills to pursue, a program of continuing self-improvement and advancement. These include conventional skills in reading and library research, but also competence in using mass media and effective-

ness in interpersonal relationships designed to promote learning that comes through participation in group projects.

2. Preparation for vocational placement. With mature interests rising above the horizon of awareness, specific skill development and preprofessional education are in order for this age group. Also more meaningful are general orientation to the work-world, building of general work habits and attitudes, and exposure to work experience of a general as well as specific nature.

3. Understanding human relationships. Emergence of the high school graduate into adult social and political status underlines the readiness that exists for continuing programs that focus on citizenship needs (information, understandings, skills), interpersonal relationships (including family living), intergroup relationships and the dynamics of group membership and action.

4. Development of satisfying and constructive leisure time interests. This should be self-evident in dealing with an age group that has time on its hands and newly acquired authority to decide how to use it.

5. Building values with respect to the good, the true and the beautiful. Ethical considerations, a philosophy of life, artistic expression and appreciation require maturity and contribute to maturation. An adult point of view has to be developed, and, in developing, leads to "growing up."

6. Personal development *per se*. We return, herewith, to the purpose of goal number one as a major value in our culture. This encompasses healthy living, physically and emotionally. It involves

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**MILTON J. GOLD** is associate professor of education, Hunter College, New York, N. Y.

education for the general purposes of growth, assistance in man's age-old striving for perfection ("What I aspired to be, And was not comforts me.").

### **Informal Means to Continuing Education**

Actually, however, opportunities for formal education are but a small part of the task of continuing education. They continue to represent what Emerson called "but the means" of education. Certain other avenues are open for this purpose. These include the mass media of communication (newspapers, periodicals, radio, motion pictures, television, recordings), libraries, adult education courses offered by school or community agencies, industrial upgrading programs operated by employing firms, union programs of general or vocational nature, religious activities, social contacts, community service opportunities and political action.

Obviously, education is not a matter of formal programs alone. What but education accrues to the individual who participates in programs of his local mental health association, in heart, cancer, tuberculosis, polio and muscular dystrophy drives, in chest X-ray programs, in civil defense organization, in film classics programs and art exhibits, in creative art or music experiences, in hobby workshops, in local concert series or musical groups, in the community's radio book review program or little theater, in the conservation activities of the sportsmen's club or garden club, in programs of the soil conservation district or grange, in the international relations study group of the AAUW, in the get-out-the-vote drive of the League of Women Voters or the know-your-candidates program of the Municipal League, in the campaigns of local political party

organizations, in community improvement or community study projects?

### **Tools Needed for Continuing Education**

To a degree, the effective utilization of these opportunities depends upon the quality of the job done by formal educational institutions. What does the college (high school and elementary, too) contribute to intelligent participation in these activities? What are the tools of continuing education?

- A background of general information?
- Skills in reading to gain further information and understanding?
- Skills in listening and viewing for the same purposes?
- Standards of criticism and appreciation to guide in selection of the truly valuable?
- Skills in expression to contribute to active participation?
- Understanding of human aspirations, motivation, emotions that make group membership effective?
- Experience in expressing oneself as an individual? In working with others as members of a group?

To Dewey learning was a continuous process of restructuring experience. The individual meets some new adventure (activity, experience, information, insight) and uses it to put relevant parts of his past experience into new perspective. New generalizations, new ways of understanding the world (i.e., one's experience of it) develop. This is education.

Formal education is used to accelerate the process. The human race has found some things of such significance that they are not left to chance but are deliberately presented to the child in our culture. Where teaching is effective, the learner is helped to use these new experiences to reconstruct his world. Unfortu-

nately, schools cannot predict all that is needed—nor can they do the reconstructing which must go on in the child's experience. Commonly accepted constructs make up the mass of the elementary curriculum. In secondary schools the mass of knowledge is divided between general requirements (agreed-upon essentials) for all students and specialized areas which students may elect.

In college this process is carried still further. What is important to one student is presumed to be of little importance to another (why else the elective system?). In all candor, we must admit that even the college student is getting only a start on the learnings which will be necessary to him as a citizen, worker, family member, individual human being. What is of importance, therefore, is not the courses taken on any school level, not the educational level achieved (in terms of years of school completed), but the competence that has been developed which is necessary for effective continuation of education. In addition to the tools already listed, these include progressive assumption of greater responsibility for one's own education, development of the "inquiring mind," establishing realistic interests and the skills necessary for their pursuit, building the attitude that one doesn't have all the answers, all the education needed for the rest of one's life.

### Importance of Method

If these—and other—competences are necessary tools for continuing education, the importance of process in learning is underlined. The basic assumption in many schools is that the school will help the student learn the information and skills which will stand him in good stead for the rest of his life. But, given the changing nature of human society at all times and the contemporary changes

which seem to us unprecedented in their speed (partly because we are in their midst), such an assumption has always been fallacious. If life is continuing and changing, then education must be a continuous process, and the major function of the school is to develop competence in this process.

A primary issue, then, is how competence in continuing self-education is developed. Time-honored methods seem based on the idea that one learns how to learn in the process of learning something. If this is true, the more challenge inherent in a learning problem, the greater the potential for learning how to learn. If this procedure is employed, it is well to heed findings in the theory of learning. Students may not be assumed to generalize from one experience and transfer their learning from one situation to a different situation. There is transfer to the degree that there is teaching for transfer. Learning how to learn may be an important by-product of learning a particular thing if time is taken to examine with the student how the learning has taken place, what resources have been used, how truth and accuracy have been checked, where one may go for further knowledge. If the matter has been presented as settled for all time, the spur to further learning has been blunted.

A second method in developing competence in self-education is one stressing process primarily. The method is a "problems" approach. Answers and solutions are not given, but students are helped to formulate the problem, to seek out sources of assistance, to check sources, to generalize, to test their generalizations, to recognize unresolved problems that remain. But "content" is necessary here, too. Application demands

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the reality of working on, of learning, *something*. Working on the process alone may deteriorate into a kind of dilettante activity and the process remain empty because no firsthand experience has been had in struggling to learn something. The approach, it seems, can be either deductive or inductive, but there must be an eventual focus on the continuing need "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield" with Tennyson's Ulysses—and on the tools with which to do so.

### Demands and Facilities for Continuing Education

Varied purposes are met through competence in the continuing self-educative process. These include vocational upgrading, improving the quality of social experience, "do it yourself" skills around the home, recreational outlets contributing to physical and emotional well-being, active participation in government, personal expression through creative arts, and simply the living of a richer life.

Facing these demands, educational agencies must make better use of mass media as one solution. This is the time when we should be experimenting with television in particular—educational channels, commercial channels devoting part of their time to the public interest, closed circuit programming—in order to establish meaningful, legitimate uses and methods which will help the individual continue his education. Radio, newspapers, periodicals represent usable media if in some way a meeting of minds

can be developed among program directors and editors with an eye on circulation, consumers with an eye on their individual interests, and educators with an eye on using a given medium in such a way that it helps the consumer meet his educational goal.

Libraries, museums, settlement houses, Y's, religious and civic organizations maintain facilities and programs for adults to assist them in continuing self-development. These institutions have accumulated experience and understanding in working on informal programs of education. It is necessary to define the role of the community's tax-supported educational agencies in relation to these services. Are there personnel and facilities which schools and universities could place at the disposal of these other community agencies? Is there need for reappraisal and coordination? If so, do schools and colleges have a role to play, competencies to offer? Is it possible—is it desirable—to maintain the identity of autonomous units working on a coordinated program of continuing education? Should communities of appropriate size have adult education centers in which are marshaled the resources of these agencies?

That there should be so many different ways in which an adult may informally continue his learning is a good thing. If the school has done a good job in giving individuals the tools of learning, it is in this melange of formal programs and informal associations that the adult can sharpen and use his tools.

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