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CONTINUING EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: Growth of continuing education programs is noted. Differences between continuing education and traditional education are examined. Author argues that continuing education approaches are appropriate for social work education and should be made an integral part of programs for the preparation of social workers.

"The separation of the university from the community appears to be declining sharply and will probably continue to do so," wrote Dressel in 1971.[1] This notion of higher education as a joint enterprise between campus and community is a familiar one in social work. It goes back to a time when education and social work were not the distinctly separate fields they are today.

During the second half of the 19th century, settlement houses provided important alternatives to degree-bound campus learning. These agency programs engaged the interest and enjoyed the participation both of social workers and university educators. The latter group included John Dewey, whose daughter wrote that because of his work in the programs at Hull House, "his faith in democracy... took on both a sharper and deeper meaning."[2]

The first formal programs for the training of social workers were organized just at the turn of the century. They were intended to provide those skills which were needed immediately in the field. These programs for working volunteers clearly recognized the consistency of learning theory and practice in combination. Practice was to be practical, based upon sound theory. Theory was to be affirmed or modified through application in practice.

Both of these types of programs, those offered by social workers to others and those intended for social workers themselves, bore strong resemblances to present-day programs of continuing education. The goals may have been different, but they were appropriate for their time: Americanization, ethnic preservation, and social change.

Faith in education and social work to create a better society remained high. During the Progressive era, various organizations mounted major campaigns of education for self-improvement and for the improvement of society. One example of this type of part-time, non-degree, non-traditional approach was the parent education program of what was to become the Parent-Teachers' Association. Using group discussion, self-instruction, and observation, these programs consciously sought to supplement the existing programs and activities of "visiting teachers, visiting homemakers, probation officers, and social settlements."[3]

The founders of the National Congress of Mothers were succeeded by a chairman who sought to use these programs to organize mothers of grown children "in working for laws regulating child labor, [for] juvenile courts and probation, pure food, compulsory education, or any other measure for the protection of the home."[4]

By 1919, the first formally accredited institution of higher learning specifically for adult learners was established. It was the New School in New York City.

Social workers devised an assortment of adult education programs during the Depression. They were located both in public school systems and in social agencies, and supported with both state and federal money. After the War, such colleges as Sarah Lawrence offered continuing education programs expressly for women in their 20s and 30s who were considering new careers as their children entered school or left home.

The present expansion of continuing education may be seen as part of the current phase of century-old reform movements for the democratization of American higher education. Parallel to the settlement/ social agency programs of the 19th and early 20th centuries was growing university recognition of "new" disciplines such as sociology and psychology, and the appearance of university studies for occupational or "practical" ends. Pressure grew for universities to extend their programs outside the walls of classroom and narrow curriculum through extension and continuing education programs. Thus, continuing education is not a recent phenomenon. Neither can it be considered insignificant in relation to the rest of higher education today. It would appear that adult learners now represent well over 20% of the total enrollment of students taking advanced study.

Social, demographic and economic trends suggest a need and the certainty of even greater growth of continuing education programs related to social service. A low birth rate and a low death rate are changing the

nature of the population; a change reflected in elementary school enrollments and in services to the aged. On the one hand, decades of double sessions, frantic construction, and overcrowding of schools are being followed by the closing and selling of facilities in many school districts. On the other hand, after decades of being virtually ignored, the aged have been discovered and there is a headlong scramble to develop services for them.

At the same time, marriage patterns are changing, with a trend toward earlier parenthood, but smaller families. A young mother now may expect to live for 45 years after her youngest child enters school. When continuing education programs were emerging 80 years ago, the life expectancy in the United States was 49 years. Today, it is legitimate to suggest that women must plan for an entire lifetime to be lived after the last child goes to school.[6]

Changes in the world of work require comparable adjustments in basic assumptions about future needs for social services and for education. Retirement programs have moved toward full pension rights after service of 20 or 30 years. Formerly confined to the military, this plan has spread to all levels of government service. Led by labor contracts reached in the auto and steel industries, twenty-year retirement has become a major goal of labor in contract negotiations. One result of this change in the expected age of retirement will be that millions of workers will be eligible for pensions just at the time when their children leave home. With time and income, free of child-rearing responsibilities, these workers will be able to take education for any career for which they can prepare themselves. Obviously, this freedom applies to all workers, whether male or female, and it will coincide with the new freedom of those women who choose to stay at home in order to take major responsibility for raising the children.

Despite the fact that these and similar trends have been known for years, many educators view modifications in educational programs with horror. Even essential changes are allowed as "exceptions". This view persists even after it has become clear that basic changes must be made in order to survive, since traditional programs have reached zero growth, while continuing education is booming. Between 1970 and 1973, the degree-credit enrollment of students in the 18 to 24 year old bracket remained almost constant, but enrollments in the 24 to 34 year old bracket increased by 35 per cent.[7] To view continuing education only as an "alternate" in higher education, including the preparation of social workers, does not take account of the reality of what has happened. Indeed, one Carnegie Commission study of higher education

flatly stated that growth in college-level education will stop "unless continuing education becomes an accepted pattern."[8]

Many factors have set continuing education apart from campus-based university activities. One factor has been the content of the programs and another has been the ways in which the learning experiences have been packaged. Continuing education has served as the main university laboratory for new content and new approaches to teaching and learning. In his recent book on the subject, Lauffer (himself a leading practitioner of the art) noted that continuing education usually includes "one or more of the following: extension courses for academic credit, short-term courses, workshops, clinics with or without credit, thematic conferences, consultation and staff development, training for specific populations, and certification."[9] What is implicit in this list of continuing education approaches is the assumption that the learning approach to adult learners can or must be different from the traditional view of students as children. This was the message of the student revolts during the '60s and it remains largely unanswered.

Knowles coined the now-popular word "andragogy" for adult learning, as distinct from pedagogy for children. Unfortunately something of a gimmick in current literature, the word can be appreciated for its intent. Knowles brought attention to certain determinants of education and to their different characteristics in the separate worlds of adults and children. Identified by Knowles and others as determinants of learning are the following, from among many: self-concept, motivation, experience, perceptual ability, self-appraisal, goal orientation, and interaction style.[10] Collectively, these determinants exercise great influence on learning. They reflect the fact that the learning process is related to how learners relate to society and how they relate to themselves. It is in these two areas involving self and others that major differences between adult learning and child learning are found.

The self-concept in children is one of dependency, because children actually are dependent. Adults, too, may be dependent, but they conceive of themselves otherwise and, in any event, are less dependent than children. Adult claims of autonomy are more secure and valid. In a program of education, the adult self-concept supports self-initiated goal-setting, questioning, and learning activities. Children require closer direction. Similar comparisons can be made in the other areas listed above, but will be mentioned here only briefly.

A major part of an educational effort geared to children is encouragement of motivation toward a given learning task. The very presence of an adult in a program may be taken as evidence of motivation, owing to his

higher level of relative autonomy. It may be assumed that the adult can exercise considerable freedom in setting his own course of study.

"Experience" has become an abused word. There has been an inclination in some current literature to equate "experience" and "education" rather indiscriminately. One example of this is the reckless awarding of academic credits for what is called "life experience". Negligence in distinguishing different types of experience has important implications for education which is presumed to follow principles of andragogy. In planning an educational course of study, it is vital to make the proper distinctions among types of experience. The young have experiences which must be considered to be limited in breadth, variety, and educational meaning when compared with the rich network of associations of adulthood. Since experience helps to determine how learning tasks are perceived, these differences between adult and child perceptions must be taken into account. The notion of planning itself implies a sense of the future which is conferred by maturity.

The objective of discussing these differences in conditions which have an effect on learning in children and adults is not to support the idea that the learning itself is fundamentally different in the two groups. The point to be made is that conditions which influence learning are different for children than they are for adults. Programs in higher education ought to reflect these differences. Yet, instead of changing the programs so that they are designed on the basis of what is known about these differences, traditional programs create conditions such that adults are required to approach education as though they were children. It is the most striking difference between traditional programs and continuing education programs and yet, the traditional programs still dominate the academic hierarchies.

Social work education has taken advantage of some of the strengths of social agencies to teach the profession. Usually, agencies are used in a measured way for field instruction, with agency-based supervision, but with all major controls remaining in the hands of campus faculty. The common complaint of field faculty is that classroom faculty do not consider the field instructors to be "real" faculty. Curriculum, evaluation, placement, and virtually every other significant area of program decision remains securely on campus. This division of authority and prestige has been remarkably resistant to the common knowledge that students consistently evaluate field work as the most interesting and most useful part of their education for social work.

Programs in continuing education take greater care in dealing with conditions for adult learning. They also operate on a far more

collegial basis with practitioners than do traditional programs. Although continuing education is widely viewed as a substitute for "real" education, its potential strengths in modern society clearly seem to outweigh those of the traditional campus programs. The differences between the theoretical and the applied are acknowledged in both types of programs. However, in traditional programs, the differences are addressed competitively, while they form the basis for collaboration in continuing education.

The two types of programs may be compared in terms of several areas. A few of these are: focus, resources, methods, reward system, evaluation, and applications of learning. They are selected for purposes of illustration.

The focus of traditional programs of education in social work is general, dealing with concepts and abstractions. The body of knowledge, values and skills prepares broadly for social work practice, from social planning to casework. The broad focus of these programs is shown in the increasing use of the term "generalist" by which schools identify their graduates. Agency-based programs favor a focus which is job-specific, aimed at measurable change within a short time.

Resources vary within each setting, class and field. A university campus offers extensive libraries, concentrations of scholars and authorities in various disciplines, and an atmosphere which is conducive to reading, discussion and reflection. Agency resources include concentrations of task specialists, opportunities for immediate application of learning, and an atmosphere which is conducive to decision and action.

Although methods are limited by resources, those limits almost always allow great latitude for differences in style. Nonetheless, campus programs remain strongly didactic, with an emphasis on listening, writing, reading, analysis, and delayed action. Agencies must favor decision and action based upon limited knowledge, with evaluation based upon the actions themselves rather than upon the reasons for which the actions are taken.

Rewards follow the same lines. Learners in traditional programs are sorted and graded according to measures of abstract reasoning, usually displayed in written and verbal expression. The rewards themselves are written and verbal acknowledments of satisfactory performance. Agencies evaluate applications of knowledge in specific situations, and also evaluate the nature of interpersonal relationships with fellow practitioners and various authority figures. The agency is

more likely to include tangible recognition of success in the form of a promotion or increased salary. The agency values action, or application of knowledge which always must be deferred in traditional programs.

In continuing education programs, these differences, which are really different strengths, are combined. This fact gives them an appeal to the adult learner which seems to grow as students proceed through higher education, according to a recent survey conducted in New York by that state's Education Department. It found that "the higher the level of education attained, the more likely an individual was to seek out continuing education opportunities."[11] A similar finding was found sometime earlier in a nationwide study.[12]

Despite the fact that the appeal of continuing education programs seems to be growing most rapidly among the most educated, these programs remain peripheral in the professional education of social workers. Because of this, great opportunities for enriching that professional education are lost. As a rule of thumb, the greater the variety of learning experiences, the more potentially rich the education. Evaluated in terms of educational potential, continuing education programs appear to offer the best opportunities for theory-practice, campus-community linkages. An additional bonus is that continuing education programs seem to be the most cost-effective.

Answers to the puzzle of the curious relationship between traditional professional education and continuing education in social work do not lie in questions of quality, as once they may have done. Rather, the answers may involve the shifts in power which inevitably would follow dramatic changes in accepted patterns. One respected national commission on education published a report containing the observation that:

> "One of the major threats people on campus feel when a major change is proposed is some diminution of institutional autonomy, even though that autonomy is seldom used for productive alteration of program or mission. Autonomy is interpreted as the right to do nothing."[13]

In these power struggles, continuing education may be used by various groups for their own special purposes. One such use would be to meet the university's community mission or responsibilities with a minimum of effort or change. The breadth, scope and flexibility of continuing education lends itself to such use and, paradoxically, keeps it from full-scale adoption into social work education. For example, programs may be carried to the poor or otherwise disadvantaged in places remote from the campus, thereby avoiding the necessity of bringing them "home".

By keeping continuing education separate, it may be seen as a valid educational service performed for the community without contamination of "serious" study. In this way, it is possible to "balance the ivory tower campus experience with practical... experiences", as Dressel puts it.[14] Even more instructive is his way of classifying continuing education experiences. They may, he notes, be "vocational" or they may "simply broaden the student's understanding."[15]

Placing the programs at a permanent remove from traditional programs prevents tampering with ancient prerogatives. Such a use of program may be considered continuing education as political or academic strategy. However, the strategy cuts both ways. More imaginative faculty have found that continuing education provides a path around entrenched senior faculty. Subject content and teaching techniques can be tried and adopted which never would emerge from the usual labyrinthian procedures of committee and administrative approval for curriculum change.

A similar buffer against change may be the recreational and entertainment uses of continuing education, especially in those educational programs available to older people. It is better, if change is to be avoided, to involve people in entertainment than in professional education, since the level of engagement is much lower in the former. It is reasonable to predict demands for sweeping change if large numbers of pensioners between the ages of 38 and 55 flooded traditional programs. The educational upheavals resulting from the influx of mature veterans after World War II provide a memorable example. In the case of the veterans, their numbers were limited and traditionalists could count on the pressure being time-limited. Once the gates are open to the new group of independent, mature learners, there is no end in sight.

Ultimately, methods and objectives presently identified with continuing education will become an integral part of social work education, if not central to it. It will be used for more than "to meet specific selected need" [16] or as a "bridge to the school of social work".[17] This change will grow organically out of desires and plans to provide better professional education, or else it will develop from fear which, as Emerson wrote, is a teacher of great sagacity. There are "traces of collaboration and cooperation", but the "primary mode" by which the two kinds of education approach each other is "still competitive".[18] Changes will come about from the pressures of determined curriculum planners or they will be forced "by one of the most innovative agents around", which the Carnegie Commission identified as "the threat of going out of business."[19] Continuing education as an essential and equal partner in social work education will come through planning or coercion. Which way it comes about depends upon how fast university faculties can learn.

FOOTNOTES

1. Paul L. Dressel, College and University Curriculum (Berkeley: McCutchen, 1971) p. 5.

2. Lawrence Cremin, The Transformation of the School (New York: Knopf, 1961) p. 63 n.

3. Steven L. Schlossman, "Before Home Start: Notes toward a History of Parent Education in America, 1897- 1929" Harvard Educational Review, August 1976, p.450.

4. Hannah Schaff, 1906, quoted in Schlossman, Op. Cit., p. 451.

5. John Bishop and Jane Van Dyk, "Can Adults Be Hooked on College?" Journal of Higher Education, January- February 1977, p. 39.

6. Extensive research on social changes as the have an impact on the aged has been conducted by Rose Dobrof of Hunter College, and Executive Director of the Brookdale Center on Aging, and who was good enough to supply information on this section.

7. Bishop and Van Dyk, Op. Cit., p. 40.

8. Ibid.

9. Armand Lauffer, The Practice of Continuing Education in the Human Services (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977) p. 33.

10. In several cases, words have been used which are similar in concept to those used by Knowles and his followers, but are different in certain important respects. The intent was to avoid debate on whether basic learning principles change with advancing age, but to deal instead with Knowles important identification of various determinants of learning which do change and which have profound implications for program design.

11. "A Continuing Education Boom" Inside Education, May 1977, p. 6.

12. Bishop and Van Dyk, Op. Cit.

13. Report of the Carnegie Commission on Education, reported by Ewald Nyquist in "Regionalism: A Modern Metphor of Collective Excellence" February 1972, p. 19 (Mimeographed).

14. Dressel, *Op. Cit.* p. 98.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Continuing Education for Social Work Personnel* (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1969) p. 21.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Quoted in Nyquist, *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

19. *Ibid.*