

A Foundation Executive Views the Future and Continuing Education¹

Russell G. Mawby, W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Mawby asserts: *"The problem in continuing education is that, when all is said and done, too often more is said than done."* But, he's optimistic about the future for continuing education. He believes higher education institutions want to make the most of their opportunities and leadership to do so will come from experienced professionals in continuing education.

The theme for the 1971 College and University Leaders seminar—New Life Styles for Continuing Education—is certainly timely and up to date. I note that in 1970 the theme was Social Relevance. I know of no professional group more inclined than educators to coin new phrases, which rapidly rise in popularity and then fade into oblivion. I'm confident that if we traced the seminar themes back through 13 years, we'd have a colorful documentation of the parade of educational jargon.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation, more than any other private foundation, is identified with continuing education. Often this identity is with 1 of the 10 foundation-assisted residential centers for continuing education at institutions in this country and England. In each instance, the interest of both the universities and the foundation was first with program, and only then with bricks and mortar. Each of our institutional

grants for residential centers represented significant new dimensions in programming models for university-based residential continuing education.

The preoccupation of the foundation with the application of knowledge to the problems of people and communities ensures that continuing education is characteristic of many of our activities.

We're committed, as Paul A. Miller says,

- to the idea that learning by doing, and combining study with experience and service is necessary to the education of a responsible man and woman.
- to the idea that doing community adult education with imagination and a sense of enlargement is among the aims of the university.
- to the idea that technology and art, culture and industry, may be wedded for the improvement of all the people.

You as practicing professionals, better than I, can document the current status or situation regarding the concept of continuing education in higher education. To summarize, it seems generally agreed that:

1. *We're a learning society.* Change is one of the most pervasive characteristics of our times. We have come to recognize the vital role of learning in accomplishing and accommodating to change.
2. *Learning is for life,* in all its aspects. Education is essential for all the various roles of the individual:
 - for occupational proficiency, whether in the trades, the professions, or what have you.
 - for civic competence in fulfilling democratic citizenship responsibilities.
 - for avocational interests for self-fulfillment goals in an increasingly complex world.
3. *Learning is lifelong,* from the cradle through the twilight years, in myriad forms and circumstances. It's this lifelong dimension of learning to which institutions of higher education have found it most difficult to accommodate.

Education—in this instance, higher education—has a special place in our democratic society. Universities (I use the term here to include all institutions of higher education—two-year, four-year, graduate, public, private) are conceived in our society

as knowledge resource centers, with responsibilities in teaching, research, and service or extension. Typically, the teaching function of the university is defined too narrowly, usually relating essentially to students in residence, young in age, and in degree-oriented programs of study. If universities are to fulfill their educational potential in serving the needs and goals of society, they must define their teaching function more creatively. This leads us to the concept of continuing education in its broadest conceptual construct.

Today the time seems right—for a variety of reasons—for you as leaders in adult university/college-based continuing education to provide essential leadership for innovations in the teaching programs of your institutions. As a sympathetic but somewhat critical observer, it seems that too often those with responsibilities in adult education, continuing education, university extension, or call it what you will, have drifted in the academic milieu, slightly apart from the main stream—generally little influenced by and little influencing the current of the institution's course—prone to shift responsibility to some mystic and allegedly disinterested third party: “If only *they* understood . . . ,” or “If *they* just gave us the money”

But this vacuous situation, to whatever extent it may exist, can no longer be permitted by you and your professional peers, for the lot of continuing education lies with the lot of all higher education. And higher education is crying for the wisdom, in-

sight, creativity of all its people, to recapture public confidence and to regain interrupted momentum.

Let me share with you now what to me as a foundation executive seem to be certain challenges in continuing education for the future. Foundations, by their nature and commitment, tend to be concerned with innovations, experimentation, pioneering efforts. We have a unique opportunity to be a part of significant developments in education and yet to be somewhat apart from. From this perspective, among the challenges would seem to be the following:

1. Creativity in *institutionalizing the concept* of continuing education. No institution of higher education has really accepted the full implications of the concept of lifelong learning and done something about it — in terms of the organizational chart of the institution, the patterns of financing, the reward system for faculty, functional activities and relationships within the institution and with organizations beyond.

It's true that we have examples of efforts in this direction, but they're fragmentary and incomplete. We need comprehensive models of what might be described as a continuing education university.

2. Creativity in *problem-oriented programs*, in addition to the more traditional discipline-oriented approach.

Most problems which concern our society are complex,

interrelated, multidisciplinary, diffuse; on the contrary, the solutions we contrive are usually highly specific, proscribed, simplistic. This dichotomy between the nature of problems and solutions is a major source of frustration and failure. As examples, consider our concerns with health care delivery, with the viability of our local political institutions, with the efficacy of elementary-secondary education. Continuing education resources from throughout the university must be mobilized to deal in a comprehensive and adequate way with such issues.

3. Creativity in *work with the informal network* of continuing education organizations. Here I mean voluntary agencies, service organizations, community institutions such as libraries, museums, art centers, churches. While it's true that continuing education activities of universities customarily include contacts with such entities as these, such interrelationships are neither as systematic nor as comprehensive as they should be.

4. Creativity in *developing linkages between the formal* (traditional undergraduate and graduate degree oriented), *and informal* teaching programs. Usually these teaching activities of the university exist side by side with virtually no interaction. Again, there are encouraging exceptions. Albion College (Michigan) has launched

an innovative “Experiments in Relevance” program involving undergraduate students, continuing education participants from the community, and faculty. And I was pleased to note in the just-issued report of the All University Committee on Undergraduate Education at Western Michigan University a significant concern with continuing education as it relates to the undergraduate teaching responsibilities of the institution. Such interaction between the formal and informal systems will be beneficial to teachers and learners alike.

5. Creativity in *interinstitutional arrangements*, implying coordination and cooperation. Institutions of higher education must be less unilateral in their educational activities. Society will no longer tolerate the apparent inefficiencies of multiple, duplicative efforts. Better answers must be demonstrated in the roles and relationships of universities, four-year colleges, community colleges—public and private—in meeting educational goals.
6. Creativity in *identifying specific target audiences* in various settings. With some audiences, exemplary effort in continuing education can be cited; other audiences are virtually or absolutely unreached. No one would advocate that a university should be all things to all people. But shouldn't institutions

of higher education be charged with strengthening all of education—with creating new institutional forms if they're needed, nurturing them, preparing personnel, evaluating their effectiveness, and developing modifications that educational needs may be better met?

7. Creativity in the *use of new technology* in learning. Much has been made of new hardware and software available for teaching. Many impressive examples of experimental efforts can be cited. But, characteristically, teaching tends to be more of the same old thing. The challenge in the utilization of new technology appears to lie with the human ingredient.

My optimistic perception of continuing education for the future is based on two undergirding premises:

1. That institutions of higher education, in fact, want to maximize their contributions to lifelong learning rather than persevere in tradition and the status quo. The evidence is encouraging (at last) that this may be the case. A glance to the health care field should be sufficient motivation. Unless creative leadership comes from within the structures of education, others (usually in legislative circles) will be prompted or forced to design the blueprint and lay the forms.
2. That leadership in meeting the challenge of lifelong learning

will come from those experienced in continuing education—a section of the academic community often too modest, too hesitant and deferring, too prone to program logistics, too little inclined to seek the center of the academic arena. It seems that a constructively aggressive stance is appropriate for adult educators, moving forward with not a plea for funds but a program for action — prompting faculty colleagues, convincing administrative leaders, educating decision makers within the framework of the academic process to the urgency of innovations to transform the concept of continuing education to reality.

The problem in continuing education is that, when all is said and done, too often more is said than

done. Most of the requests our foundation receives in continuing education have goals of finding out more about a problem, of completing another study as a basis for possible action, rather than really doing something about it, based on the wealth of knowledge and experience currently available to us.

With reference, therefore, to a systematic implementation of the concept of lifelong learning — the needs are apparent, we have the know-how for substantial progress, we need only get on with it!

Footnote

1. This article is a revision of a speech presented at the 13th Seminar for College and University Leaders in Continuing Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, November 3, 1971.