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ADULT EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

By Alfrad Temesi

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SOME PEDAGOGICAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF
ADULT EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

Following is the translation of an article by Alfrad Temesi in Magyar Pszichologiai Szemle (Hungarian Psychological Review), Vol XVIII, No 1, Budapest 1961, pages 67-70.

All our symposia and studies dealing with the problems of our culture mention the upswing in our adult education since the liberation [1945]. This upswing is due to our social, economic, and general cultural development. It also created the necessity for the development of new methods in adult education. We agree with the statement given on 13 April 1960 at the meeting of the Psychological Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (PCHSA) which stated that adult education and methods for it can not continue without previous as well as simultaneous pedagogical-psychological experiments and studies. This statement was given by Ferenc Lenard. We also agree with another statement of his, namely that pedagogical psychology concerning adults is a terra incognita.

On a meeting of the Academic Senate of the Eotvos Lorand University, two suggestions dealing with the subject were heard.

1. The methods of university and college education have to be investigated. This investigation should deal with conditions for further development.

2. We will have to look into the possibility and necessity of educating teachers who will teach adult classes exclusively.

Both suggestions as well as the program of the PCHSA fall into the line of suggestion and recommendations that came up at the Montreal conference of UNESCO, held in August 1960. I was the Hungarian representative at this conference. The central theme was "Adult Education in a Changing World". The conclusion of the conference was that the changes taking place in the world spell social, economic, and cultural progress. In this changing world, adults have to change, too, by means of continuous education. To make this education possible is a task of the state and society. Every adult can possess modern general and trade knowledge. This knowledge can be acquired only if society properly organizes, prepares and distributes our existing cultural heritage. The development of methods for this can not be arrived at by guesswork. There is a good deal of psychological work to be done on the methods of adult education. The conclusion of the conference suggested the following program for the universities and

institutions of the world:

"While youth education has always been paid wide attention by outstanding researchers, the field of adult education is a relatively neglected one. This field has, however, many problems waiting to be solved. Among them are the questions:

1. What are the needs of adults in education?
2. What circle of interest, what ambitions characterize adults?
3. How should we construct a program for adult education?
4. In what way is adult education effective, and how do we get lasting results?

All these problems require thorough pedagogical-psychological research. The demands of the conference are not mere exhortations; they express real needs for action. Here in Hungary we also need investigations to help adult education. We have to know, for instance, what is the interest of the adults in our social-economical system and how their interest could be and should be directed. We also have to know what is the capacity of a person who is already carrying a certain workload. But the most urgent task is to work out pedagogical methods based on psychological research.

At the Montreal conference, Prof J. R. Kidd (Canada) spoke on his psychological studies on the learning capacity of adults. His coworkers were E. L. Thorndike and Irving Lorge. They found that the intellect does not decrease in the 30-60 age group. The adult may learn more slowly, but his retention power is better than that of people under 30. They also surpass the younger group in the application of their acquired knowledge. Vocabulary increases up to the age of 60. Kidd disagrees with some American psychologists who claim that the intellect of the average person after 30 remains on the level of a 12 year old child. These views, he says, are the basis for producing films aimed at the "masses". Kidd claimed that after testing a great number of "average" people (we don't know how he classified them as "average") he found that adults who were freed of their inhibitions could solve very difficult problems in his tests.

The decrease in hearing and vision in aging persons and its effect on learning and methods to be used in adult education were also studied by Kidd's group. A methodics manual, based on these studies, was compiled. Among the exhaustive studies done by the Canadians, the channeling of interest and the effect of aroused interest on the "joie de vivre" were particularly interesting.

All these researches and their conclusions would be of interest to our specialists, too.

Mathur, president of the Indian Radio, spoke on the role of radio and TV in adult education. He referred to psychological studies on adults with respect to these information media. These studies raised the questions:

1. Individual or collective studying leads to better results?
2. What is the role of collective studying in the development of the communal village?

3. What is the effect of picture and sound together? (Role of TV and film.)

4. Which gives better results: Continuous, course-system studying, or a short lecture?

Charles H. Barbier, a UNESCO worker, also dealt with some of the pedagogical-psychological problems of adult education. His most interesting observation was that in adult education attention should be centered on the adult himself and not on the methods and tools used in his education. His opinion -- based on many studies -- is that active methods are the best in adult education also; the activity of the adult, his contribution in the act of his education, is of utmost necessity if we want results. Our task in adult education is not to give theoretical knowledge or eternal, unchanging truths, but to reveal to people how to understand and apply principles. He also advocates the mobilization of psychology in adult education.

Elvin Lionel, dean of the Pedagogy Department of London University, found much the same results in his study (Education de base et education des adultes, No 12, 1961). He concedes that there is much work to be done on the methodology of adult education, but finds a need for a methodology in the teaching of technical sciences for adults. The adult student and his teacher have to live in a republic of dialogues and not in an autocratic system. The teacher should work out the material with the student; the knowledge should not be dropped on the students head in one massive block from somewhere up in the clouds.

The leader of the Soviet delegation, Deputy Minister, Kasin spoke on the relationship between learning and work and the everyday constructive life of the workers. He said that in the Soviet Union, one is studying for better work results. This desire comes from the deep feeling of social responsibility of the Soviet man.

The methodology committee of the conference worked on the cooperation of psychology and the social sciences. They concluded that there is need for group-psychological studies in groups of people in the same profession. Several people lectured on results achieved by so-called argumentative activities. Adults studying in discussion groups are active participants in their own education. This method, which is very wide-spread in the West and in America, is somewhat similar to the consultation method we are adopting for the regular meetings of our correspondence courses.

Although we do not fully agree with these American methods, we are interested in the activity of Laval University (Quebec, Canada). Their goals and tasks are defined by them thus:

1. We have to give such knowledge to adults as will relieve them of their anxiety, (sic!) prejudices, and escapism, and which will make it possible for them to finish the development of their personalities and make them able to participate in the improvement of their social and economic positions.

2. We have to teach to adults the methods by which they will

be able to create effective contacts with the community. Through this education, they can learn to think and act freely, with moderation and wisdom.

This university organizes seminars two to three weeks long, where the participants live together. They are usually of the same profession. The students start out with a specific problem and proceed step-by-step to the point where they get the knowledge through which they can see the meaning and goal of their further education. (Hence not the actual learning of something is the aim, but the desire for learning.) This goal can be achieved because they use the following methods.

1. Their teaching method insures balance between the presentation of an idea and the discussion on it.

2. The group is deeply involved in the educational process and hence has a chance to find the relationship between theory and practice.

3. The participants themselves have the elements that stimulate them to further thinking.

This example shows the necessity of precursory psychological research in the methods of adult education.

One of the most discussed topics of the conference was the merit of rigid, school-type course-giving vs. the merit of "free" learning. In the latter, the adult himself chooses those lectures, seminars, symposia, etc. that interests him. It is necessary, however, to find what lectures, seminars, etc., will be attended. This "free" education should be influenced, and if necessary, channeled by social considerations.

Rumanian scientists studied the attitudes of adults while they were getting educated. The Bulletin of the Rumanian UNESCO Committee reports that there is a preparative course given to adults who are about to start on further education after a long pause in formal education. This course was constructed with considerations to the practical work and life experience of the participants as well as to the education they are going to get after the preparatory course. The methods of this course were also carefully thought out; its character combines independent study with study designed to reveal one point after another.

They also tried to find out the elements of study methods of adults participating in correspondence courses.

Czech scientists reported that in their country art education emphasizes folk art. They claim that teaching folk art increases the desire for education and practically insures success on the part of the worker and adult peasant students.

Here in Hungary, the opinion is that self-education and insulated research on the part of adult education experts is not enough anymore. Organized pedagogical and psychological education on the university level is what is needed for future adult education experts. Specialists will carry the day in this field, who will not equate youth with adults. Such specialists are already being

trained elsewhere. In Canada, three universities offer courses in this field. The PCHSA should collect data from abroad and, based on this data and on our research, should lay down principles for the training of adult education experts.