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ONE of our greatest mistakes in thinking of education is to put a period instead of a comma after public school, high school or university. We set a mental terminus to our learning.

Strangely enough, progressive in many other ways, we are inclined to look upon adult education as something for those who missed the chance to finish school in their youth. Instead, it should be regarded as a stimulus for all minds that have grown beyond the easy judgments and mechanical training of youth. It might be said that not until the mind develops into adulthood is education really possible.

"But," say some, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." If that is true, it is because the old dog doesn't want to learn; not because he can't. It is too bad that such a saying should be allowed to deprive people of the big and happy things they could do.

The fact is that the average adult is more intelligent and has more learning capacity than the academic world supposes.

Because of its nature and the standing of the adult in life, his education is voluntary, with no more compulsion than the person has within him. People study because they wish to, and their wish arises from their needs, their interests and their intellectual craving. It is no field for missionary endeavours, nor for the imposing of ideals from above.

In an article in the *Agricultural Institute Review*, J. G. Rayner, Director of Extension of the University of Saskatchewan, remarks pungently: "I sometimes feel that I would like to 'mow down' the person who tells me I should read more books. I like books, but I don't want some one else to guide my life so far as reading is concerned." That was not Hitler's philosophy of education. He compelled those who came under his power to accept his doctrine, and his minions crammed books and theories into people's heads.

Adult education in Canada takes for granted that men and women have mental and spiritual resources capable of solving their problems, and it is the function of the adult education movement to make available the knowledge which will help bring out their best. Education is not the pumping full of people's minds. It would be possible to learn all that is in the largest encyclopedia without being able to handle facts fruitfully.

Some adults are held back by self-consciousness from taking part in group education. The "old dog" proverb has injected a defeatist thought into their minds. Others are disappointed after a short try, because they have been misled by false hopes. Mere attendance at lectures will not perform miracles in transforming a person from a wallflower into the life of any party. Learning is not something absorbed by a class from an incense-swinging lecturer. It starts inside one, reaches out for whatever new ideas and facts it can obtain from a lecturer, film, book or from neighbours, and goes on from there. That is what makes learning fun: it would be quite uninteresting if one absorbed it as one does all the good things which come wrapped up in a doctor's pill.

This thought of "reaching out" naturally leads to the conclusion that it is silly to think of education ceasing at the end of juvenile school days. Evelyn Waugh puts it this way: "Who but the muddle-headed, mist-haunted races of Northern Europe would ever commit the folly of glorifying incompleteness and immaturity? For what is youth except a man or a woman before it is ready or fit to be seen?" Education in these days is too vast to be compressed within a few years of public school, or high school or university attendance. Life is one long process of learning. When Michelangelo was nearly 90, and had lost his sight, he ran his sensitive fingers over a statue and exclaimed: "I still learn! I still learn!"

School  
Isn't All

It stands to sense that however diligent a pupil may be in his studies, he is soon out of date if he quits learning after high school. The economic, scientific and social information he absorbed at 18 is not going to meet problems of his thirties. The world is moving so fast that ideas and knowledge and thoughts are out-dated in a year. Early schooling is only a baptism.

Nothing could be more depressing than to imagine one's self launched upon a great decline at 18 or 19, at the end of formal schooling. If that were so, then we should become poorer and more miserable every minute we live. We know we don't. We absorb education as we go along, whether by trying or by mere exposure to something catching. The argument for adult education is that we shall be much better if we gain the education knowingly, desirably and with a realization of what we are doing.

Every age has its own features. "Life is a string of beads", as Emerson says: "As we pass through the train of moods they prove to be many-coloured lenses which paint the world their own hue and each shows only what lies in its focus." It is not necessary, in order to approve adult education, to scoff at that of youth. What we learned then was fit for its time, and is necessary to what we learn later. But there is an education appropriate to adults. If they excuse themselves from it, they may do so on the plea that they are tired or sleepy or in need of entertainment rather than improvement, but they cannot plead out of it on the ground that they are past the learning stage.

Comparisons do not mean very much, because in this of all fields there is little accuracy in averages, but for what it is worth educationalists have found that the best age for learning in the sense of receiving the greatest returns per unit of time spent is in the twenties. They have also found that any age below 45 is better than the ages 10 to 14, and that a man of 65 may expect to learn at least half as much per hour as he could at 25 and more than he could at 8 to 10. Any normal adult, meaning a person between 21 and 75, can learn what he needs to learn.

It seems important to emphasize this point, because we are all too ready to seize upon the excuse of age for failure to learn. Many significant contributions have been made to the world by men and women who started late. They have been people who refused to allow life to develop into a routine of tearing off the calendar's pages. Others fall too early and too easily. They permit habits to become fixed, they grow fussy, they seize upon the prospect of age as a reason for relaxing.

Physically, it is only common sense to simplify life in keeping with the waning of free energy. Mentally, no time in life hinders the acquirement of new knowledge by one who thinks it worth while to make the attempt.

There is great temptation to fill a page with proof from real life that age is no genuine handicap to learning anything you want to learn or need to learn. Simply by making the most of the opportunities within reach we can get more out of our fourth, fifth and sixth decades than out of any of the first.

Lack of formal schooling is no obstacle. Edison went to school for only three months in all his life. Some of the best educations on record have been acquired by the old midnight oil method at home.

Lack of time is no valid excuse. Everyone has some leisure, and the use of it becomes a choice between this and that. If you count up the hours in your year you will find they total 8,760. Deduct 2,288 hours for working 5½ days a week; 2,920 hours for 8 hours a night sleep, and 2 hours a day for dressing, shaving and walking the dog. You have 2,822 hours left. Take off half of that for straight recreation, and *what you have left is 911 hours more than the University Arts student uses in lectures in a year.*

Difficulty of access to education does not stand in the way. It is true that Thomas Campanella made learning extra easy in his ideal state, the "City of the Sun." All the knowledge of all the world was engraved upon the walls, so that citizens learned as they walked. Since walking around all the present world knowledge would be exhausting, it is fitting that there are organizations which bring education by mail and radio, and hold forums no farther away than your community hall.

Experience cannot take the whole place of education. The amoeba, lowest form of life, floats around in a pond and draws away from things it doesn't like, and absorbs the trifles it does like, but who wants to be an amoeba? Life is not made up of a series of neutral experiences. We need to pluck up courage to throw out the window a lot of false slogans. Education is always futuristic. If it looks to the past it must do so with the idea of obtaining materials with which to build something new to meet emerging needs.

Adult education, says Eduard C. Lindeman, professor of social philosophy at the New York School of Social Work, in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, "bears no relationship to the proud but fallacious doctrine of

**Obstacles  
Can be  
Overcome**

'knowledge for the sake of knowledge.' Adult education is education for use. Its starting point is not history but rather the contemporary situation. Its method is that of the device known to motion pictures as the 'flash-back': it begins with the present and then proceeds to discover the past out of which the present situation arose . . . The purpose of adult education is to prevent intellectual statics; the arrested development of individuals who have been partially educated cannot be prevented otherwise."

Greatest gift of adult education, because it is basic to so many human activities, is straight thinking. The adult who studies may not always arrive at certainty, but he is better able to arrange in his mind the facts and opinions he sees in the newspapers or hears on the radio. Straight thinking helps toward making significant choices wisely. Choices which are made calmly and based upon reasons are much more likely to be good choices than those arrived at by bias, emotion, prejudice and bigotry.

Everyone wants the reputation of being broad-minded. It does not only mean being a pleasant listener, but one who keeps his mind open on a question until the evidence is all in, and, moreover, insists on the best evidence. This is one of the great arguments in favour of adult education. It is all very well for reformers to urge us to do this and that to help our fellow countrymen, and for internationalists to tell us to love our neighbouring countries and seek fellowship with all the peoples of the world. But how can we hold out help intelligently if we do not know what causes the need? Or how shall we love our neighbour understandingly if we do not know him?

Looking at it from the learner's viewpoint (and that is what counts), our approach to adult education requires answers to the questions suggested by A. E. Wiggam in his excellent book "The Marks of an Educated Man": (1) Do I really want to know the truth about politics, business, science, religion, morals and life, or do I merely want to prove that the notions I already have about these things are correct? (2) Am I willing to lay aside the convictions of a lifetime and all the traditions and beliefs of history, and all the customs of my social class when I come into the presence of a new fact, long enough to find out whether or not this new fact ought to change my point of view?

The Canadian Association for Adult Education was founded in 1934. It is a national organization, with a council of 60 members representing all parts of Canada and all walks of life. The Director,

**Adult  
Education  
in Canada**

Dr. E. A. Corbett, was for 8 years Director of Extension at the University of Alberta.

Hundreds of local associations are engaged in adult education, and the Association has affiliated with it 42 national organizations all active in the field of public welfare and education. It is responsible for three national projects which have helped in shaping the way of life of rural and urban people.

The conference method of adult education is an effective way to keep people's minds active. As long as men have had others with whom to talk they have engaged in debate and the exchange of ideas. The virtue about today's adult education conferences or forums is that the talk does not dribble into inane conversation. The people who attend them are there to learn, and they carry away with them clearer ideas of the issues they choose to debate.

Passive curiosity has small place in a forum, which calls for the principles of democratic assembly, deliberation, and a pooling of ideas and counsel. John Dewey in his book "How We Think" gives a formula which might apply: There must be a felt difficulty, it must be located and defined, there must be a suggestion of possible solutions, these must be reasoned out by exchange of ideas, and further observation and experiment will lead to acceptance or rejection of a proposed solution. To these it might be added that the topic needs to be within the experience of the group members, interesting and alive to all.

The forums must espouse no programmes of action, political or sectarian, nor should they organize citizens into "pressure groups." When he wrote on the subject "Liberalism and Adult Civic Education" for the Annals of November 1935, John W. Studebaker, United States Commissioner of Education, said this: "Action groups we have in plenty, in which citizens may band themselves together to work for whatever improvements they choose. But of educational machinery for these broader purposes of social improvement we have little enough, and that little should not be prostituted to any other purpose than the honest discussion and exchange of ideas, the development of tolerance and open-mindedness, and the encouragement of habits of critical thinking."

Adult education has its place in community projects, and should be one of the main features provided for in every community centre. There is a wealth of topics to be discussed, covering every possible interest in life. Donald Cameron, Director of the Department of Extension, the University of Alberta, suggests these:

**Lighted  
Schoolhouses**

citizenship, international affairs, science, health, psychology, home beautification, crafts, town planning, libraries, and many others. When Kitchener and Waterloo launched an experiment in adult education, a "People's College" sponsored by the Y. M. C. A. and by Waterloo College, they were swamped with applications for participation, and membership had to be limited in many classes.

Mr. Cameron is strongly of the opinion that wherever it is practical to do so the community centre should be developed as an integral part of the school plant. "This," he says, "is particularly true of rural and village or small town high schools." The national conference on building community programmes had a commission under chairmanship of Alex Sim, which recommended: "That this conference request the C. N. E. A. to urge through provincial departments of education that school buildings and facilities be made available for community programmes and that plans for new school buildings provide adequate accommodation for varied programmes including those at the adult level." In "Food for Thought" in February there is an item headed "One More Lighted School." It tells how a Home and School Association has organized a series of night courses conducted in a high school.

In addition to forums, conferences, courses and radio there are books. The person who does not read cannot keep mentally alive. People who write books have, for the most part, had peculiar opportunities for acquiring the knowledge. Their work is not to be disregarded: indeed, the great men of our past did not overlook what had been discovered and printed before their time. Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Dante, Milton and Bach all received gladly what their predecessors had to offer them. They may not have agreed with the author in every case, but his finishing place gave them a starting place.

It is remarked in the Report of the Survey Committee of the Canada and Newfoundland Education Association (no article touching on education can refrain from quoting that excellent report): "Formal education, however liberally supported and skilfully

administered, is futile unless it is continued by a lifelong use of books engendered in childhood, fostered in youth and built into an adult habit." The report goes on to tell the advantages which would accrue to adult education from a generous use of public funds to make library provision possible where it is now lacking.

There is a wide choice of materials available to those who wish to study — pamphlets, study courses, films, filmstrips, radio programmes, records, posters, displays, pictures, handicraft materials and so on. The Canadian Association for Adult Education and its associates release bulletins and pamphlets on current problems at the rate of about 20,000 a week. "There would be little difficulty," says Dr. Corbett, "in expanding such an activity to include hundreds of thousands of people if a little more money were made available for research, organization, and publication costs."

That is the case for adult education: there remains the question which will be asked by practically everyone — "What would I get out of it?" Much of this article has tried to show the spiritual and practical benefits. Adult education covers every field of human interest, as Dr. M. M. Coady, Director of Extension of St. Francis Xavier University, says, from "the simple material things that are vital to human living" up to "the more cultural and refining activities that make life whole and complete."

A man does not get all of his education out of something connected with his work or the management of his home. It isn't enough for most of us to know how to tighten bolt number 979 and loosen nut number 841 as a way to earn our daily bread, and to keep a budget in balance so as to run our family affairs satisfactorily. Even the humblest of us has aspirations beyond the purely necessary things of life. Here is where liberal education comes in, to teach us to enjoy life. The millennium to which utopians look forward — and most ordinary people too, if we would only admit it — is a world filled with educated people, people who not only know about, but live, lives of liberty, tolerance, sympathy and beauty.