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BOOK REVIEWS

Houle, Cyril O. *Continuing Learning in the Professions*. San Francisco, London: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980. 390p. \$15.95. LC 79-92462. ISBN 0-87589-449-6.

In the last few years, articles and books on continuing education have rolled from the presses in a veritable flood. Most of them have been sheer pap—lacking in substance and reminiscent of the sentimental rhetoric of the library-college proponents. Now comes a first-rate book on lifelong learning by one of the leading students of professionalism. Cyril O. Houle, professor emeritus of education at the University of

Chicago and senior program consultant for the Kellogg Foundation, has summarized his own lifelong study of the professions in this major work that will undoubtedly become a fundamental treatise for the field. Houle is interested not just in professional education in the restricted sense but also in education that will result in a lifelong system of continuing learning to provide quality skills for society's changing needs. Thus his book combines an overview of research, theory, and observations of practice in all the professions (including librarianship) as well as some reflections on the changing nature of professionalism in our turbulent society.

Not that Houle proposes a grand design. He recognizes the infinite variety of professionals and the need to use all three modes of learning: inquiry, instruction, and performance. What this book may do best for us, librarians and library educators, is to force consideration of the problem of how one enters the profession, attains basic skills through a degree program, and adds constantly to his or her store of knowledge.

Along the way to raising basic questions, Professor Houle provides a new framework for looking at theory and practice (p.105-6). He suggests that we must move from a static to a dynamic concept of professionalism and isolates fourteen characteristics (chapter 3) broadly associated with the process, which can provide the basis for goals. If you can read only part of his book, by all means read and think about these characteristics in chapter 3, "Goals of Lifelong Professional Education," and chapter 4, "Lifespan Learning of the Professional." These chapters, with their references to research on professional practice, should provide librar-

ians with a better framework for considering their library schools, their places of work, their associations, and their career development. As the Council on Library Resources begins to provide substantial funds for a new approach to the education of the research librarian, Houle's chapters are especially worth consideration. For much too long a period we have assumed that a basic master's degree should prepare one fully for the practice of his or her profession for the next twenty to forty years. Incidentally, the text has numerous references to librarians as professionals and to the Asheim statement on library personnel.

Possibly the greatest obstacle to lifelong learning in the nonscientific professions has been the lack of a "Zest for Learning" (chapter 5), which should permeate one's entire career. There has been all too little encouragement among academic librarians to develop their own resources and to become lifelong inquirers. Certainly it is difficult amid the routine dullness of many day-to-day library, ministerial, or legal tasks to maintain the kind of enthusiasm with which one may have entered a given profession. Yet as Houle says, "... if practice dulls the keenness of knowledge, skill, and commitment, education can resharpen it" (p.123). How one rekindles the fires of learning is a major task of professional leaders, who should ponder Houle's summary of studies on why professionals want to learn (p.150-52). In discussing the laggards in all professions, Houle notes that they not only cause concern to their colleagues and the society at large but also have a high resistance to learning, believing that it costs too much time and money but not realizing that ignorance is even more expensive (p.159). Yet Houle recognizes that continuing education is expensive and that ultimately a major part of the real cost falls upon the individual practitioner (p.196-99).

Few would doubt that librarians have yet to demonstrate the kind of commitment to improved performance that causes medical practitioners to move into specialties or demands that the military officer spend at least one-fourth of his or her career in some kind of training situation (p.186). Perhaps there is more than historical interest in

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Houle's quotation from a biography about Sir William Osler in the early days of modern medicine:

It is interesting to see how consistently he began anew at Oxford with precisely the same projects as those which had engaged him in Montreal, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. A consuming interest in libraries and librarians; the reunifying of an old medical society or the organization of new ones; the establishment of a medical journal, the bringing together of discordant elements in the profession, and the raising of money when money was needed (p.195).

As Houle comments, "A similar pioneering enterprise is still necessary for most professions in most places at most times" (p.196).

There is a great deal more in this book, of course. Houle analyzes the organizational structure of continuing professional education, he addresses the need for designing programs of learning, and he is well aware of the naiveté of many who are currently working in the field. And he is also aware that the impetus for advances in continuing education came from attacks upon the professions by the general public. As he notes in the chapter "Assuring Professional Quality," "It was thought that earnest and, if possible, innovative efforts to help practitioners learn might greatly improve performance, disarm criticism, and build defenses against malpractice suits, loss of certification, and the requirement of compulsory periodic relicensure or other forms of recertification" (p.269). Education per se, of course, is no assurance that quality will result; ". . . the effort to achieve excellence must be based on the realization that it is ultimately subjective. Procedures can be refined, outcomes can be measured, authorities can be cited, precedents can be followed, and data can be brought to bear upon decision-making processes, but qualitative conclusions must always be judgmental" (p.269).

Where, then, do we go from here? We consider the accusations of failure to serve all the people, of the self-interest of professionals, and of their reported incompetence, and institute those controls that give the public confidence in the continued expertise of the "experts." To do this will certainly require such elements as reshaping accred-

itation, a new look at licensure or certification, and recrediting professionals themselves. For the comfort of the professional, one is reminded of the optimism expressed by Lloyd Elliott, president of George Washington University, who stated at a Columbia University conference last March, "society seeks out the expert to answer that special question or to solve that unique problem. We believe the expert to be on the cutting edge of new knowledge, and we continue to increase our dependence on that advanced achievement" ("Some Observations on Graduate and Professional Education," in Richard L. Darling and Terry Belanger, eds., *Extended Library Education Programs* [New York: School of Library Service, Columbia Univ., 1980], p.19). Elliott believes our society will continue to need such professionals.

Houle says that each profession must develop its own tailor-made system of life-span education with an attention to what is happening in comparable situations in other professions. He does not believe the task will be easy. At the advanced level professional work demands "the skilled use of intricate and complex techniques, the comprehension of abstruse knowledge, and the application of sensitive understanding" (p.305). In the development of lifelong learning for librarians, the primary responsibility will doubtless remain with the individual. But professional associations, library schools, and libraries cannot escape their own responsibility for developing goals for education throughout the whole life span—and funding them.

When a colleague of mine stepped down from the directorship of a major research unit at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I expressed my regret. He appreciated the compliment but he added, "I'm midway between the receipt of my M.D. and retirement. What I need just now is some time to think about what I want to do with the second part of my career." Lots of librarians at mid-career are asking themselves a similar question. Reading Houle's book will make a contribution to their deliberations.—Edward G. Holley, *School of Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*