

# Reflection on the Connotative Development of Continuing Education in Colleges and Universities

## —Base on the definition perspective from adult education to continuing education

Yaner Tang<sup>1, a</sup>, Yanli Liu<sup>2, b</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Education College of Jinan University, Guangzhou

<sup>2</sup>College of Public Administration of Jinan University, Guangzhou

<sup>a</sup> [tye@jnu.edu.cn](mailto:tye@jnu.edu.cn)    <sup>b</sup> [liuyanli415@126.com](mailto:liuyanli415@126.com)

**Keywords:** Adult education; Continuing education; Concept; Connotative development

**Abstract** Specifying concept is clear basic elements of definition. Adult education is an essential part of continuing education. They have the same substantive connotation. Therefore, if sort out the relationship of the object, subject and characters, it could make rewarding suggestions to promoting the connotative development of continuing education in ordinary colleges, which aim to confirm their ideal position, clarify their service recipient, optimize their department structure, construct network teaching platform and innovate resources sharing mechanism.

### 1. Introduction

In April 2013, Yuan Guiren, the Minister of Education participated "the Fifth Congress of China Association for Adult Education" pointed out "continuing education especially adult education, is an important part of lifelong learning system. Continuing education is indispensable to achieve lifelong learning[1]. In October 2014, Adult Education Association of Higher Education Theory Research Council held the 18th annual meeting in Kunming. The theme is "the diverse needs of lifelong learning and adult continuing education transformation" [2]. In March 2016, "the 13th Five-Year Plan People's Republic of China National Economic and Social Development" is issued, which pointed out that we should vigorously develop continuing education and build the benefit of life-long education training system[3].

Visible, the related department pay high attention to develop continuing education. Continuing education have great significance not only improve the national education system but also promote the construction of the lifelong learning, learning society and the sustainable harmonious society. However, continuing education and adult education are often accompanied appear in the relevant documents. What are the definition and connotation essence? What is relation between the two words? Therefore, we need to clarify the connotation of the two names' essence and comb the reality of the practical development to put forward the proposal about its integration transformation and connotative development.

### 2. The definition and relationship

If we want to clarify the path of continue education in connotative development, it is necessary to sort out the concepts and their relationship.

#### 2.1 The definition

##### 2.1.1 The adult education

From the existing literature, the current academic generally believed that the concept of adult education originates in the 1790s. The development of adult education has more than 200 years, which forms variety of the definitions. But the following three aspects are typical and influential.

The first, it refers to the adult education. "Adult education is designed to provide a purposeful, organized, systematic educational activities for the adults"[4].

Second, it emphasizes multiple functions of adult education. "For receiving incomplete educated people, the adult education supplement elementary or vocational education. For the people need to

cope with new environmental requirements, the adult education is to extend the existing education. For the people have highly trained, the adult education provide further education for them"[5].

Although the definition is different that dues to the author's vary angle of analysis, but it is not difficult to find something in common: Firstly, it emphasizes the particularity of education objects, for example the age, the characteristics related to social recognition and social role-playing. Secondly, it stresses organization of activity. Adult education is an educational activity, which involved the process of the educators, objects, contents, forms, evaluations and results. Thirdly, it underlines compactness between adult education and social development. The purpose of adult education is not only beneficial to develop of adult learners, but also realize the sustainable development of the society.

### **2.1.2 The Continuing education**

Continuing Education was developed from the United States in the 1930s. It's a new education project called the CEE (Continuing Education Engineering), which provides necessary training for some engineering technical person again in order to master new technology and adapt to the development of the production. Since the 1960s, continuing education achieved development in the modern sense. So its main content is concentrated on the following two aspects.

The first, it stress in-service education especially for the higher education post. Continuing education focuses on the re-education for intermediate technical staff to supplement, update, expand knowledge and improve the creativity and development, which is underlined the object of learning. The second, continuing education refers some kind of post-professional education. "An educational activities who have obtained certain academic education and professional titles, so that they can constantly update their knowledge and improve innovative skills to adapt to the needs of social development and progress of technology"[6].

From the above two perspectives, the concept of continuing education mainly focused on the following four aspects: first of all, the object of education is specified, which refers to have already have a certain degree or professional titles. Secondly, the purposes of education are multiple. Continuing education is to update existing knowledge structure, increase the utility reserves, improve professional skills and more important is to promote further career improvement. Thirdly, the content is advancing. Accepting continuing education is to learn new knowledge and technology, etc. It is beneficial to improve their comprehensive quality in line with the development of times. Fourthly, the definition is generalized, which give priority to with summary of generalization.

### **2.2 Combing the relationship**

Through combing the concept of the adult education and continuing education, we can find that exist similarities between them, namely, the first frame of education object and then probably work out the content, finally clear aims and nature. However, with the development of times and society, the connotation of the concept itself will face a constantly updated. So there will be no fixed template of the concept. The connotation will be mature and perfect in the differentiation. At the same time, it will be connected with the needs of social development closely.

Up to 2014, the Ministry of Education count that the gross enrollment rate of higher education has reached to 37.5% in our country. That means we have entered the stage of popularization of higher education[7]. They are endowed with the same social attribute no matter what the essence of the adult education and continuing education respectively.

To meet the diversified development of society, the author believe that continuing education is more able to adapt to the information society, which emphasize the practice skills, all kinds of knowledge innovation and diversification flows, etc. Studying the relationship between them, adult education and continuing education is in line with the different needs of the times, both are to cultivate the adult. Adult education is an important part of continuing education. The competent department of adult education is becoming more and more attention of non-academic education in colleges and universities, so we can predict that the content of adult education in the traditional sense has changed. It covers the range has been expanded, regardless of contents or forms. It will be gradually replaced by continuing education which will be more representative and convincing.

### 3. Conclusions

#### 3.1 Thinking based on the normative concept

In this study, normative concept mainly refers to that how to define. The author thinks we should revolve service objects, subject of education and the nature of this activities to define the two concepts.

##### 3.1.1 Service objects

Whether adult education or continuing education, have specific service objects. Although the concept may be from biology, psychology and sociology to define at present, the existing definition is framed objects of education at first. Regardless of the object of education is strictly limited or a general overview, which can guide our understanding to adult education and continuing education. However, the definition of two concepts does not stand still and may have limitation. No matter what it is, this does not prevent us from thinking the object of education.

##### 3.1.2 Subject of education

Adult education and continuing education have consistent connotation. However, organizers are difference from the current actual situation in our country. For adult higher education, the organizer mainly include adult education colleges, open universities or management cadre institutes, etc. For continuing education, the organizers are not only the above institutions but also enterprises and other relevant training institutions, which are more diverse.

##### 3.1.3 The nature of activities

Both have the nature of education activities. Whether academic education or non-academic education, its core purpose is to realize the cultivation of the people and to meet the multiple needs of work, life and development as far as possible, in order to promote the development of the individual and the whole society. Although learning path, learning tools and learning modes are different. But the substance of two activities is consistent, namely the cultivation of people.

Based on the above three points, it is necessary to clarify: subject, object and nature of the activities when describe or define of the concept. Accordingly, the adult education and continuing education are an educational activity, both have a particular study group as the object of service and various forms. And based on this level of understanding, we may be able to put forward the proposal for continue education.

#### 3.2 Recommend on college of continuing education to achieve the connotative development

Colleges and universities as a higher institution to develop lifelong education play a bridge role in our national education system. Many colleges and universities carry out the continue education, which include higher academic and non-academic education. By 2014, colleges and universities education received total enrollment of 2.6560 million students, an increase of 91100 over the previous year. The students who are registered were up to 6.5312 million, an increase of 267100 over the previous year[8]. Many colleges and universities increasingly concerned continuing education and began to organize all kinds of quality training, special training workshops and other non-academic education.

There is no doubt that colleges and universities is not just cultured academic talents but also need to focus on training applied talents in the development of adult education, which play important role on the cultivation system. Through the survey found that many institutions of colleges and universities have experienced merged, adjusted and changed its name and so on. But there are lacking of integration in the development process, which can't achieve high-quality resource sharing. Therefore, the author put forward the following suggestions to promote connotative development of adult education and continuing education based on the above analysis.

##### 3.2.1 Make educational orientation clearly to implement the concept

Adult education and continuing education must meet the property of educational activities, namely cultured human. Therefore, it is necessary to uphold the idea of education in the development of continuing education, it stems from awareness of the basic knowledge. Colleges and universities should find the reasonable localization in the development of continuing education at present, especially make clearly what is the role and goal. It is necessary for colleges and universities to accurate positioning, segment the target group as well as differentiate "market" share, which is

beneficial to implement the essence of education so that promote the harmonious and comprehensive development of continuing education.

### **3.2.2 Clarify the object to meet the needs of learners**

The purpose of clarifying the object is to grasp its nature and characteristics. After combing the concept of the adult education and continuing education, we find that their service objects are cross and overlap. The actual difference between them is mainly focused on the specific contents and the forms and so on. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the traditional sense of borders and crossroads for colleges and universities as one of the organizers of continuing education in order to adapt development strategy of the society and market. In March 2016, "The 13th Five-year Plan of People's Republic of China National Economic and Social Development" points out that the development of continuing education should focus on technical skills training model of production-teaching and school-enterprise cooperation[9]. Therefore, we must be with learners as the center to truly realize the development of continuing education. Only do this can determine the development path of further education in order to meet the needs of learners.

### **3.2.3 Optimize the structure of departments to achieve integration of resources**

Some institutions of colleges and universities experienced a transition from "Adult Education College" to "The College of Continuing Education". At the same time, the content of education has changed. With emphasis on non-academic education, the content of continuing education is much more abundant. However, these departments did not realize the real integration development in reality from the perspective of the management. Such as many institutions are changed from a single college into the Integrated management department, but it is still a subordinate management, especially the development of education activity is entirely separate. In the long run, it caused the redundant construction and waste of resources. It is not conducive to develop and share the high quality resources. Thus, the development of continuing education is necessary to build public service platform so that make various activities to realize integration development.

### **3.2.4 Build network of teaching platform to create a digital learning environment**

In 2015, Premier Li Keqiang put forward the "Internet +", "Internet + continuing education" can meet the demand of personalized learning and provide a flexible, open learning environment for learners. In January 2016, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China proposed that combination of the Internet and life-long study means continuing education should adapt to the development of the "Internet + education" in order to strengthen the construction of information infrastructure. For example, the construction of various terminal digital libraries, virtual laboratories, training rooms and others can expand educational resources, enhance service awareness and change the old forms of teaching and learning in order to achieve communication conveniently.

### **3.2.5 Innovate the sharing mechanisms to develop high-quality digital teaching resources**

In May 2014, Shenzhen University established "UOOC" committed to promoting the use of "MOOC" in the field of continuing education[10], which is effective for the sharing resources and plays an important role to improve utilization of education resources. In February 2016, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China proposed that colleges and universities should develop digital resources and online education, which can explore the sharing mechanism and mutual recognition of credits. It is beneficial to promote information construction and develop high-quality digital teaching resources constantly. Thus, application of high quality digital resources can play a positive role to realize the connotative development of continuing education.

All in all, it is necessary to make educational orientation clearly, clarify the object, optimize the structure of departments, build network of teaching platform and innovate the sharing mechanisms in formulating the path of development and management. That has a positive significance for discussing normative definition, integration and connotative development of continuing education. To develop continuing education will not only enrich the architecture of higher education but also provide access to education for different people, which is conducive to open and popularize higher education. Colleges and Universities should quickly find accurate positioning, draw up the path and constantly enhance the social service function so that the continuing education can realize the connotative development in truth.

## **Acknowledgements**

Source of Funding: Research for Social Support Mode of the New Migrant Workers Based on Psychological Capital, National Social Science Foundation (China), No.16BSH092.

## **References**

- [1] Yuan Guiren, in: Continuing Education Is Indispensable to Become a Useful Person, edited by China Education Daily(2013)
- [2] Jia Jiao: submitted to Journal of Higher Continuing Education(2014)
- [3][9] Information on ([http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xxgk/moe\\_1777/moe\\_1778/201603/t20160318\\_234148\\_15.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/moe_1777/moe_1778/201603/t20160318_234148_15.html).2016.4.23.)
- [4] Wang Maorong, Zhu Xianshun, in: Adult Education Foundation, edited by Beijing: Workers Education Press(1988)
- [5] UNESCO International Education Development Committee, in: Learn to survive, edited by Beijing: Education Science Press(1996)
- [6] Hou Tongyun: submitted to Journal of Adult Education College of Hebei University(2013)
- [7][8] Information on ([http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xwfb/gzdt\\_gzdt/s5987/201507/t20150730\\_196698.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201507/t20150730_196698.html).2016.4.23.)
- [10] Information on (<http://www.szu.edu.cn/2014/news/2575.html>.2016.4.19.)