

## THE PURPOSEFUL USE OF PROGRAM \*

by RUTH R. MIDDLEMAN

Associate Professor, School of Social Administration, Temple University,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

)The momentous changes in contemporary social conditions clearly forewarn that if man survives—his social relations like his genetic constitution will undergo increasingly rapid mutations. If this is true, it will be imperative that all people, rather than just a few, *learn how to learn*. I use the term to learn rather broadly. It refers, first, to the adaptations that man must make to his environment. More specifically, man must learn the rules that govern life in the family, the group, and the society in which he lives.<sup>1</sup>

**T**HUS concludes the book *The Myth of Mental Illness*. It is a radical view of mental illness as being more reflective of breakdown in man's capacity to cope successfully with the problems of social relationships than of an illness in the physiological sense of the word. According to Szasz, the rules of the game of living are so complex and fast-shifting that man is like an immigrant coming to a new land who must change games because he has come to a new cultural context. Not only are the present day values, techniques of successful interaction, and satisfactions different from those of his childhood, but he must take on new games along with new rules. We need only to look about us in any direction today at the massive

expressions of young people protest, dissent, Hippieism and Black Power converted into dangerous rioting to see that our young are questioning the rules of our games as well as the very object of our games. The values and means for attaining the good life are at once being scrutinized and found lacking by many persons in our day.

Against such a backdrop approaching the subject of the purposeful use of program in YM-YWHA's and Jewish community centers is an horrendous task if ever there was one! "Purposeful use" implies that there must be some purpose underlying the program other than the program itself, and that there may be certain uses that are without purpose or at cross-purposes with the avowed intent. Such thinking has been popular in our culture ever since John Dewey emphasized that *how* the child learns is of far more importance than *what* he learns. In more recent times, as we shall discuss later, even greater alarm has been raised concerning the means—that is, the process, or the medium of communicating—as being powerful factors in altering the ends (the content) as well as the recipient of the content (the individual).

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, Dell, New York, 1967, p. 309.

\* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Detroit, Michigan, June 12, 1968.

### Program—Ends and Means

But to begin, we shall first discuss *program*. It can mean many things. It

can refer most broadly to the overall offering of an agency's services. It can also refer to one large event of an evening or to a series of related events or to the activities offered to a particular age group. It can connote the doing and talking kinds of things engaged in by one small club group and this aspect of program or non-verbal content has been more fully dealt with elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> so I shall simply state that the points made herein will pertain equally to the broader and to the more limited aspect of agency program.

Now as to the purpose underlying the use of any program, it could be said that there are as many purposes behind meaningful program as there are objectives specified by the Jewish agency and the larger body to which it is affiliated, such as a Jewish Welfare Board, a family, or children's, agency association, or attitude-forming and community-planning agencies. The purposes in all instances, so far as I can see, deal with the desire to affect attitude formation, individual growth and expression, and behavioral change and are aimed at helping individuals live more satisfying lives. The focus of the communication of the agency's program may be the large audience, or the small group, or the individual-and-worker conference. The intent may be primarily educative, recreational, rehabilitative, therapeutic or socializing. The crux of the matter is that the program and the supporting means of offering it ought to carry out the aims of the agency (and worker) and at the same time connect with the aims of the user of the program that motivated him to seek out the offering.

All of this is to say that there are many purposes underlying a program's use and that both the content itself and

the way of making it available to the clientele should be closely scrutinized so that each is consistent with the other. For the ends spring from the means used to achieve them. It is meaningless, for example, to try to enhance inter-group relationships if the clientele is provided no opportunity to have intimate experiences with others different from one's self. Likewise, we have long known that the assuming of the responsibility to help Jewish boys grow to effective manhood inclusive of a sense of adequacy in physical and mental activities is inconsistent with a physical education program that admits only the more competent athletes to the gym floor and then gives them the opportunity to become more skilled.

Such inconsistency between ends and means is also seen in the public schools. For the individual, liberty (freedom of the individual) and equality may contradict each other. If either principal is emphasized alone, we find the following: *freedom* for all can reduce the experience of all to the least common denominator and can be monotonous or unstimulating to those possessing greater competences. *Equality* of opportunity for all according to individual capacity can fulfill individuals' skills but may exclude some persons. The school system is confronted with just this choice: separate tracks of complexity of learning, or classes where all levels are mixed together so that students can influence each other while learning.

However, it seems to me, that an emphasis upon the *process* itself, or upon the *means* to any end can unite both emphases and avoid such contradiction. If the various levels of participants are all reached in the first place, they can interactively influence each other in the process of involvement. At the same time, more precision in shaping the means and the process by which content is offered can contain a recognition of

---

<sup>2</sup> Ruth R. Middleman, *The Non-Verbal Method in Working With Groups*, Association Press, New York, 1968.

individual differences. All of this goes back to what the essential content of the program is to be . . . or what is to be learned. Is that which is to be communicated a subject content or is it primarily an attitudinal content? In actuality, all experience possesses both emotional and cognitive learning simultaneously.

The major emphasis of this discussion will be on exploring and accenting those values underlying program of the Jewish Center that are unique to it and less attainable elsewhere in the larger community. When we view program as an entity in itself, we will seek in it an educational experience better than those obtainable elsewhere, a dance grander than those held, for example, by the schools, recreational activities different from those of the broader community, and small social group experience, day camp and overnight camp experience, which provide a special something for Jewish youngsters.

In this connection, we recognize that the historic need of Jewish persons for a distinctive place of their own apart from the vast and demanding network of interactions of the larger world-community still exists for many persons. Many members of a minority group need some opportunities for being in a situation where they are the majority. In such situations, every experience is different from one whose content might be identical but whose participants have less ethnic uniformity. It must be added however, that much of Jewish religious, educational, and social life is by choice and by geography ordered along ethnic lines. Only the future will tell whether the uniqueness of the contribution of the Jewish agency will rest within its essential Jewishness, or in the difference and excitement of its unique offerings, or in the effectiveness of meeting and working with the life-problems

of people—all people—in their need for self-understanding as well as their capacity to have effective social relationships with others.

The offering of exciting program content as content is certainly not new in the Jewish Centers. I can recall being a pilgrim travelling from Philadelphia to New York's 92nd Street Y in the early 1950's to be able to see and hear Dylan Thomas read his poetry at the peak of his popularity. Other similar examples of excellence of content in other Centers abound. There are endless examples of program that are outstanding at Jewish Centers, that attract the total community, that fulfill in best measure the objectives they set out to meet. Being "people of the book", the Jews have long valued culture, learning, the arts, the sciences and philosophy. Given adequate financial resources and facilities, they can match or better the offerings of the outside community in these areas. And they have done so.

But the content of any offering, however intriguing or fascinating it is, may not actually affect the participant significantly, regardless of the purpose of the sponsor or the aims of the participants, be they education, recreation, diversion, entertainment, enrichment, or personal growth. For to make of the encounter an experience or "a happening" we must look to elements underlying the content.

#### **"The Medium is the Message"**

Beginning in the early 1950's and becoming more insistent in the mid 60's the voice of Marshall McLuhan, investigator of the media of communication, has become ever more strident. McLuhan has claimed "the medium is the message" and, more recently, "the medium is the message". According to McLuhan,

The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted . . . Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication.<sup>3</sup>

McLuhan contrasts the world of today, in which TV and electric circuitry are dominant, with the vastly different one of even the early 20th Century. Whereas in the past, logical order and linear sequences (as for example reading word after word in a book), or specialization in a field of interest predominated, presently we must learn to adapt ourselves to constant change, to respond to overall patterns rather than component parts, to maintain more superficial involvement rather than intense immersion with any given thing. The order of the times is flux.

He states further that the content of any medium is always another medium. The message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The electric light, for example, is a medium without a message unless it is used to spell out some name as in a sign. The light can be used for brain surgery or for night baseball or for providing atmosphere in a discotheque, or for "painting." The light escapes our attention as a communication medium because it has no content and is unnoticed until it is used to spell out some brand name. And yet, because it so often goes unnoticed its effects are all the more powerful and pervasive. We should stop being oblivious, warns McLuhan, to the power of any medium (TV, radio, books). For the effect of

the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as *content*.<sup>4</sup>

If we follow McLuhan's suggestion, we should stop studying and focusing our interest upon the content of the medium and pay attention to form, structure, framework—in other words the *medium*. For the form alters the content and all media—film, radio, TV for example,—are languages of their own, codifying reality differently and thus altering it pervasively.

At a recent Memorial gathering for the late Woodie Guthrie, the audience was profoundly moved by the work of two folk singers—Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan—each in a different way. Seeger's technical command of his instrument and impassioned verse appealed because of its message, of what he was saying in words. Dylan's words were not intelligible, but yet his very style—his emotion, movements, silences, staccato and rhythm—caught all up in an emotional intensity. His message came through his *means* and it is this means that increasingly has meaning and appeal for young people.

McLuhan calls TV a "cool" medium because it demands little involvement on the part of the spectator in contrast to the radio or the novel which leave much for us to fill in through our own imagination. The effects upon the audience are quite different. "Hot" media actively involve the audience. People have to work at reading a book; they are invested in it and bring much of their own selves to this process. "Cool" media demand a different kind of participation. The person is involved despite himself and with little conscious energy output. The TV, for example, inundates all sense receptors simultaneously and the watching person is a more passive extension of the stimuli. He sits and absorbs it all with little active effort.

Consider the implications of these two

<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*, Bantam, N.Y., 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1965, p. 18.

different ways of being involved with an outer stimulus. The person, himself, becomes different because of a diet of TV versus a diet of reading. Because his receptive faculties are challenged differently, he *is* different. This is what McLuhan means when he says "the medium is the message". Through this pun he asserts that the non-neutral medium does something to people—it grabs them, or jostles them, or massages them . . . in short, it changes them. Studies upon whether the prevalence of violence and sex featured on TV has increased the actual amount of violence and other acting-out have been inconclusive because it is impossible to rule out whether those choosing to saturate themselves with TV in the first place might already have more of a tendency toward such behavior.<sup>5</sup> But for those who do sit and sit in front of this medium, the fact of isolated, sedentary passivity is incontestable. This non-activity takes time away from other possible pursuits, thereby affecting the person deeply.

It might be surprising to those of us concerned with enriching others' lives to know that by the time the average child graduates from high school, he has clocked 15,000 hours of TV time and 10,800 hours of school time. He probably has had three to four thousand of these hours of TV "to keep him quiet" in his formative pre-school years.<sup>6</sup>

The people we serve through our programs are, like most Americans, already saturated with TV. Surely their need of us is now different. They are exposed to all that happens in the world today and to far more *content* than we ever were at their age. We simply could not, even if we wished, compete with the TV

in up-to-date immediacy of reporting of the world about us. The technical expertise of the networks is almost beyond comprehension. Consider what happened the minute Martin Luther King, Jr. or both Kennedys were assassinated. As a nation we can join in a massive emotional experience without reading a word about the tragedy. The medium is immediate and powerful. But what is happening to our powers of actively making our own connection with an event?

Considering the process of human development from yet another angle sheds light on what approaches in program the Jewish Center may pursue. The cognitive psychologists within the last decade are revolutionizing our notion of how early children learn and could be stimulated toward greater curiosity. Beginning, in some cases, with the neonate in the hospital, eye patterns and heart beats are measured to reveal his response to stimuli.<sup>7</sup> In communities such as Canton, Syracuse, Washington, and Chicago for example, crash programs are being instituted for the "high risk" or culturally deprived child, sometimes with 15-month-old children being visited at home by tutors, certainly with three-year-olds and up.

There is talk of innovating home visiting by tutors, much like visiting nurses, to provide appropriate toys and talk to babies. Setting up children's houses on every crowded city block is being considered (Montessori did this 60 years ago with great success in Rome), as well as adding checkups on intellectual development of the young child to the well-baby clinic and pediatrician's office. A fierce battle is raging today between the early childhood Establishment and the innovators who emphasize cognitive or intellectual growth. Stimulated by the

<sup>5</sup> Joseph T. Klapper, "The Effects of Mass-Media-Depicted Violence: A Review of Research Findings," Paper, 45th Annual Meeting, American Orthopsychiatric Association, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> *Saturday Review*, March 18, 1967, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> "Early Learning Right in the Crib," *Life*, March 31, 1967.

emphasis provided by Head Start programs, the gaps between preparation during the early crucial years afforded by the middle-class and that in the lower-class homes are just beginning to be appreciated. While the middle-class home emphasizes use of language and invites curiosity, the children of poverty, by contrast, learn that the best way to behave is to keep quiet and stay out of trouble. The speech they hear is brief commands or phrases that do not encourage thought. With transistor radios going constantly, they learn not to pay attention to words, but to tune things out.<sup>8</sup>

No wonder the public school system is in such confusion today. By the time he enters the first grade the lower-class child is already seriously retarded compared to his middle-class schoolmates and it doesn't take him long to experience the frustration of inadequacy in the competition, the esteem from peers, the esteem of his teacher and thus, self-esteem. The schools are presently seriously wracked by the problem of how to educate all their children, understanding that each child needs to be motivated and to have success experiences.

The innovators are not only looking at the early years in an effort to lessen the inequalities of life experience, but they are scrutinizing curricula and motivation through all the grade levels. Bruner, commenting upon the problems of teaching people to be curious and to want to learn, states:

One is struck by the absence of a theory of instruction as a guide to pedagogy—a prescriptive theory on how to proceed in order to achieve various results, a theory that is neutral with respect to ends but exhaustive with respect to means.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Maya Pines, "Slum Children Must Make Up for Lost Time," *New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 15, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *Toward A Theory of Instruction*, The Bellknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1966, pp. 20-38.

Again we come back to the consideration of the how, of the process, of the medium rather than the ends or content or program per se. Referring further to preparation for change, Bruner adds:

We are bound to move toward instruction in the sciences of behavior and away from the study of history. We need to study the possible rather than the achieved if we are to adapt to change<sup>10</sup>. . .

How does one train a student in the techniques of discovery? Learning logic and the formal aspect of inquiry are not enough. There are other activities and attitudes going along with inquiry and research that have to do with the process of trying to find out something and though their presence is no guarantee that the product will be a great discovery, their absence is likely to lead to awkwardness or aridity or confusion. We solve a problem or make a discovery when we impose a puzzle form on a difficulty to convert it into a problem that can be solved in such a way that it gets us where we want to be. This is to say, we recast the difficulty into a form that we know how to work with—then we work it. Much of what we speak of as discovery consists of knowing how to impose a workable kind of form on various kinds of difficulties.<sup>11</sup>

Recently while serving as a consultant to Philadelphia's Board of Education in their Motivation Program, a program designed to help 10th through 12th graders gain adequate knowledge and attitudinal security so that they can aim toward college, I met with an all-Negro group. We spent several weeks discussing their hostility to white people and their resentful awareness of the inferiority of their own educational experiences. Most of them felt tremendously inadequate. In discussing their hatred of whites, I asked who in the group ever knew a white student or had one as a friend. The response was pitiful. How then, can the Negro child *like* the white child, when he doesn't even know one

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *On Knowing, Essays for the Left Hand*, Antheum, New York, 1967, p. 93.

and perceives all about him in our segregated cities evidences of his own disadvantage?

**Specific Instruments and Processes for Program**

Now, how does this affect the Jewish Center? It seems to me that in our cities, we cannot even consider the fine points of self-development for some people until all residents of our communities, white and black, have sufficient basic services—housing, schooling, health services, job opportunities, equality of life—opportunity, if you will, so that all children can settle down to making the most of their lives. Some measure of hope, optimism and curiosity is needed.

All about us are reformers who are concerned with means as they will affect ends. All about us are people speaking in their various technical languages about what I, as a social work educator, would term "process." It is through process, whether we be teachers or social group workers or therapists, that our objectives and those of our members are actualized.

In my own work of late, I have been thinking about new means of stimulating discussion, consideration of problems, opening up of attitude and behavioral change. I am concerned with introducing startling pictures to lead to some discussion, with role play to involve group members in living out feelings, with humor as a means of affecting group thinking, and of the game and puzzle form as means of helping people cope with behavioral problems with less pressure than direct discussion. I am also concerned with the matter of rewards.

I cite one such example, recently dis-

cussed in greater detail<sup>12</sup> a game called *Success*, developed by myself and several other persons that measures success in terms of social relationships. It is a board game much like *Monopoly* but hangs on the premise that it is as much fun to play at social relationships as it is to manage armies or make money, or travel to other lands. In this game, tantrums, cursing, picking fights or tattling on others are penalized with moves backward, while thinking out solutions to difficult problem situations or being a good sport, or "keeping your cool" are rewarded with moves ahead. There are other facets to the game such as the value and liability of taking a chance which is translated into concrete terms like leaping forward or backward, or the prevalence in life of the unknown event that can set you back just when you think you have success within your grasp. The game also has cards that call attention to the players' interrelatedness. For example, a certain card can enable you to stay put but move your worst enemy back 10 spaces. Or you can have some good luck that affects all other players too. In this kind of interaction, we are conveying the concept that no man is an island in terms real to the 8- to 12-year-old.

I mention this game here because it is a serious attempt to get at consideration of behaviors through a medium familiar to children and enjoyed by them. That learning can be powerful when the experience is pleasurable rather than arduous is a well known fact. In this minute way, we are considering not simply the content (peer relationships), but the means (the game) toward engaging the children in wanting to be involved with such content.

This is but one of several ideas that we are exploring presently in our effort to give greater concern to the means through which we approach people of

<sup>12</sup> Ruth R. Middleman, Frank S. Seever and Erwin Carver, "A Game and its Therapeutic Use," Paper, 45th Annual Meeting, American Orthopsychiatric Association, 1968.

all ages, and that we hope will be useful to such institutions as Jewish community centers. Our approach in all cases is to take as a point of departure what activities the age group under consideration likes to do and then to attempt to juxtapose a content which contains key interests or needs as expressed either directly or indirectly by the age group. Such matters, for example, as getting along in the family or safe driving, or attitudes about sex are fair game for the concern of all workers with teenagers. Similar listing of growth concerns for all age groups could be developed with little effort.

One other specific example of using program and structuring it in a way that meets the particular problems of a given group will illustrate the purpose that underlies it. Emotionally disturbed boys in residential treatment have explosive behavior. They are quick to become angry and drop out of a game when it is not going their way. They also are sent home from school frequently for the same inability to cope with the regimens of class work.

Two years ago we found their games chaotic, if, indeed they agreed to be part of them in the first place, for their usual response to worker encouragement to be involved, was hostile resistance. Gradually however we began to coax them into the games. First, those games were picked which were on a level at which they could achieve, games that were exciting in themselves and diversified. We also experimented with changing teams frequently to keep the competition fair. Most important, we developed a plan for giving each boy a score for every activity he engaged in and writing down his points all through the game playing. We did not give the winners 10 points and the losing team 0. We rewarded the quality of persistence at the same time we rewarded winning. For example, the winners might get 10

and the losers 7 points. Through such accounting those who lost in one game did not fall far behind and still retained the drive to try again with the hope of surging ahead.

We were lavish with our points, all in the spirit of keeping interest high. At certain times we threw in extra points to an individual for good sportsmanship or for particularly skillful actions. Since such awards were open to all, there was ready acceptance of these bonuses by all. The boys themselves began to understand that they were really accomplishing something important if they battled their frustrations and angers, or if they helped someone else. At the end of the game series the totals were tallied, and the boys all selected prizes in the order of highest point holder on down.

Such a deliberate ordering of the reward structure can enhance many values additional to simply winning or losing. Now, two years later, the climate in the residence is one that supports its being fun to be involved in these games on Saturday nights and the boys await this program eagerly. We no longer have to keep up the intricate calculations because they want to play regardless of the little prize at the end of the evening.

To return now to a consideration of the contribution of the Jewish agency in its work with groups, as we think back upon the history of the Jewish Centers, can we not value their very informality and folksy quality? For years people have come to the Centers for intimate, particular experiences that were educational, or recreational, or social or personal service in nature. Long ago the center developed a special expertise in valuing the individual and showing concern for him. We need not look for elaborate content unduplicated in the larger community for there is no such thing. Rather we must work at maintaining the spirit inhering in the



program—a spirit that is more in tune with the times, that appeals to the new generation, that is “in.” The medium is the message and the Jewish Center workers are old hands in possessing an appealing medium. The process rather than the content is not only important—it is central.

Next, we should scrutinize afresh the way these programs are ordered and offered so that what we hope to achieve actually has a chance of being achieved through the particular means of approach. With less responsibility for mass education than the schools, our classes might be rare opportunities for new approaches to teaching and learning. Experimentation with training the class member to learn how to learn is in order. We must help the student learn to create his own version of the world rather than simply assimilate those ideas and activities that the teacher wishes to get across. Competency and mastery can become ideals which can serve to lead toward the development of individuality.

Within the rest of the program if we look to the problem or desired experience as the point of departure, then we can work at creating the form the program will take. I have noticed, for example, that small groups can be involved in many areas through the addition of the tape recorder to their meetings. As children of the electronic age,

this gadget is exciting and prestigious to them and has the potentiality for eliciting much involvement around topics and concerns that might otherwise be kept hidden.

The mobility of our youth and their desire to move about, mix with others, give service to others, ought to be exploited. Likewise the need of young people to communicate with the older generation, with persons of different backgrounds, to understand themselves better in the midst of their conflicts and of the world's chaos are issues to be met. All of these matters are of concern to us. There is really no mystique about the interests, problems, and needs of Center membership.

But what I can add for all of us to consider further, is that the context of our times must be our roadmap, muddled and confusing as it is to all of us who must live through it. We must aim to look and to hear carefully and to have compassion for the human condition that we all share with all of its obvious imperfections. We must not be too quick to exclude the outspoken, the dissenter, the unpopular from our midst. We must aim above all to help our members through their experience within the doors of the Jewish Center find meaning in their own existence, even as we help them reach out to help others who are similarly groping.