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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE (2)  
 UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA -- U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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PLANNING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE

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Our job as Extension educators

People not infrequently ask Extension people what they are about and some Extension people have some difficulty answering this in a clear-cut fashion.

One descriptive and clear-cut statement is that our job is that of helping people continue their learning throughout life. We frequently hear discussions about cradle to the grave security but increasingly, we are beginning to hear discussions about cradle to the grave learning. No longer can people who are interested in making progress place a period at the end of some segment of their formal education much as you would a period at the end of a sentence and say, "I have now finished my education." Today we have to put a comma there which indicates a brief lapse between one educational experience and another. No longer can anyone afford to stop learning for the minute he does, he begins to coast and there is only one way to coast and that is downhill.

There are two or three major reasons for this consuming interest in continuing to learn. First of all our social, economic, political, educational, and moral systems in the United States are based on the premise that all people, not just the elite, have an opportunity to become well and accurately informed. If we ever needed any concrete evidence of the worth of this premise, we had it a few weeks ago when our President was assassinated. Instead of having riots, civil war, and chaos which many countries would have had under those circumstances, we had a very stable situation in our whole operating system. I would attribute a great part of this stability to the fact that we have a high level of literacy in these various areas in a relatively high proportion of our population. Although all were grieved at the developments, none gave way to irrational behavior on any front. Secondly, we the people are committed to the concept of progress which embodies the idea of overcoming a dissatisfaction with "what is" as we attempt to obtain "what ought to be." Making progress requires at least three things. First it requires people who are alert, creative, enthusiastic, well informed, and anxious to have something better than they now have. Secondly, it involves ideas which must be created, evaluated, and then accepted, rejected, or modified. Thirdly, it requires people plus their ideas plus the decision to do something about them which means action. These are the three minimum requirements for making progress.

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Finally, another valid reason for continuing education is simply the reality that the volume of information we have available today is increasing tremendously fast. It is said that between 1850 and 1950 the volume of information in the world doubled. It also doubled again from 1950 to 1960 and current predictions are that it will double again by 1967. When Land-Grant colleges were first developed, all the scientific information known about agricultural production could easily have been placed in one book. Today we have thousands of books involved in each commodity area or each functional area.

The degree of success we have as educators, as teachers of students in helping our students to continue learning is a function of many things, not the least of which nor the last of which is an accurate identification and precise and clear description(s) confronting our students regardless of the age, sex, or business of our people.

In recent years psychologists, social psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, economists, and many others have written much and verbalized more on the problem solving process, the management process, the decision making process, and other such kinds of processes. Though different terminology is used essentially the same concepts are involved. In most of these economic efficiency, emotional rationality, logic, accuracy of facts, and scope of knowledge are highly emphasized.

One of the curious features about much of this writing and speaking is that little or nothing has been said about problem identification. This deficiency, within the framework of Extension, raises several relevant questions:

- a) Is it assumed that everyone knows what the problem is or problems are and is simply waiting for someone to be creative and imaginative enough to propose alternative solutions?
- b) Is it assumed that it is the Extension Service staff's responsibility to state what the problems are?
- c) Whose problems are we talking about--Extension's problems or people's problems--and are they the same or different?
- d) Whose responsibility is it to spell out what kinds of problems?

There are several other equally provocative questions which might be raised.

#### Problem Definition:

Speaking of problems--what is a problem anyway? Increasingly one finds it possible to become disenchanted with the dictionary in attempting to define precisely what words mean. For example: In looking through several dictionaries, the following definitions were provided for the concept "problem." (a) A question proposed for solution; (b) a synonym for the term "mystery" which was defined as something that has not been or cannot be explained--something beyond human comprehension--a profound secret or enigma; and (c) a demand for a solution which, if not found, will put one in a predicament. Each of these is highly unsatisfactory from the standpoint of a meaningful definition.

One potentially useful definition of the term "problem" might be: A condition which exists in the mind when "what is" (the current situation) is something less desirable than "what ought to be" (value judgment). This condition ordinarily exists most vividly soon after intensive study of the present situation in relation to that which is desirable (what ought to be) and that which is possible. This condition exists in its most acute state when the results of some form of behavior which has been directed toward some objective(s) is less successful than expected, hoped for, and/or desired. (For example: farm and home development programs across the United States). Problem = Objectives = Reciprocals (Problem is defined by inability to attain some objective).

### Whose Problems ?

Is low farm income a problem confronting all farm people, some farm people, or is it Extension's problem? Or is it both? The Extension Service, as a unit of society, seems to have some schizophrenia on this point. Perhaps each of us is guilty of fuzzy thinking and loose talk on this issue. For example the several quotations which follow illustrate this:

"Program projection should not be confined to the interests of Extension. Many problems identified in study will be broad in nature dealing with community and area problems. It is important that this should happen." (1)

In contrast to this, the following copy appeared in a publication under the subhead of "What Will My County Gain From Program Projection?"

"Your county will get an evaluation of specific problems that the people in the county hold as the most important for Extension to work on." (2)

These two are almost diametrically opposed and indicate quite different conceptual frameworks of program projection. One emphasizes a search for problems which confront people irrespective of who might help solve them, and the other emphasizes only those problems which confront people about which Extension can do something.

A third quotation which indicates a middle position is as follows:

"The lay leaders have a primary role in helping the professional staff to analyze the situation, identify major problems, and help with deciding on program objectives." (3)

This statement neither identifies whose problems they are talking about nor whose program objectives. Another quotation perhaps hit the nail squarely on the head:

"A wide range of concepts exists among the visited states regarding the scope of program projection. Several states consider program projection a means of attacking all programs affecting the social and economic well being of people. Other states hold to the more traditional concept of program planning, i. e., consider program projection a method of

developing an Extension program of work. The remaining states have concepts somewhere between these positions. Only a few state and county workers are committed to the broad concept and conduct program projection in the light of such a commitment. Many express a belief in the broad concept but are moving slowly to implement it." (4)

It ought to be made clear that I am talking about two specific different kinds of problems--the people's problems and Extension's problems. Each has a different, albeit interwoven and closely related, problem. Neither can spell out the problems of the other. Each has a major responsibility to take the lead in identifying his own problems. Each, however, might well help the other do the job. Inadequate income of farm operators in Hennepin County is a problem concerning people only when and if those people recognize it is a problem. But, it per se is not Extension's problem. However, if one of the causes of the existence of that problem is inadequate knowledge on the part of the people and that cause is recognized by the people, then the Extension Service has an opportunity to state such in terms of an educational objective and to develop a program to accomplish that objective. Occasionally one hears speakers talk about the necessity for the Extension Service to lay out a blueprint for people. These same speakers deride the process of laying out various alternative solutions to problems confronting people and suggest that, in general, people are not well informed enough to make sound decisions among these various alternatives. With this I heartily disagree. I have an immense respect for the good judgment of people who are armed with accurate information which they understand. Our form of political, social, and economic system is founded on the premise that all people have an opportunity to become well and accurately informed. It is also clear that their decisions can be no better than their information. Though we may never reach perfection in this process of teaching and learning, it is a goal toward which the people of our nation constantly strive.

The following quotation perhaps describes my notion best:

"From the decisions reached (in program projection), the Extension Service, other agencies, organizations, and/or individuals, can determine what contribution they can make to the solution of problems and can develop their respective plans of work to that end." (5)

(It is the job of the county Extension staff to see that the recommendations of the program projection committee or program planning, resource development, OEDP, or whatever reports which fall within the area of Extension responsibility, serve as the foundation for Extension's educational program). The last quotation was more in line with the statement on the back cover of the familiar "Scope Report" which said:

"The objective . . . the development of people themselves to the end that they, through their own initiative, may effectively identify and solve their various problems directly affecting their welfare." (6)

In the companion publication to this and consistent with the previous quotation, the following statement seems to clarify:

"Extension is thus as much concerned with the process as with the objectives of community improvement and resource

development. The major function of the Cooperative Extension Service, as clearly identified in the founding act, is education. Education involves changes in people--in their knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, and appreciations." (7)  
This concerns not only subject matter but process as well. The process of motivating, analyzing, identifying problems, thinking through and examining alternatives, deciding and acting.

Though this statement appeared under a title of "Community Improvement and Resource Development," can any less be said in regard to any other program area with which the Extension Service deals?

In a major speech recently by President Elmer Ellis of the University of Missouri, the following quotation has been misinterpreted on occasions:

"It is imperative that rigorous examination of present Extension services be continued. When changes are necessary, Extension must recognize the need and provide the initiative to make such changes. Otherwise, it cannot hope to retain the confidence of the people it serves or perform its full obligation to society. A danger here lies in reliance on the public to recognize and initiate changes. True enough the change initiated must meet the test of public review but they should most often originate from Extension leadership." (8)

Here the Land-Grant college presidents are speaking of changes within the Extension Service and not changes among people outside the Extension Service. This in no way suggests that the Extension Service ought to be initiating or insisting on changes on the part of individuals or groups of individuals in the public except as they suggest possible alternative solutions to problems identified by people. At the same time this provides ample opportunity to initiate discussion of new concepts, new thoughts, rearrangements of old ideas, and blends of new and old ideas which likely will lead to changes among people. It is one thing for the Extension staff to decide what is good for people and set out to initiate changes, and quite a different thing for the Extension staff to initiate discussion of ideas which would enable people to decide on this basis of information what changes, if any, they want to make.

#### Process:

Anyone who examines carefully the literature in the field of resource development or one who has had any extensive experience in the field, and preferably both, will soon discover at least two major kinds of agencies which are engaged in motivating and programing for resource development. And Extension might very appropriately be called a resource development agency. The first is the directive type which involves highly directive process (ordinarily dictatorial and frequently autocratic process) by which the agency attempts to introduce specific changes (usually specific projects such as zoning, recreation facilities, airports, etc.) which it thinks would benefit the community or the people involved. The agency and its workers themselves decide upon the specific form that development should take in a given community or area. This practice is based on the premise that they know better than the people what the people need but, by and large, over the

world and in several continents--Africa, Asia, and South America to be specific--the directive type of program has been tried extensively and, for the most part, has failed extensively. Historically and currently, the most likely situation in which this technique succeeds is where quick results are necessary. This frequently is precipitated by a crisis type of situation where speed is highly essential. The old cliché, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink" is relatively apropos here with respect to the directive type of community development agency. Many missionaries and most government officers have worked on this assumption until relatively recently.

In addition to applying the directive process and prescribing the type of developmental project, by and large, some form of coercion has also to be used to insure permanent benefits. Generally a program based on any form of coercion requires a large staff to enforce all the rules and regulations and this makes it exceptionally expensive. The basic problem with this type of approach is that of getting the people to conform to what the agency wants the people to do rather than enabling the people to do what they really want to do themselves. As the agency relaxes its use of coercion or pressure the people will often quickly regress to familiar habit patterns.

The alternative to this is to use what is sometimes described as the developmental process--the process in which education plays an extremely important part. An agency which chooses this process is interested in stimulating local initiative, developing local leadership, promoting and encouraging analytical thinking and self motivation in people in the community. This technique utilizes every opportunity for stimulating, motivating, even irritating people to think, to discuss in an informed manner what they think about, and to make decisions for themselves. Once they have done this, and especially if we have suggested various types of alternatives for them to consider along with the ones they have thought about, we as Extension people then have a basis on which to develop sound educational programs. Educational programs in which people have already demonstrated an interest, because they think it will help them solve their own problems which they have identified, are much more likely to be successful. All of this is based on the analytical process of identifying problems before we get the machinery oiled up to go through an efficient, smooth-working, process of solving problems and making sound management decisions.

Developing an educational framework and creating an environment in which people can sit down and really begin to identify problems forces people into the posture of asking themselves, "What am I trying to do?" "What do I want?" This is true for a family, a church, a community, or any other unit of society, each of which needs a program in order to make progress. Fundamentally, our educational objectives have to be based on a clear understanding of the objectives of the people with whom we are trying to work.

#### Educational Objectives:

There are three component parts of a good statement of an educational objective. The first part is an accurate identification of the student. The second part is a statement which reveals the kind of behavioral change which the Extension worker is trying to effect in the student--such as a

change in his awareness, his knowledge, his understanding, his skills, his attitudes, etc. The third major component part of an educational objective is a precise statement of the subject matter area of concern which the student is trying to learn and the teacher is trying to teach. "To increase the knowledge of southeastern Missouri cotton producers about the effects of increased price supports on international markets for Missouri cotton," is an illustration of a clearly stated and meaningful educational objective.

With regard to setting priorities, as long as we are engaged in educational work with volunteer students and their participation is subject to their own interests and desires, Extension staff members need to set priorities among their various educational objectives--objectives that are in line with the high priority problems confronting people which can be solved either entirely or partially by an educational program. We are in the business of helping people continue their education. It is an honorable, productive, exciting, and much needed profession in today's fast moving world. Let us all strive to be teachers about whom our students can say, "He made me think," because no greater compliment can be paid a teacher than that.

- (1) "Guide for Program Development," Michigan State University, Cooperative Extension Service, October, 1956, p. 8.
- (2) "How to do Program Projection in Extension," Purdue University Publication Mimeo ID-22, December 1957, p. 8.
- (3) "Program Development Workshop for County Extension Agents," Cooperative Extension Service, Ohio State University, March, 1963, p. 17.
- (4) "Observations on Program Projection Process in Eight States," Federal Extension Service, USDA, AO-146, August 1958, p. 1.
- (5) "Program Projection," Federal Extension Service, HEP-44, May 1957, p. 5.
- (6) "The Cooperative Extension Service Today . . . A Statement of Scope and Responsibility, Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, July 1959, p. 39.
- (7) "A Guide to Extension Programs for the Future," Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, July 1959, p. 39.
- (8) "New Dimensions for the College of Agriculture: Some Policy Considerations," Prepared by a task force of Land-Grant College Presidents, President Elmer Ellis of University of Missouri delivering at an Administrative Workshop at Ft. Collins, Colorado, Summer, 1963, p. 23.