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EXTENSION PHILOSOPHY

by

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by

Joseph Di Franco*

Perhaps too many of us in extension think in terms of a professional discipline when we discuss extension. Although thinking professionally is not bad in itself, we assume that all it takes to be a professional is to learn the terminology, rules, and philosophy of our respective disciplines.

The philosophy of extension, however, is not something abstract. It is the basic characteristic fibre of the individuals within the "discipline" of extension. Many of us who have decided to make extension our life work soon realize that there are some general philosophical qualities that apply to extension, but that unless we, the individuals, adopt, believe, and practice these qualities, there is no real meaning to a "philosophy of extension."

But what are some of these qualities?

One is that we must accept the belief that ideas must be put to work for the betterment of the human race. Pursuing knowledge for its own sake is like keeping tools locked up in a tool chest. Knowledge must be put to work.

Another of these qualities is that knowledge can only be transferred through a process of "man helping his fellow man." With this, we must also accept a fundamental belief in the ability of people

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to help themselves -- and in the fact that all levels of society can learn to make decisions.

One other belief we must hold is that there is no fundamental difference in the intellectual abilities of any race or sex, if given a chance to acquire education and if helped in the application of knowledge.

After many years of experience in extension work, we can also add a few more specific beliefs that are also relevant. They are:

1. That education is the most permanent way through which to bring about change; extension is fundamentally education.
2. That extension education must be based upon freedom of choice and voluntary participation; participation in extension activities functions best when democratic processes are applied.
3. That extension must be a form of education that teaches people to do things, not a system of doing things for people.

Education must be based upon facts (research), although these facts may need to be translated and interpreted and made understandable for rural people, so that they can put knowledge to work.

All of the abovementioned qualities and beliefs must become the basic philosophy of extension workers. Only then can we begin to understand the scope of extension education. Only then can we apply

the principles so that they have meaning. Only then can extension workers plan solutions to the problems involved in helping rural people. Only when enough extension workers believe and practice these beliefs will they become professionals; only then will the extension profession develop a creed for its "discipline" -- a philosophy for extension, if you will.

This is true wherever extension education efforts are taking place. Extension in Latin America will only be as good as are the individuals doing extension. The philosophy of extension can only be as good as the beliefs of the extension workers. Unfortunately, there are many extension workers who do not have a favorable philosophy for doing extension work. It is fortunate, however, that there are many who do.

When extension people begin to accept the "philosophy of extension," they are also more able to apply the principles of extension. The principles then become more significant and in turn become a part of the individual's philosophy.

Some principles which are now recognized as successful guides for extension have been developed from experiences in different areas of the world. One composite list of principles is the following:

PRINCIPLES OF EXTENSION*

Rural adult education (with emphasis on the extension process) should:

I. Be based on conditions that exist (local, regional, and national).

II. Involve people in actions that promote their welfare.

III. Develop programs gradually.

IV. Aim basically at people's interests and needs.

V. Use democratic methods.

VI. Keep programs flexible.

VII. Work through understanding of the culture.

VIII. Use local leaders.

IX. Use existing agencies.

X. Utilize trained specialists.

XI. Work with all members of the family.

XII. Make programs as broad as needs of rural people.

XIII. Evaluate continuously.

XIV. Work with all classes of the society.

XV. Keep in line with national policies.

XVI. Use the community approach.

XVII. Help people recognize their needs.

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* Joseph Di Franco, "A Collection of Principles and Guides." Comparative Extension Publication Number 4. New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. June, 1958. page 9.

These principles in themselves help to clarify some important aspects of the extension philosophy. No philosophy of extension, however, is effective unless it is applied. Neither can the principles be effectively used unless the fundamental beliefs inherent in good extension workers exist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Allahabad Agricultural Institute. Experiment in Extension: The Gaon Sathi. Bombay, India: Oxford University Press, 1956.

A vivid description of the extension process as interpreted and applied at the Allahabad Agricultural Institute in Uttar Pradesh, India. The Institute had started pilot extension projects in 400 nearby villages, and developed the book as a text used in training the Gaon Sathi (literally "the village companion"), for his work in carrying extension to rural India. So that the text may be used as a guide for group discussion, a list of questions appears in the appendix, covering the materials presented in each chapter.

2. Bliss, Ralph K. The Spirit and Philosophy of Extension Work. Washington: Published jointly by Graduate School, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Epsilon Sigma Phi national honorary extension fraternity, 1952.

This volume presents a historical background of the Department of Agriculture, development of the extension ideal in the Association of Land-Grant Colleges, university extension methods for the promotion of agricultural knowledge, and development of a national extension program. It records in their own words the vision of many of the pioneers in extension work and brings together for the first time important declarations of policy and philosophy that have guided the federal and state extension services through the years.

3. Brunner, Edmund de S., and E. Hsin Pao Yang. Rural America and the Extension Service. New York: Bureau of Publications. Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949.

In reading this book, a person not familiar with this phase of adult education may learn what it is, how it came to be, and the organization of the extension service. The authors describe and evaluate the extension service program.

4. Kelsey, Lincoln D., and Cannon C. Hearne. Cooperative Extension Work, 2nd Edition. Ithaca, New York: Comstock Publishing Associates, 1954.

This covers cooperative extension, its objectives, philosophy, and methods. It was written for use of the upper classman and graduate student interested in cooperative extension education. It is a well organized text with footnote references suggesting further sources of information.

5. O.E.E.C. (Organization for European Economic Cooperation). Agricultural Extension Services in the USA. Paris: Report of a working party of European experts on farm advisory work, 1951.

An excellent concise history, origin and cross section report of the extension services in the United States, with descriptions of various states to show differences. Policies, methods, and organization are all included. An excellent reference for foreign students. Since this was written by a committee of experts from outside the United States, it is a good reference for Americans to use to see how others see us.

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