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THE NATURE OF EXTENSION

"To Change People"

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## THE NATURE OF EXTENSION

### "To Change People"

One of the objectives of Extension Education is to bring about change. When new practices are adopted or when new skills are learned and used it is felt that the goal of helping people has been reached. Too often, however, many extensionists fail to realize that before new practices are adopted or new skills learned, people themselves must change. New attitudes must be accepted. In fact, within the individual there must take place changes that will permit him to learn the new skill or to adopt a new practice. It must be useful to him.

Many times teachers place too great an emphasis on the skills and practices they want people to adopt. They know that the new knowledge is important if people are to raise their income or level of living, contribute more to society, etc. However, teachers have been surprised when people have not adopted the practices that would be good for them. When people do not adopt recommendations it is because extension personnel have failed again in bringing about the desired changes within the individuals first.

This is where the trained teacher (county agent, village, level worker, etc.) becomes necessary. His training must include two aspects: (1) training in how to work with people in order to bring about the desired changes within individuals; (2) knowledge of the technology, the practices, and skills he hopes people will adopt. Of the two, the first is the most important.



To know to work and assist people is the main job of the "teacher". For the second skill the teacher can rely and use other experts. If he is expert in the first instance it matters little if he demonstrates to his people or has someone else demonstrate the new practice or skill.

Extension educators (teachers) must be experts in working with people. This calls for special training. This special training in itself indicates that Extension Education cannot be done by everyone. Just as farming is not as easy as it looks, so too has Extension Education become more than it seems.

In Latin America there is developing a specialized group of adult educators, using the Extension education process. These people are called "Extensionists" or "Extension agent". Every country now has some form of state or federal programs which provide for extension agents who are responsible for rural adult education. This rural adult education is out of school education based upon voluntary participation. The 50 odd year history of this development in the Western Hemisphere is in itself a unique story. It need not be repeated here. Suffice is to say, that it has resulted in being the largest single adult education movement in the world. In fact, most countries of the world are trying to put into effect a rural adult education program. Everywhere requests are being made for advisors, consultants, demonstrators, etc., who can help promote such programs. The United States, a leader in this field, still has to provide much of this leadership. Although there is developing a corps of Latins who are trained and experienced extension people, in Latin America the supply is not adequate to meet the demand.





Since the success in the United States has been demonstrated, many extensionists in Latin America have tried to adopt or adapt some of the concepts and principles the United States Extension Service has developed. But simple as these principles sound, the difficulties of following them have been almost too great to overcome. Many Extension personnel have had difficulty in putting them into practice. Some Extension administrators and others have changed their organization, hoping to get the job done. Many have abandoned their original programs and started over again with small "experimental" projects.

In every case it has become evident that one of the big stumbling blocks was lack of trained personnel. The emphasis on adequate training has been overlooked. In desperation all kinds of methods have been employed to train people for extension work. Most of it has been too little and too fast. In most cases there do exist trained agricultural experts and there does exist technical knowledge to transfer to farmers which would increase production but as has been stated formerly, it is not the absence of agricultural technology that is lacking but the people trained in the skills of teaching. This aspect must be considered to assure success in educational efforts. In simple words, although there is technology to impart there is a lack of people trained in the techniques of transferring this new knowledge. Until there is a better balance in Extension training, most Extension programs will be far from successful.



The "simple" extension and educational principles need to be fundamentally understood by the Extension administrators as well as the Extension Agents who must implement them. This means training the entire staff- from the administrator to the extension agent. The job of Extension Education requires Extension "experts". Experts in adult education at all levels. The Extension Education process requires trained professional people. With expansion and development of the extension process a new professional group is emerging. We can call this group Extension Educators.

The status, success and advancement of Extension Education in Latin America depends upon those who are responsible for it. Everyone in it must think and act professionally for they must be professionals if they hope to contribute to its development. By development it is meant that rural people everywhere benefit from Extension teachers who know how to work for and with the people they serve, to help them change the skills and practices of their vocation, aspirations, beliefs, and attitudes toward their vocation and way of life. This is a tremendous challenge and responsibility for Extension workers.



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