

EXTENSION EDUCATION AS A PROFESSION

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AS professional workers we possess the strong conviction that the fundamental purpose of extension and community development is providing an *educational experience* for the people with whom we are privileged to work. Whether such educational programmes thrive, just exist or wither on the vine, will be determined in large measure by our ability to serve as effective adult educators in developing stimulating programmes with people.

If we accept education as our major responsibility and reason for being, then it follows that *teaching is our major profession*. It is a time honoured profession that affords unlimited challenge to people with keen minds and a yearning to seek and teach the truth. The most effective workers, whether they carry the title of village agents, specialists, administrators or university professors, are basically skilled teachers. As such they not only know the subject-matter involved in their field of work but the organizational philosophy, policies and methods of teaching required to effectively share their knowledge and skill with others.

As professional people our first responsibility is one of *mastering the technical knowledge in our subject-matter field* if we are to be effective teachers. We also serve as interpreters of this knowledge developed through systematic, scientific research to assist people in solving their problems. After all, the practical value of such technical knowledge depends upon it being interpreted to the masses. The

mere sharing of folk-ways between villages, states and countries will be no longer suffice.

The professional person in extension education will also be a specialist in the field of *leader training and development*. We have the opportunity to assist in identifying men, women and youth as potential leaders and afford them opportunities to develop their own leadership capacities. The value of the Extension worker, as a professional leader, lies not in what one can do for one's self, but in what one can get other people to do.

As was stated in the scope and responsibilities document for the Co-operative Extension Service in the U.S.A.¹

"leaders are the catalysts for group action; the voice for group expression; the tools through which the group considers and carries out its decisions. Almost everyone has the potential for some leadership."

The professional extension educator also serves as a *leader of group planning* in assisting people in analysing and solving their problems. As a leader of group planning, the most effective extension worker will stimulate and guide his colleagues and lay people in the planning process, including the identification of their problems, not lead it in the sense of directing the planning. He or she *plans with people, not for them*.

Every educator serves in the *role of evaluator*. It is our responsibility to appraise the accomplishment of the programmes we develop

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with people. Are we achieving the objectives which have been established? Have the resources at our disposal been used in the most efficient and effective manner possible? Have the decisions that must be made concerning areas of programme emphasis, teaching methods, clientele to be reached and changes in interest, knowledge and skills of people that we served resulted in increased production of food and fiber, higher levels of living, more desirable homes and villages in which to live?

Such educational tasks are tasks for professionals. The outstanding accomplishments of extension and community development programme have been made by highly dedicated people who are associated with an important profession.

Characteristics of a Profession

The task of defining a profession is obviously not an easy one. The absence of any commonly accepted statement is testimony that the characteristics of a profession in general, and of extension education in particular, are not precisely stated. For "the term profession...clearly stands for something. That something is a complex of characteristics."²

Webster defines a profession "...a calling in which one professes to have acquired some special knowledge used by way of either instructing, guiding or advising others, or of serving them in some act..."

Mortimer J. Adler³ an American news paper columnist, under the byline "Great Ideas from Great Books," writes as follows:

In common usage, the word "professional" is applied to anyone who shows tested competence in performing a given task. In this sense, the word is merely a synonym for "skilled". But in the original and

deeper meaning of the term, a professional man is one who does skilled work to achieve a useful social goal."

The famous English economist, R.H. Tawney,⁴ gave a comprehensive definition of a profession:

"It is a body of men who carry on their work in accordance with rules designed to enforce certain standards both for the better protection of its members and for the better service of the public.

"It has long been recognized that certain activities necessary for the preservation of society require an organized or concerted effort on the part of men with special knowledge or skill. To meet this need, the traditional professions developed. The oldest of these is, perhaps, the military profession. Other professions which have a long history are the traditionally recognized professions of theology, law, medicine, and teaching."

Lieberman⁵ provides these criteria of a profession

1. A unique, definite, and essential social service.
2. An emphasis upon intellectual techniques in performing its service.
3. A long period of specialized training.
4. A broad range of autonomy for both the individual practitioners and for the occupation group as a whole.
5. An acceptance by the practitioners of broad personal responsibilities for judgements made and acts performed within the scope of professional autonomy.
6. An emphasis upon the service to be rendered, rather than the economic gain to the practitioners as the basis

for the organisation and performance of the social service delegated to the occupational group.

7. A comprehensive self-governing organisation of practitioners.

8. A code of ethics which has been clarified and interpreted.....by concrete cases.

Yoder⁶, in considering whether the performance of a job is professional, stresses the concept of continued learning, as noted in his desire for continued exchange of information and knowledge, continued research, and familiarity with literature. His criteria are as follows:

1. Professional performance usually reflects a formal and somewhat standardized training.....

2. Professional performance implies a considerable area of widely accepted *standard practice*.....

3. Professional performance presumes the regular, formalized *exchange of information and experience among practitioners*.....

4. Professional performance implies a knowledge of and familiarity with a continually growing field of *professional literature*.....

5. Professional performance reflects *continued research*.....

6. Professional performance is guided by an accepted system of professional *ethics* and a strong sense of *public responsibility*.....

7. Professional performance, finally, is earmarked by the most important distinctive characteristic of the professional—that suggested by the designation "learned professions"—a continuing *attitude of learning*.....

Is Extension Education a Profession?

My answer to this question is "yes", providing the members of the professional society of extension education in the United States of America, in India or in any other country have established, among its purposes for being, the following characteristics and standards:

1. A body of knowledge based on systematic, scientific investigation.

2. Continual research and exchange of information among members of the profession.

3. Established requirements of training and competency as a basis for entry into the profession.

4. Established technical and ethical standards.

5. Requires a personal responsibility by members for service to the public.

6. Requires personal responsibility by members for self-direction and self-discipline.

If we can accept the premise that the *educational task of Extension is a task for professionals*, then let us examine briefly some of the desirable characteristics of a professional person. Those I am suggesting are as follows:

1. Thorough knowledge of the professional literature in his or her field.

2. Particularly skillful and proficient in interpreting his or her knowledge.

3. Never ceasing quest for learning and improving one's skills.

4. Readiness to accept new facts and methods as revealed by research.

5. Belief in interchange of information and ideas.

6. Dedication to advancing one's profession and the standards established for it.

7. Strong sense of public responsibility; service to others rather than personal gain.

8. Ability to plan and work co-operatively, but also to practice autonomy in decision making.

In a study by Dr. Ranta,⁷ former National Extension Centre Fellow, of the professional status of the county extension agents of the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service, he concluded that agents consider themselves to be professional persons to a degree. They fluctuated more in their perception of the professional nature of the total service than they did in considering the professional level of their colleagues. They did not consider all county positions to be professionally equal as newer fields of work, such as marketing and consumer information rated higher than the traditional positions represented by 4-H, home economics and agriculture. They considered their own position to be professionally lower than the position of college professor and extension specialist. They scored higher than professional nurses and industrial workers in the extent they considered their work as a central life interest.

Such factors as level of formal education, work as a central life interest and tenure were moderately associated with the county extension agents' professional perception and orientation. No apparent association existed between the individual's professional orientation and the extent to which he perceived the Co-operative Extension Service in Michigan as being professional.

Conclusion

In attempting to answer the difficult question "how professional are we in our job" we might wish to re-examine certain factors.

Is there a body of knowledge being developed, based on scientific research, in the field

of extension and community development?

Are we generally well informed about the latest findings of research in the technical subject-matter fields for which we are responsible, in the process of effective communication, programme development and evolution?

Have we recently re-examined the increased requirements for professional competency in our job and our need for inservice training, graduate study and additional professional experience in our field of work?

Although we are privileged in extension education to exercise a high degree of self-direction and self-discipline in determining what we stand for, and how we can best serve the people with whom we work, we still find that much more can be gained by planning and working cooperatively with our colleagues than working entirely independent of them. Therefore, we might appropriately re-examine how well we can think for ourselves and co-ordinate our thoughts and efforts with our associates.

Such independent scholarly thinking and willingness to be a full-fledged playing member of the "extension education team" is what has made this type of educational experience one of the most sought after commodities in this challenging age in which we live.

As President William Oxley Thompson of Ohio State University remarked more than 50 years ago, "An institution is to be operated for the good it can do, for the people it can serve, for the science it can promote, for the civilization it can advance."

The Indian Society of Extension Education has many accomplishments to its credit. It also has a most challenging future. The *Indian Journal of Extension Education* should contribute significantly to achieving new professional goals and in meeting the needs of the present and future generations of the people of India.

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