

Education or Information Giving?

RUSS A. MAHAN AND STEPHAN R. BOLLMAN

Today's educator must increasingly go beyond presenting "just the facts." For the success of a teacher's educative attempt it is vital that he make sure his learner has understood the information given and can now put it to use. The authors feel the ability of the learner to apply knowledge is as necessary for the success of Extension programs as is the quality of the information presented. They deal with the question: How does an educator develop the sensitivity to accomplish this goal of learner-focused teaching?

AN IMPORTANT question for the adult educator is: What in his contact with the audience brings about learning? Is it the material? The methods of presentation used? The motivation of the audience? Or the conditions under which this contact takes place?

Centuries ago, the educational practitioner—the medicine man or tribal priest—handed down "truth" from on high and this was accepted on faith. However, a new concept of the practitioner is emerging. According to Bugental,¹ we can no longer merely diagnose a patient's problems, scrawl an illegible prescription, and send the patient dutifully off to a pharmacist for a medicine which the patient then takes with complete ignorance. Today, he points out, we are recognizing that "the patient's own responsible involvement in the change process" is essential to the educational process.

This view implies the dynamic quality of the educator/learner relationship, especially the involvement of the learner. There is some evidence that it is precisely at this point that the educational process may fail: *not in the content competencies of the educator nor in the learning abilities or motivation of the learner, but in the relationship*

¹ J. F. T. Bugental, "Humanistic Psychology: A New Breakthrough," *American Psychologist*, XVIII (September, 1963), 563-67.

RUSS A. MAHAN is *Extension Specialist, Human Development and Family Relationships, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa*, and STEPHAN R. BOLLMAN is *Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Child Development, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas*.

between the two. This article focuses on the relevance of the assumption that process is a key factor for future Extension educational efforts. "Education" is defined here as any learning process resulting in a change of behavior on the part of the learner; "process" means the dynamic interaction between the educator and the learner. Dynamic interaction in this context means an empathetic, accepting, communicating relationship.

RELEVANCE OF PROCESS IN EDUCATION

The Cooperative Extension Service has constantly sought to examine the needs of its audiences and align its resources to this identified need. There is yet another area of emerging need—the sophisticated application of knowledge derived from the social and behavioral sciences to Extension education. In this article, we hope to encourage the teacher/educator to rethink the *relative importance of content and process* for Extension teaching situations. *We do not accept the simple differentiation that content is the "what" and process the "how."* But, rather, we would suggest that to meet the needs of certain clients and audiences, the educator may find that the "how" (process) becomes the "what" (content). Thus, the process may become the message. The process is what is meaningful and contributes to behavior change.

We do not argue the importance of sound subject matter in educational efforts. However, the discussion in this article is on the relevance of process for Extension education. This philosophy of learning assumes that in many situations the learners have more to offer each other than does the Extension educator. This is not to argue that the Extension educator does not provide significant factors for learning. However, subject-matter content per se may not always be the key factor for learning.

Our position assumes that a behavior change is not only caused by the content taught, but by the very processes used in relating to the audience. It is in these processes that we find the most potential for bringing about behavioral change.

As Extension focuses on audiences such as deprived families, families getting established, institutional leaders, and the community power structure, the greatest needs will not be served by additional inputs of technical data and information. Of course, technical data will be important. But greater attention must be placed on the *process* of the human aspects of learning rather than on *information giving*.

A single-dimension continuum might represent this differentiation

(Figure 1). At one end ("A") the educator/learner interaction is based on content alone, and the purpose or end is to transmit information. At the other end of the continuum ("B") the educator/learner interaction is based on the relationship of the persons involved. At "B," the needs, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of the learners determine what is shared. The learning process becomes the major factor in bringing about behavior change.



Figure 1. Information giving (content) vs. the human aspects of learning (process).

AN EMERGING EXTENSION EDUCATOR

Each Extension educator needs to look at his own role image. If this image is that of information giver, he must ask himself what kinds of effective education he can provide. The Extension educator of the future must be knowledgeable in the social and behavioral sciences. In 1968 a course in social action, leadership, human development, or counseling seems more relevant for a 4-H Club agent than does a course in livestock judging. As the needs of Extension audiences shift from skills and performance to concerns of decision making, social organization, and interpersonal relations, there must be shifts in the educator's functions. Institutional controls and limits have given way to uncertainty and anxiety. The political, economic, and religious institutions now offer individuals, families, and communities conflicting ideologies which force upon individuals decisions they cannot verify by old familiar patterns.

Extension educators have attempted to deal with these shifts in a variety of ways. One way has been to develop a more structured program-planning process—from identifying a problem to involving representatives of the potential audience as co-planners and reactors. Another procedure has been the development and use of indigenous group leadership. Leadership development in this context has too often been that of teaching a limited number of techniques for transmitting information or for group manipulation. There have also been attempts to employ more sophisticated techniques of com-

munication, from written materials to the latest audiovisual resources. All of these efforts have merits, but they are not a substitution for a needed change in the educational philosophy of the Extension educator. The emerging Extension educator must be able to work with human problems more complex than the problem of raising the average acre yield of corn. He must deal with social rather than physical phenomena. In the future, he will become a practicing social engineer. He must deal with the human aspect of learning.

THE HUMAN ASPECT OF LEARNING

Extension has not yet fully adopted the principles of humanistic psychology. Human psychology is represented by the writing of Rogers² and Maslow.³ From humanistic psychology come the concepts of creativity, self, growth, self-actualization, being, becoming, and autonomy. Krutch⁴ defines the humanist as anyone who rejects the attempt to describe or account for man wholly on the basis of physics, chemistry, and animal behavior—and believes that will, reason, and purpose are real and significant. According to this position, the Extension educator dealing with decision making cannot evaluate the goodness or badness of decisions made by the individual. Kenkel believes that the crucial test in decision making “is the recognition of the fact that in many areas of life, worth and importance are relative attributes which derive their meaning from the individual.”⁵

The National Educational Association⁶ has developed an approach that is rooted in a system of values relative to productive, mature, and right relationships among people. This approach, the “t-group,” is an unstructured group in which the content for learning comes from the behavior and transaction among members, rather than from outside the immediate experience. The t-group is an attempt to develop a process of inquiry so that behavior can be analyzed and members can learn about their own motives, feelings, and strategies.

²Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961).

³Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1962).

⁴Joseph W. Krutch, *Human Nature and the Human Condition* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1959), p. 197.

⁵William F. Kenkel, *Family in Perspective* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1966), p. 410.

⁶L. P. Bradford, J. P. Gibb, and K. D. Benne, “Educational Innovations,” in Bradford, Gibb, and Benne, *T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), pp. 1-14.

PROCESS POINT OF VIEW

The process point of view suggests that an interpersonal orientation in action programs of education is marked by (1) an educator with an individual identification and concern for the learner, (2) a focus which is personal-growth centered rather than problem centered, and (3) a high concern for learner perceptions rather than learner responses. Further, the educator assumes that the experience will modify and change attitudes of the learner and perhaps of the educator as well. Foote and Cottrell⁷ define this orientation as neither a trait nor a state, but rather consider it as capabilities to meet and deal with a changing world, to formulate ends and implement them. It is not considered to be social skill or polish in interacting with others, or merely leadership or effective use of power toward institutional ends.

Counseling is the subject area of social science which most clearly utilizes the essential relationship between educator and learner. Brammer and Shostrom⁸ define counseling as a learning-oriented process which helps a normal person achieve higher-level adjustment skills which manifest themselves as increased maturity, personal integration, independence, and responsibility. This most often occurs in a one-to-one relationship or in a small group where a professionally competent educator is found with relevant knowledge and skills. He seeks to assist the client by *methods appropriate to the latter's needs*. The focus is on people, not problems.

The counselor recognizes that basic to any increase in insight or change in behavior by the learner are: establishing a relationship, expressing feelings and concerns, exploring these internal feelings, and relating this "internal exploration" to the external world. For too long, all education has relied on content outlines to bring about learning. If the emerging concerns of Extension's audiences are in the areas of social and social-psychological needs, then the question of content or process is highly relevant.

Applying Process Orientation to Extension

An Extension worker's educational philosophy is of major importance. The individual's philosophy shapes not only the perception of his role but determines to a large extent the needs on which he focuses, the audiences he seeks to serve, and (most important in the

⁷ N. Foote and L. S. Cottrell, *Identity and Interpersonal Competence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

⁸ L. M. Brammer and E. L. Shostrom, *Therapeutic Psychology* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960)

context of this article) the processes he employs with his audiences.

Perhaps the influence of the process of orientation can best be seen by referring back to the continuum illustrated in Figure 1. The educator who accepts a process orientation can certainly see his role as moving toward the right; that is, he would not see his role only as dispensing information, but rather as assisting individuals to focus on their own particular problems and on ways they might bring their resources to bear in solving these problems. He would not be focusing his attention only on needs that are simply external (those concerned with knowledge and practice). He would direct his attention to needs that have an internal focus—feelings, goals, perceptions. Such a direction of attention would require that the educator's role vary from situation to situation. This would mean, in terms of identifying audiences to serve, that he would not necessarily choose those audiences that could be worked with only in an external fashion; rather, he would be flexible enough to adjust his methods to both the external and internal needs of every audience.

Situations where the educator/learner relationship serves as the learning vehicle are best represented in programs focused on personal-social attitudes, values, and behavior rather than on skill or practice. Basic to this position is the premise that even behind skill and practice there is a supporting or inhibiting attitude and understanding. The farm operator who inquires about seed varieties has feelings about his adequacy as an operator, expectations about the future, and an environment of peers that influence his skill and practice. Therefore, more factors are involved in accounting for the farmer's behavior than merely his information about seed varieties. If he is to cause the farmer to change behavior, the educator must understand the importance of the human factors.

The more sensitive the educator is to these internal and external social and social-psychological forces, the farther he can move to the right on the continuum, and the more meaningful his educational programs become.

A process orientation to education, rather than an information orientation, takes more time, more effort, more involvement, and more commitment by the educator. It takes more time because the educator is not simply giving people information, rather he is helping them search through their knowledge and experiences so they reach an understanding themselves. It takes more effort because the educator recognizes the uniqueness and individuality of each person and supports him in his growth. It takes commitment because the educator's personal needs are not easily met through this approach; he is not always in the role of "expert."

Some interpret this as educational "soft sell," with the educator attempting to satisfy, or at least recognize, some learner needs as information is dispensed. According to Rogers,⁹ ineffectual learning takes place when the educator assumes that he knows something the learner needs and that he is going to pass on this knowledge. If, however, the educator also approaches the situation as a learner, so that both educator and learner are involved in a mutual experience, then not only can an effective relationship develop, but knowledge and behavior change may occur.

Questions Concerning Process Orientation

It is argued by some that interaction process orientation to education is an idealized concept that cannot be utilized in Extension programming. The principles are accepted by these educators, but the personal responsibility to function in this fashion is not.

To some, this concept represents an "affluent education" that cannot be used because of the pressing needs of many audiences, and because of the organization's always-limited resources to meet these needs. These educators suggest that more action programs are needed with an empirical base that gets to the problem and "reaches the people with what they need." In such cases, we raise the question: Whose needs are being met—those of the learner or those of the Extension educator? It should be recognized that not all those in the role of educator have, or will develop, the insight and self-perception to use the process-orientation philosophy when working with people. The question must then arise: Under changing conditions with a changing audience, what kind of education can take place without applications of principles from psychology, sociology, social psychology, and other relevant areas of social and behavioral sciences? To those who reject the process-orientation approach, we ask: In the emerging future, what audiences will remain to be served by the traditional approach of information giving?

⁹ Carl R. Rogers, "Personal Thoughts on Teaching and Learning," in W. G. Bennett et al. (eds.), *Interpersonal Dynamics* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1964), pp. 712-14.