

Methods in Home Economics Extension

Current social and economic changes suggest close scrutiny of teaching methods in terms of characteristics and needs of clientele.

BOND L. BIBLE

IN A BOOK entitled *The Eclipse of Community*, Maurice Stein notes that values and traditional patterns in our country are continually being discarded whenever they threaten what he terms the pursuit of commodities or careers. Community ties, he points out, become increasingly dispensable, finally extending to the family itself. The processes at work as interpreted by Stein seem to produce two trends: (1) Individuals become increasingly dependent upon centralized authorities and agencies in all areas of life; and (2) personal loyalties decrease their range with the successive weakening of community ties, neighborhood ties, and family ties.¹

There can be no doubt that the effects of hidden revolutions at work in communities are producing conditions such as these. It is also very evident that Extension personnel must take advantage of every opportunity to strengthen their skills and know-how if they are to be effective under such circumstances. One concern uppermost in the minds of many Extension workers regards methods that are most appropriate to reach present day clientele. Before examining some methods applicable to the Extension program it should be pointed out that no one method is considered best. Each method available is suitable to certain groups of people under certain circumstances and can be adapted to specific teaching opportunities. The effective Extension worker or group leader must not only have at his or her command a variety of tools and methods of teaching

¹ Maurice R. Stein, *The Eclipse of Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 329.

BOND L. BIBLE is Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, and Extension Specialist in Rural Sociology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

but must know where to use them, when to use them, and how to use them.

This paper reports on Extension methods in home economics in view of the rapid social and economic changes brought about by industrialization and suburbanization. Various uses of mass media are examined in light of research findings regarding clientele preferences. Workshops and seminar type meetings are discussed as group methods of instruction. Specialization and the utilization of all possible resources are suggested.

MASS MEDIA

Mass communication media enable Extension workers to greatly increase their teaching effectiveness. With the very rapid growth of urban fringe areas, a whole new clientele is interested in Extension. For example, of the families reached by Extension work in home economics in 1960, as reported for the nation, 21 per cent were farm families, 23 per cent were rural non-farm, and 56 per cent were urban.² Certainly the use of mass media makes it possible to get information to a much larger and diversified clientele.

If educational programs in home economics are to be conducted for the ever increasing urban population, meetings and personal visits alone will not do the job effectively. Mass communications media provide a means for reaching thousands of people readily. Rogers found that impersonal type of contacts through mass media reached twice as many Ohio homemakers as personal contacts did.³

However, we need to know when mass media methods are most effective in our teaching. Research in the diffusion process has shown that mass media are most effective in the awareness and interest stages of the process. More people become aware of new ideas from mass communications media than from other sources. Mass media have their greatest impact in the awareness stage of adoption. However, they still play an important role in providing general information in the interest or second stage of adoption. As the individual progresses through evaluation, trial, and adoption of an idea, personal contacts with friends and neighbors (as well as with professional personnel of agencies) become more important than media contacts. For early adopters mass media are more effective

²*Extension Activities and Accomplishments, 1960*, USDA, Extension Service Circular 533, June, 1961, p. 34.

³Everett M. Rogers and A. Eugene Havens, *Extension Contact of Ohio Farm Housewives*, Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 890 (Wooster: Ohio State University, November, 1961).

than personal contacts in all stages of the diffusion process.⁴

Some information already collected indicates that, at least in urban areas, agents can use TV as a means of teaching directly. For example, a Michigan study compared the effectiveness of three communication channels used by a county home economics agent in teaching homemakers. Group I received the usual Extension teaching instructions by an agent-trained local leader. Group II was instructed via a television program. Group III, in addition to watching the television program, carried on a related discussion led by the local leader who had been coached on leading discussions by the agent. Group IV served as a control. The author concluded from this study that about as much knowledge can be acquired and retained through teaching small groups by television as through more conventional classes conducted by local leaders or the more involved television-discussion method.⁵ Since teaching by television can be a more economical use of time of professional personnel, it may well become the choice method in more Extension teaching situations than presently is the case. Further study should shed more light on this subject.

This raises the question as to what preferences homemakers have for receiving information. In a randomly selected sample of Ashland County, Ohio homemakers preferences were expressed for (1) newspaper and magazines, (2) television, (3) radio, (4) bulletins and leaflets, and (5) meetings.⁶ These responses may be a reflection of several factors. For example, some of the respondents were not being reached by Extension—this is likely to be true for any random sample of homemakers in any county. In this or any such case, preferences may have been limited by experience. Also, in the county studied, the home demonstration club approach had not been used at the time of the survey.

A random sample of homemakers in a Pennsylvania county responded in much the same manner.⁷ Their responses indicated a

⁴For a more detailed discussion of the diffusion process and how it may apply to home economics practices see: Everett M. Rogers, "The Adoption Process—Part I," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Spring, 1963), 16-22, and "The Adoption Process—Part II" in this issue.

⁵A. J. Schaeffer, "A Study of the Comparative Effectiveness of Three Communication Channels Used by a Cooperative Extension Agent in Teaching Homemakers" (unpublished M.S. thesis, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1960).

⁶R. M. Dimit, "Needs and Interests in Family Living as Reported by Ashland County Homemakers," Ohio Cooperative Extension Research Report 5, August 1961, p. 17.

⁷E. J. Brown, "Farm Families in Bedford County," mimeographed Extension Studies No. 4, Agricultural and Home Economics Extension Service (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, June, 1958), p. 9.

reference for the mass media approach. These studies point to the importance of mass media methods in reaching the average homemaker. However, might it not also be inferred that, in order to be effective in helping solve specific problems and for effecting behavioral changes, methods must be developed to get homemakers involved in the total program development process.

GROUP METHODS

There is no right way to handle topics. It may be necessary to choose a variety of ways to suit different occasions. Research indicates that (1) people learn little by hearing someone speak, (2) that they learn more by *hearing* and *seeing* illustrations, and (3) that they learn most by *hearing, seeing, and doing*.

Those responsible for planning educational meetings must know what they want to accomplish and the characteristics of the audience to be reached. To be most effective, a meeting for people concerned primarily in securing information on a specific topic should be fact centered. As people move toward the adoption or decision-making stage of an idea, they need to be more and more involved. They need to be challenged to think; this can best be done by gaining participation. Such a procedure is supported by recent communication research which has taken into account interpersonal relations as structures which relay and reinforce the flow of influence and innovation. Meetings provide one example of a social structure to implement the process.⁸

A development meriting careful consideration is the current trend of trying to get away from the single shot approach to Extension education. Presently there is interest in building what amounts to non-credit courses or seminars involving several sessions. Such courses in depth have been developed in Ohio and in other states. This method, or process, involving intensive group instruction, requires a considerable degree of skill and knowledge on the part of those responsible. It is suggestive of a new and challenging approach to adult education. Farm and home management workshops and other types of workshops are proving effective as a way of helping farm and non-farm families to explore some of their problems and analyze the relative value of various alternative solutions. Similarly, public affairs workshops which bring together people of different backgrounds and points of view afford opportunities for analyzing community and county problems.

⁸Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXI (Spring, 1957), 61-78.

Trends in living have brought on another approach to Extension education; no longer can Extension programs work independently of other programs. More and more Extension personnel find themselves concerned with the total agricultural industry and overall economic growth, with total youth development, or total home and community living. Such a trend results from the fact that man cannot be separated into economic man, social man, and spiritual man. Neither can living and working be strictly separated. A person lives as a total unit; so do families, groups, and communities. Concerns, problems, and wants become intertwined; underneath these are basic values and goals that people desire to preserve. These must be given first consideration. People are concerned with the solution to their problems and the attainment of goals rather than the names of agencies or programs.

This breadth and depth is a part of the concept referred to as resource development. Leadership development and economic growth are its cornerstones. Such breadth and depth of planning is likewise embodied in community development and program projection, depending on the area under consideration and on the resources and responsibilities involved. This means working together more closely within Extension, between Extension and research, and with other resources on the broad and varied problems of families and communities.

Home Demonstration Clubs

The home demonstration club is the major group method currently used in Extension home economics. But if the home demonstration club does not reach a sufficient number of homemakers in a county, perhaps an added approach may be advisable. This could provide a procedure with greater flexibility than the present method and lend itself more readily to problems and needs brought about by trends in living. Such an approach may attract many homemakers not included or interested in the traditional methods. As an example, Michigan reports favorable acceptance of a series of one-day workshops covering a period of six weeks. One day was devoted to consideration of the role of women in the changing community. Other topics discussed included (1) the American family today, (2) the roles of the modern woman, (3) conflict in women's roles, (4) women's contributions through organizations, and (5) increasing participation and support in organizations.⁹

⁹ Edward O. Moe and Sheldon G. Lowry, "The Role of Women in the Changing Community," mimeograph publication for Public Affairs Workshop, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Michigan Cooperative Extension Service, East Lansing, Michigan, 1961.

An Alabama study indicated that in some counties special efforts were made to plan and consciously serve those other than home demonstration club members. Through neighbor-to-neighbor leadership, use of mass media, and by surveys, both club members and agents are reaching other people.¹⁰ A Wisconsin study suggests these ways to improve the leader training system of home demonstration work: develop plans to reach young homemakers and to identify and select interested leaders, have fewer but better training meetings, provide instruction in fewer areas but treat each topic more intensely, increase personal contact, and work more with special interest groups.¹¹

Club members and non-club members differ in regard to preferences for receiving information. Both in a nation-wide study and in Ohio, club members placed meetings first, leaflets and bulletins second, TV third, and radio and newspapers fourth. As indicated in the discussion of mass media, random samples of homemakers in two counties expressed preference for mass media as a means of securing information. These samples would include a broader cross-section of homemakers than the survey of home demonstration club members. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that club members are satisfied with the meeting approach. However, the inference may be drawn that clubs could well be only one approach—not the whole program.

SPECIALIZATION

The importance of new and improved methods with an expanded and often demanding clientele denotes the need for more specialization as well as the utilization of all possible resources available in our Land-Grant University. The educational level of our clientele is rising; this is especially noteworthy among young adults. For example, in the 1950's 60 per cent of new workers had a high school education. In the 1960's this proportion will increase to 70 per cent.

The general feeling seems to be that Extension should reach more people. Young homemakers are generally not over organized but appear to have definite needs. Specific programs may be required to meet these needs. Such young people seem to want programs—in which both husband and wife can participate—that are

¹⁰E. J. Niederfrank, "Informal Self-Review of Extension Program Planning in Alabama," USDA, Federal Extension Service, AEP-87, July, 1960, p. 14.

¹¹A. M. Reuter, "An Evaluation of the Leader Training System of Home Demonstration Work in Wisconsin as Viewed by Home Agents" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1959).

both educational and recreational. It seems logical that the educational needs for the young homemaker, often a teenager, is becoming increasingly demanding. Perhaps we need more specialized programs that focus on specific groups and subjects. It is becoming increasingly difficult to deal in the same meeting with people of all ages, all levels of education, all degrees of experience, and from all kinds of farms and homes.

CONCLUSION

No attempt has been made to cover all methods available to Extension. Personal contacts, such as visits, office and telephone calls, letters, and others, are certainly a basic core of the Extension approach. Their contribution is invaluable, but much more is being demanded today. One approach to Extension education is to make greater use of mass media in informing and teaching people. We need to become more proficient in the use of these media. Some mass media methods are better adapted to informing and interesting people than others.¹² TV group instruction offers a whole new avenue for teaching, especially in the more urban areas.

A development in group methods is the seminar or workshop involving a series of meetings in a selected subject-matter field. The method provides opportunity for exploring a problem in greater depth, as well as for utilizing all resources available. The problems of our clientele have become so specialized, so complex, and so intertwined that we need to coordinate our efforts in a team approach to problem solving. It should be kept in mind that no one type of media or no one approach to teaching offers the final answer.

Home Economics Extension has done and is doing an outstanding job. It seems that the opportunities are unlimited as we become more skilled in the use of newspapers, radio, and TV, as well as group methods and other means of teaching. Competencies in the area of communications and human relations are essential. Professional improvement is mandatory; we need graduate courses which embody both the practical and the theoretical. As Extension educators, we need to know what motivates people, and the various techniques which will help implement desired action.

¹² For a discussion of some research findings related to the use of mass media by rural people see: Rosslyn Wilson, "Rural Families and the Mass Media," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Spring, 1963), 41-46.