

## Points of View

### Involve Local Agents?

An interesting question has been raised recently as to whether certain audiences should be served from the university without involving the local staff of agents.

First, I ask myself the question trying to establish the situation. Do we have the present county agent setup that has been known for the last 50 years, or are we thinking of a new multi-county agent or area special agent, or a combination of both? Are we thinking of a university county agent responsible to all aspects of the university?

Assuming that we are thinking of the old county agent aspect, I do not believe that it would be wise for a certain audience to be served directly from the university. I do not say this out of jealousy or a guarded need for preservation, but out of a relationship that has been established over many years between the people of the county, the county agent, and the university. There undoubtedly would become established a situation whereby the university, the specialist staff, the county agent, and the people would start to wonder who has any responsibility, who actually is needed, and in turn who gets the blame or credit.

I have seen, in the past, too many cases whereby this local agent is definitely needed to help steer the all-wise but inexperienced university group on local problems. Perhaps they don't know the inter-relationships of the bankers' association or of the local daily paper or of a recent incident that happened with the Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps they don't know the stand that the Pomona Grange or the local pork producers may have taken.

When the university sets up a meeting or a program without the help, knowledge, and advice of the local agent, then there is a great opportunity to establish a series of misunderstanding

that could hurt the university, kill the county agent, and eliminate Extension.

Someplace or other along the line, the local agents need to be involved. A program could not last too long without some sort of relationship. Maybe it is only for consultation purposes and not in program planning. Maybe it is only in relationship to facilities needed, or clientele that need to be touched, or twisting the right copy writer at the paper to get the proper publicity. These are functions that I believe only a county agent can do if he has his "feet well grounded" in the county in which he is expected to carry on a program.

There are perhaps some good, fresh aspects to a university program with certain audiences. The freshness of the might be that they could "perk up" an otherwise dead Extension program. It could be merely a disguise for the old thing, but coming from the campus rather than the county agent. But regardless of this, there just could not be a complete ignoring of the county agent if he exists at all.

If we are thinking of a multi-county or area program, this might be more successful from a university level, but unless the county agent is on sabbatical leave, or has crawled under a desk, he will somehow involve himself if at all possible; and if he doesn't, there would be no reason for him to be in the county in the first place.

If we believe that Extension is as great as it is said to be, if we believe that it is an educational system that is envied by many agencies within our own country and particularly by foreign nations, we who are in the county do not take all of the credit. But, you are rest assured that it would not have happened had there not been a local "PR" man to establish some atmosphere for the high-powered educational information that comes from the Land Grant institution.

Perhaps the system is antiquated

we know it today, but it is not so antiquated that it should be immediately junked. Perhaps a new spare part here or there, a new lubrication job, an oil change, a couple of new tires and a little polishing, and this old Extension buggy will be able to do a real good job. If it is worn out to the point that there is nothing to do but trade it in on a new model, make sure the new model fits into the garage.

S. GLENN ELLENBERGER  
*Allentown, Pennsylvania*

#### **Finds Articles Useful**

Congratulations for the very fine Spring issue of the *Journal*! Busy as I was when it arrived, I couldn't seem to put it down until I had read practically every article in it. The theme is exceedingly important, and your lead article was excellent. I shall use much of the content of these articles in my classes to prepare teachers; we have much in common.

HAZEL TAYLOR SPITZE  
*Urbana, Illinois*

#### **Recommends Book**

In the issue of the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* for Summer, 1967, I noticed the books reviewed include *Work and the Nature of Man*, by Frederick Herzberg.

I have read the book and feel that it is an important one—one that would benefit those in supervision or administration and particularly those in our Marketing Department who work with firms.

MILDRED L. WALKER  
*Manhattan, Kansas*

#### **Understanding Statistics**

I have a proposal which might merit airing to see what reactions others may have.

Your point of view has been that *Journal* readers balk at statistical tables. Frankly, I don't find them nearly so interesting and understandable as prose paragraphs myself, but this is because I haven't learned the language well enough to be comfortable reading it. Doubtless others are in the same situation. Similarly, I don't read foreign languages easily, so I'm likely to skim

foreign phrases and look beyond for the translation or interpretation. Still, there are times when I need to know precisely what is said in the unreadable language if I am to know whether an idea is useful to me or not. If I have a handy dictionary of words and phrases, I can and do use it to find out just what is being said.

Perhaps this suggests a course of action. How about an article which describes in layman's terms just what some of the common statistical manipulations are, why they are used, and what they tell us about the results of an experiment. The chi-square, the Pearson "r," " $p < .001$ ," and a few of the other symbols can be explained and that issue could be retained as a reference for later help in converting the tables which mean so much to the writer into ideas which are significant to the reader. As we get more opportunities, then, to read "statistical language," we will tend to outgrow the need for the dictionary. But unless we have some practice, our vocabularies will stay the same or grow smaller.

Are there others who would appreciate such an article? Perhaps they will let you know, and you can guide yourself accordingly.

H. L. EWBANK, JR.  
*Lafayette, Indiana*

#### **Group Discussion**

The recent *Journal* article "Misuse of Group Discussion" presents an interesting approach to the means of determining use of the technique of group discussion in adult education. Variables used as a frame of reference appear to guide the educator in a logical fashion in making decisions leading to the choice of a teaching technique.

As an educator concerned with the strengths and weaknesses of group discussion, I would have been interested in seeing the author direct more attention to the processes involved. Group discussion is widely viewed as a valuable technique in the development of participation skills so important in a democracy. In order to teach such processes effectively, the leader plays a role that is critically important. It is also at this point that the process can

be and is often badly misused.

For example, many authorities take the position that the role of the discussion leader should be primarily that of a guide. In many instances he is most effective in direct relation to how quickly he works himself out of this overt role and shifts responsibility for productivity to the group members. On the other hand, the group leader can divert progress away from the objectives most important to the participants by emphasizing his own self-interests. A strong and ruthless leader may also push ambitiously for consensus and thus stifle imaginative, unique, and discriminative thought.

Group discussion also appears to offer many opportunities for effective use as an educational technique concerned with organizational operations. I suspect that most Extension workers have participated in intraorganizational meetings (as well as in public educational meetings) where group discussion has been misused.

Mr. Woeste has presented a useful frame of reference for selecting the technique of group discussion. It would be interesting to hear other viewpoints on the use and abuse of this technique, particularly as they relate to the process of group discussion. Such comments would complement an interesting and useful presentation.

JAMES W. MATTHEWS

Fairbanks, Alaska

#### Quality of Education

This is a response to Mr. C. Hoyt Webb's letter published in the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* (Summer,

1967). I can sympathize with Mr. Webb's warm feelings for rural youth and for the Extension Service. Unfortunately the cold facts show us that *on the average* rural youth do not make out as well as youth in the rest of the society. In the article to which he referred, I tried to show part of the reasons why this is so. To provide answers, I drew on the best available scientific research.

Basically, these data (and others which have appeared since the article was written) show that the quality of education a youth receives is the single most important factor influencing his chances of success. The Extension people will render the youth of this country a great service if they can find ways to cooperate with the school systems to improve the education young people receive. Recent data show that such improvement is most desperately needed in Mr. Webb's home region, the rural South. In this regard it should be remembered that the quality of education of both Negroes and whites must be greatly improved.

A. O. HALLER

Madison, Wisconsin

#### Correction

I saw the review of my book, *Communication and Public Relations*, in the latest issue of the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* (Summer, 1967).

I was pleased with the review, but there was one error which could be corrected in a future issue. I am at Boston University, not at Boston College.

EDWARD J. ROBINSON

Boston, Massachusetts

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WHEN YOU WRITE a letter you are in competition with many other writers for your correspondent's attention and interest. This is not a competition in which the winner is the man who writes most poetically, or most grammatically, or most fluently, or most ornately. It is one in which the prize goes to the person who can best guide and inform and persuade. To give information is one function of a letter. To persuade to some action or belief is another function. To combine these in friendly language requires the greatest skill and a warm heart.

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