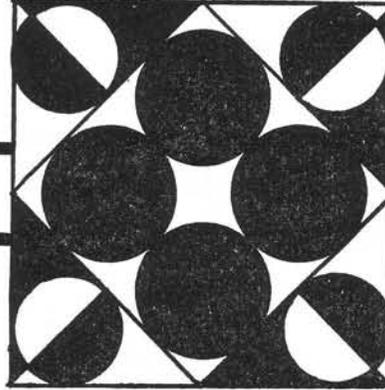


## Idea Corner



### **Blessed Are the Listeners . . .**

“When I sat down with the young people they stopped talking.” That was the frustrated comment of an adult involved in our state 4-H conference last summer. And I think many of us find ourselves in the same position: good intentions, wanting to find out what’s being said, and suddenly being turned off.

So what’s the solution for an adult wanting to discover a communication channel to young people? One way is to begin asking questions about what’s “real” or meaningful. And then listen.

I did some asking, and listening, early in 1971. Most of the asking was done through a questionnaire to Iowa young people in schools, church groups, YWCA-YMCA, and other youth groups. The one-page questionnaire was an informal attempt to determine who and what is believable to young people. Of the 900 sent, over 650 were returned, giving me a cross section of rural and urban, 4-H and non-4H youth, 12 to 18 years old.

My first question was: “Suppose you could discuss issues that concern you with anyone you chose. What one person would you consider most believable?” Regardless of where they lived, youths 12 to 13 rated parents as most believable. Those 14 and older ranked equally parents and others their own age as most believable.

I then asked who was least believable from the list I gave them. Television personalities and newspaper columnists were chosen most often.

The young people also gave reasons for their “most believable” choices. Parents were believable because they understand, they are trustworthy, and parents and children know each other.

Ministers and priests were believable because, according to the respondents, they’re honest, they don’t lie, they listen, they’re not prejudiced, and they have faith in young people.

Some young people chose youth two to three years older than them-

selves as believable because they've had the same problems, they're older but not too old to forget what it's like to be two to three years younger, and they're more experienced. Age mates were chosen as believable because they have the same problems, they'd listen, and they'd keep a confidence.

Another of my questions was about their use of television. Situation comedies were popular with 12- to 14-year olds, and so were the adventure shows. Medical shows began showing up with older youths, especially girls over 14. Movies were popular with both boys and girls over 15. Their most-watched newsman was Walter Cronkite. I would have guessed Frank Reynolds, Peter Jennings, or Roger Mudd.

I was amazed at the number and variety of books read outside of school. The younger teens liked mysteries, adventures, and stories about sports figures. The girls liked stories about someone their age. Older teens listed these: *Love Story*, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, *Black Like Me*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*, *Invisible Man*, *Airport*, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, and *The Godfather*.

The January, 1971, *Life* published the results of its poll of young people across the country. One of the questions asked respondents to name four most-admired and four least-admired people. I listed 45 national figures and asked my respondents to do the same as was done in the *Life* poll. Their choices for most-admired were John F. Kennedy, Bill Cosby, Flip Wilson, and

John Wayne. The least-admired were Fidel Castro, Vice-President Agnew, Mrs. Aristotle Onassis, and President Nixon. The girls reacted very negatively to Mrs. Onassis; Joe Namath was also low on their list.

Here's the final question I asked the young people: "Who or what says best how you feel about things?" This may be, for some, not a very precise question, but I asked it to get some clue about who or what communicates with youth. Maybe the question was vague, but the responses weren't. Music groups and songs were named by nearly everyone. More than half the respondents who chose a person named a song writer or recording artist. And the song mentioned most often was "Reach Out and Touch." A few young people said that they themselves best expressed how they felt about things. Some named their sister, brother, boyfriend, or father, and only one named a teacher.<sup>1</sup>

But music, I think, is one of the strongest ingoing channels to young people. There's intense communication between the words and music of recording artists and their listeners. The music is forceful, whether it's loud or soft, fast or slow. Music has a message, and it sometimes provides directions about what to do. It may express an intangible ideal, or it may clarify a young person's vague feelings about his view of the world.<sup>2</sup> But we have to know what's being said. True, some of what comes across is entertainment, but much music extends beyond that. Have you ever read the words? Words of popular

songs can help us develop another link of communication between generations . . . and, in my opinion, we need that.

Dr. Joyce Brothers, on a recent television special devoted to youth and music, said:

For many parents, the reason that they object to the sounds is not so much the volume as that they don't understand. And if they listen to what is being said and they talk about it with the young people in their family, it doesn't become quite as annoying. It isn't the volume of sound . . . we can find very low-volume sound irritating if we find that it closes us out . . . if we don't understand it.<sup>3</sup>

My greatest reward for research was learning something more about one of our audiences. We needn't become a member of that audience or try to imitate youth, but it helps to have some clue about where to tune in.

<sup>1</sup> Donald J. Wishart, "Analyzing the Youth Audience" (unpublished research, Iowa State University, Ames, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> J. Simmons and Barry Winograd, "Songs of the Hang-Loose Ethic," in *It's Happening: A Report of the Youth Scene Today* (Santa Barbara, California: McNally and Lofatin, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> National Education Television, "Why Can't You Hear Through the Noise in Your Ear?" A program in the series "The Turned-On Crisis" (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: WQED, 1971).

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## **An Extension Center — A Learning Center**

With the explosion of man's knowledge that began during the turn of the century has come the age of specialization; and the "generalist" is giving way to the "specialist." As a result, the one-time county agent has to deal with more specialized information to meet the educational needs of the adult population.

Since 1900, the Extension agent has used short courses, conferences, and small group demonstrations to diffuse information. Although not obsolete, these traditional methods of communicating information may have limited value in the future. Additional methods and techniques must be used if the Extension agent is to continue meeting the changing needs and objectives of the adult population. Changes are necessary because: (1) man's knowledge has expanded at an unprecedented rate, (2) rural population has been decreasing, and (3) the megalopolis is developing.

### **An Alternative Is Possible**

To meet the changing needs and structure of our society, the learning center or learning laboratory is an instructional format that can supplement traditional approaches. This alternative provides for individualized instruction rather than stressing whole-group instruction.

A learning center is a place an adult may come, on a schedule he determines, to learn various skills. The mechanism that can be used by

the Extension educator in the learning center is programmed instructional material and self-directed learning sequenced material. This format of learning is centered around the concept of voluntary enrollment, an informal and flexible structure, and an individualized approach to learning. The model is particularly appropriate for adults who vary greatly in their functional reading level.

Once an adult enrolls for a particular course, he's evaluated and tested with informal testing instruments to determine if he has the necessary background for understanding the course. After taking the self-administered test, the adult consults with the Extension specialist who helps him establish appropriate learning goals.

As the adult is oriented to the learning center, he is led to an interpretation of his test scores and implicitly to the learning center philosophy of personal responsibility for his learning experience. In addition, this process gives the adult further understanding of the concept of "continuing education."

Fundamental to success are frequent individualized meetings the specialist has with the student. It's here that the student will often glean the social reinforcement needed to complement the positive progress that should be apparent on his learning charts. The personal conference is also the time when the specialist can review the appropriateness of the student's prescribed curricula and learning sequence.

The most common error in establishing a learning center is to provide programmed material and then say that is a learning center. Careful attention to record keeping and to the individualized conferences on learning progress aren't ancillary services, they're the heart of this format. Without these activities, the learning center would be no more than a traditional class stocked with programmed instructional materials.

### Courses for the Center

This format wasn't adaptable to the Extension program until recently because of the lack of adequate material. According to Carl Hendershot, in his bibliography on programmed material, more than 17 courses are offered in the fields of agriculture, clothing, health, home economics, and safety. In addition, there are more than 4,000 other programs in such areas as art, business, computers, data processing, economics, insurance, law, mathematics, science, and writing which can be offered to adults in any community.

One of the most important aspects of establishing a learning center is the new or changed role of the Extension agent. The person responsible for coordination of the center doesn't use the traditional method of group instruction. The primary responsibility of skill development rests with the instructional material, thus, permitting the Extension agent to spend more time diagnosing, goal planning, scheduling, record keeping,

and motivating the adult to continue his education.

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### **Employability Orientation — A Success Story**

“I feel like a person now.”

“For the first time I and my children have a future.”

“My common sense has been replenished.”

“It has soaked up the shadows from my brain.”

These moving comments were evoked by an Employability Orientation course for welfare mothers. Five days a week, from 9 to 3, for 2 weeks, on the campus of the State University of New York at Farmingdale, an average of 13 women share a special experience.

The course is the first phase of the federal Work Incentive program (WIN) that prepares recipients of Aid to Dependent Children to move into productive employment. The challenge is to provide in a short, intensive experience, both “know-how” and motivation for adults preparing for school or jobs or both.

In the last two and a half years, more than 600 men and women have completed this 2-week course, and the results have been good. We’ve been visited by educators and legislators, and have shared our curriculum and techniques widely. Attendance has been phenomenal. The personal insights, knowledge of the

world of work, and determination have carried over in most situations into the next step. What is the “magic,” and how does it occur?

### **Curriculum**

Most of the topics covered during the two weeks were spelled out by federal and state guidelines. They include: why work?, job and family, household management, how to find a job, applications, preparation of work history forms, role playing the job interview, how to keep that job, what a job is really like, problems of working, introduction to counseling, transportation, recreation and community resources in Suffolk County, grooming for the job, opportunities in continuing education and training, you and your pay, and how to make the most of your money.

### **Techniques**

Each subject area is handled somewhat differently. Resource people come as guest speakers for some topics, and students research and report on other topics. Group discussions, which are subject oriented but open-ended, are used extensively. Each group takes three half-day field trips—to a hospital, a manufacturing plant or other large business establishment, and a multi-occupational training center.

The instructor is with the group full time for the two weeks, sharing all experiences, and creating the necessary climate. Encounter techniques, such as nonverbal exercises, aren’t employed. However, there’s always an open, accepting atmosphere; con-

cern for the unique qualities of each individual; honesty; and love. No one is ever "put down"!

### Conclusion

During the two-week program, much specific information is learned about what jobs exist and how to get and keep them. There are also insights into self and family and sometimes new perspectives. At the same time, significant changes occur in the student's self-image. A greater self-respect, and belief in his or her own potential, leads to fantastic motivation and determination. These qualities, in turn, result in better performance in education and training programs, and on the job.

The WIN program is national in scope, but to our knowledge, the Employability Orientation class at SUNY at Farmingdale is the only example of this component being subcontracted to a college. The positive impact of the college setting is significant, both psychologically and as a result of the many available resources. It seems to me that university extension units all over the country are missing an opportunity to provide a valuable community service program. Even more important, other WIN clients are denied the special advantages of attending such a course on a college campus.

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### Increasing Press Coverage

In 1971, Iowa's 3 public universities staged a large-scale public affairs program on local government throughout the state. Titled "Government by the People," the program was presented in a series of 3 meetings at each of 40 locations throughout the state.

The program was based on research conducted by the University of Iowa's Institute of Public Affairs and Iowa State University, plus a wide range of material drawn from the Census of Government and other sources. Teaching was conducted by Iowa State University Extension Service specialists, and additional planning and resources were supplied by the Political Science Department at the University of Northern Iowa.

Nearly 8,000 persons attended the programs. The audience included local government officials, community leaders interested in local government, and citizens.

Some of the research for the program indicated that: agreement on goals is the key to program success in government; government spending does reflect changes in public attitudes and goals; Iowa's taxes are slightly above the national average, mostly due to higher per capita spending on highways — necessary with a comparatively sparse population; savings could be made by consolidating small units of local government, though the savings wouldn't be large enough to solve the state's money problems; and most people are satisfied with local government services.

Content of the Government by the People program was judged newsworthy by the state's newspaper editors, evidenced by 269 articles from the program that appeared in the state's daily and weekly newspapers.

In support of this program, the ISU Extension Information Service prepared eight stories reporting the subject matter included in the conference-workshops. These stories were released to local media by county Extension staff members who made local arrangements for the meetings. (Before the conference, news stories also were provided to Extension field staff to recruit audiences. This material isn't included in the analysis, however.)

To determine coverage of the Government by the People program and obtain editorial comment on the series, the Iowa Press Clipping Bureau was asked to provide newspaper clippings about the program during the three months of the presentations. The analysis is based on the clippings received.

Clippings were sorted according to content, and the number of column inches were measured. Content categories for sorting included news, photos, and cutlines of audience and speakers, stories listing names of persons attending, local coverage (including editorials) of subject matter, and the articles prepared by the university Information Service and published locally.

The clippings were analyzed according to source (local coverage by the newspaper versus the university-prepared articles) and whether the

content was primarily about the meeting (photos and names of participants) or whether it contained subject matter. The last is termed educational coverage and is of the greatest interest because it shared the meeting content (educational messages) with the newspapers' readers.

Information Service articles that were rewritten or had material added were considered local coverage. About 20 percent of the local coverage stories consisted largely of the university news releases with small additions or rewriting by the local reporter or editor. University-prepared articles published as released, or with only minor editing, weren't considered local coverage.

Local coverage stories and editorials totaled 1,457 column inches. Of these, 984 column inches were devoted to educational material and 473 column inches to participants' names or photographs.

The university-prepared educational articles accounted for 2,730 column inches. Total coverage, including both locally written and university-prepared articles, amounted to 4,187 column inches. Of the total, 35 percent was local coverage and 65 percent university-prepared.

The effectiveness of the Information Service coverage might be analyzed in several ways. The university-prepared articles accounted for nearly twice as much space as local coverage. Or, the 1,457 column inches of local coverage was increased to 4,187 column inches total coverage with the university-prepared material—nearly a threefold increase.

Considering only the educational material, local coverage was 984 column inches. The university-prepared material (all educational) accounted for nearly 3 times that—2,730 column inches. Or for a dramatic view, the 984 column inches of local coverage was increased nearly fourfold to 3,714 column inches of educational material.

These comparisons are conservative in one sense . . . local coverage stories did include many column inches of material prepared by the university. On the other hand, you could contend that local editors might

have provided more local coverage if the university-prepared material hadn't been available. Our experience, however, indicates that lack of the university material wouldn't have increased local coverage, but might have reduced it since about 20 percent of the "local" stories relied heavily on the university articles.

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