

audience involvement: best way to learn

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A People and a Spirit challenged Extension to fulfill an expanded role in international technical assistance programs. The report suggested: "Training should concentrate first upon improving the capability of foreign personnel in . . . development of better marketing and distribution systems . . . and community development processes."¹

We combined this challenge with the USDA request for Extension specialist expertise to train field-level governmental personnel in Kenya. The result was a program that used proven Extension participant-centered educational methods to teach marketing and community development.

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Participant-Centered Training

Developing Environment

The key to developing effective international communications is, perhaps, the willingness of the change agent to change first. The role in participant-centered training requires that Extension educators have both faith in themselves and their clients. The Extension educators must trust in people's ability to help design their own learning environment and have faith in their own patience and ability to guide educational processes by example rather than by the weight of subject-matter expertise.

In such a mutual environment, both subject matter and educational "style" combine to form a medium which carries two messages—technical information and human development. As such, what's required for participant growth is a balance

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of learning between knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Emphasis on imparting knowledge, and ignoring or downgrading the importance of people's attitudes, is a common characteristic of professionals in development work.²

Our work was based on a continuing commitment to the principles of people-centered learning.³ We found that application of Extension educational methods to foreign situations not only enhances the quality of the learning experience, but also enriches our perspectives for work at home.

We have tested these applied Extension teaching methods in a number of work experiences with foreign field-level professionals both in foreign countries and in the U.S. In Kenya, the market development workshop showed how these methods apply to a training program for resource development professionals.

*Discovering
Problem and
Solution*

In technical assistance programs, professionals base their efforts on the assumptions that: (1) they can solve problems for participants and (2) the way to do so is to define the problem for clients and give them the solution. As a consequence of these assumptions, both problem definition and proposed solutions are limited to those that fall within the expertise or disciplinary perspective of the teacher.

While this approach is consistent with traditional educational philosophy, it limits the opportunity to effectively interact, learn, and develop.

We found that our clients could effectively participate and that their expertise was equally valid in working out solutions. Thus, the learning experience begins by temporarily laying aside our subject-matter emphasis to discover precisely the learning objectives, problems, concerns, and expectations of those with whom we work. Our work in Kenya was based on the principles of participant-centered learning.

**Experience
in Kenya**

In Kenya, we worked through an agricultural marketing workshop planning committee made up of three Kenya government agencies and two U.S. government agencies, as well as the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization. To gain neutral acceptance among such diverse agencies, we chose to demonstrate a versatile, nondirective leadership stance. The host country's traditions and cultural practices were kept uppermost in our minds and respected throughout the planning process.⁴

The workshop format encouraged the integration of lectures, small group activity, field work, and agricultural

commodity case studies. During the first several days, Kenyan government officials and politicians visited the workshop site and participated in opening ceremonies which gave participants a sense of pride and credibility.

During informal sessions with students and participants before the workshop, we encountered feelings of anxiety and some hostility by the students, most of whom were required to participate. To dissipate any negative feelings, the opening session provided an atmosphere in which participants could express their personal objectives and individual learning goals. These goals were documented on flip charts and checked out with the participants to ensure we'd obtained their precise meanings.

This opening activity turned out to be the key in determining the workshop outcome—learning marketing and community development skills. It provided an opportunity for the participants to ventilate pent-up frustrations and hostilities toward perceived required participation. Many of the participants were concerned about being lectured *to* for three to four weeks in the tradition of many previous workshops. The critical concern expressed by the participants on an informal basis was, "Will we be allowed to interact and express feedback to the lecturers and other resource people at the workshop?"

The workshop leaders demonstrated their willingness to establish interactions with the participants by documenting their concerns first before presenting lectures. Small work groups were set up for participants with common interests in various commodities. The participants, on their own, elected and provided for an "officer of the day" to summarize each day's presentations. The "officer of the day" would report the previous day's presentations and other participant feedback at the beginning of each new session.

The workshop staff spent considerable time in initial sessions preparing participants to become future trainers. As documented on the participants' final evaluations, some of the concepts transferred to them included: (1) the freedom and encouragement to become personally involved; (2) encouragement to use their own insights, personal competencies, and knowledge of their country; (3) encouragement to gain from each other's insights, personal competencies, and special expertise; (4) understanding that the workshop staff was seeking feedback from the participants; and (5) probably the most important, that the workshop provides a shared leadership experience for everyone involved. Ultimately, each individual decided his/her level of workshop involvement.

Conclusion

The workshop was designed to teach marketing and community development skills for Kenyan leaders. But, the demonstration of participant-centered learning was probably equal to or greater than the subject-matter information transfer.

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is also taught in a dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught also teach.⁵

Footnotes

1. Joint USDA-NASULGC Study Committee on Extension Service, *A People and a Spirit* (Fort Collins: Colorado State University, 1968).
2. Hayden Roberts, *Community Development Learning and Action* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 66-67.
3. Thomas Gordon, *Group-Centered Leadership: A Way of Releasing the Creative Power of Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1955).
4. Ernest Stabler, "Kenya and Tanzania: Strategies and Realities in Education and Development," *Journal of African Affairs*, XLIX (No. 3, 1978), 308-15.
5. P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), p. 67.