

Introduction to Topic 1

UTILIZATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN OTHER RELATED FIELDS

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The Department of Extension Education at the Agricultural University in Wageningen was established in 1964 mainly to give pre-service training for agricultural extension officers. Now most of our graduates go into related fields such as health education, participation of people in regional planning, environmental education, adult education, and similar fields. This change was caused by what may be termed 'push factors' such as the present limited employment opportunities in agricultural extension and the increasing interest of students in other fields, and 'pull factors' such as the hope that communication problems, especially in health education, may be capable of solution with research done and experience gained in agricultural extension.

The large variety of jobs which our graduates get makes it impossible to derive the curriculum from an analysis of the needs of these jobs. Instead, a 'cafeteria' system is used in which the students can select courses, laboratory training, literature, subjects for a thesis, and other curriculum matters according to their interests. We try to stress the basic principles of influencing human behaviour and to develop the flexibility of the students in order to enable them to apply these principles in different situations. Some of the students, however, are more interested in learning 'recipes'.

There is some discussion within our Department about the extent to which we should give attention to fields of influencing human behaviour other than in extension education. These include fields such as adult education, advertising, public relations, journalism, organization development, social work, community development, animation rurale, mobilisation strategies, social action, and psychotherapy. In all of these fields there are interesting ideas, which can contribute to the development of extension education and in all of these fields

some of our graduates might find employment. However, it is impossible for our staff to master literature and experience in all these fields. It can be more stimulating for our staff members to concentrate on a limited area, which they can master and so contribute to the progress of theory and practice. One of the difficulties caused by these changes is the diversion of interests of our staff members and especially of myself. Another is the large number of students we get, also from the other universities in our country, which makes it impossible to give enough personal attention to each of them.

We have delegated a lot of academic responsibility to staff members and students, especially in the Institute of Applied Extension Education, which is not without risks. However, the advantages of the expansion of our Department into other fields than agricultural extension education are that we better serve the needs of the students and the society. In addition new insights can be developed from an integration of research and experience in different fields of influencing human behaviour.

Discussion could perhaps focus on the following questions:

- a. Is it desirable to concentrate our attention entirely on agricultural extension?
- b. If we decide to deal with a wider field, which other topics could be included in our work with which we are better qualified to deal than other people and which can stimulate the development of agricultural extension?
- c. What are the best ways to overcome the difficulties involved in the expansion of our scope of interests, if we decide to do this?

The discussion centred on the fundamental question raised by Professor van den Ban regarding the basis of the curriculum in Extension Education Centres: should the primary concern be with agriculture, or can 'changing human behaviour' be taught with relevance to a much wider range of students? The trends

in this direction are noticeable, and the Centres represented at the seminar are already diverse. Some remain concerned only with agriculture and agricultural extension, some are based on the wider concept of rural development and rural extension, and Wageningen has an even wider interpretation of 'change of behaviour'. Possibly the Centres have no choice, but should follow the needs as they are identified. A number of associated problems were raised and discussed, and possible future developments were clarified.