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Changes in the American Family and Beyond: One of the most important changes in the American family is the reduced birth rate. Families contain fewer children on the average than 20 years ago. In 1957, 123 children were born per 1,000 women; today, the birth rate is about 67 per 1,000 women, a decline of 46%. Childbearing is becoming one stage in the adult life cycle, instead of a long-term career pattern.

The increasing number of women in the work force is the second major change in American family patterns. Many of the women are mothers. Over half the mothers of school-age children, over a third of those with pre-school children, and almost a third of those with children under the age of three are working outside the home. Two-thirds of these women have full-time jobs.

Third, there's the recognition of the Afro-American experience, and acknowledgement of the strengths in the black family. The roles played by informal helping networks in the survival of the black family are being expressed at a time when the pressures to destroy the family are increasing for all American families.

The fourth major shift taking place inside the family is the roles performed by family members. As women move out of the household and into the work force, there are tasks they'd performed that must now be managed by them after work and on weekends or shifted to another member of the family.

The fifth major change in American families over the past two decades is in family membership. To quote Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Today, more than 1 in every 6 children under 18 is living in a single-parent family, with the 1 parent generally also being the head of the family and holding down a job, usually full-time."

Beyond the Family

Unemployment may be the single most powerful force working in the U.S. today to destroy families. Violent behavior toward child and spouse has been linked with unemployment

young children—like whether to close neighborhood elementary schools because of declining enrollment.

These are new audiences for Extension . . . and very important ones. We can't afford to ignore them if we care about one of the most important functions performed by families—the rearing of the young.

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Twenty-four hundred years ago in Greece, there lived a man named Aristocles. He was a big man, and wore the purple robe of nobility. He was a student and companion of Socrates. During a discussion with his mentor, Aristocles observed, "All the people I talk with, except you Socrates, have similar thoughts and ideas, so that talking with one man is like talking with many others."

Aristocles was not like other men—his thoughts and ideas were different. And, every statement he made, Socrates questioned "Why?" Aristocles grew to be broad in mind as he was in body. His comrades nicknamed him Plato, or Platon, meaning "broad."

When Socrates drank the fatal hemlock, Plato stripped himself of the robes of nobility and sought to be, in appearance, as other men were. He developed a friendship with a young man by the name of Academus. For hours, Plato and Academus would sit in the garden and talk. They shared ideas, thoughts, information, desires, dreams, and kept the philosophy of Socrates alive.

Slowly, other bright young Grecians joined in. Many young men wanted to listen to Plato's ideas and his questioning of their own thoughts. The garden of Academus became known as the Academy—and was the very first university. Those who attended were known as Academicians.

The tradition of sharing at the Academy grew. One of Plato's most promising students was Aristotle. As Aristotle listened to Plato, he became aware that Plato's thoughts should be segmented and classified so that the commoners might have an opportunity to understand. Aristotle began classifying objects, thoughts, and concepts. Within the walls of the Academy, the field of scientific observation was born.

One day, a group of young men was listening to a debate between Plato and Aristotle, or between poetry and science. One of the young men walked to the edge of the garden and looked down at the street below. He saw merchants in their daily routine and observed laborers in the fields. He commented that within the garden walls only a select few had the opportunity to share ideas and listen to others.

From that day on, the Academicians gathered for a short while in the garden and then dispersed into the fields and the streets to share their knowledge with those in the community. And, so, extension education was born.

Early on a summer day, a foreigner came to Plato's Academy. He was interested in what was happening there. He asked Plato, "What is your purpose at the Academy—and what do you put into the minds of these young men?"

Plato replied, "Ah, that is the point. It is not what we put into the minds of these young men that is important, but what we draw out from them." Plato had coined the word "educate" which literally means "to draw out from" or "to bring forth."

The university's first teaching was in the form of a "quiz," which literally means "who, what, which, why, how, and wherefore." Plato believed that truth couldn't be acquired from another—it's self-discovery. Pure Platonic philosophy is to find joy in any thought . . . whatever form it takes for the simple pleasure of thinking.

We, as extension educators, have a classic heritage and an educational lineage of rare distinction. To offer encouragement for self-motivation, provide skills for self-discovery, and jointly explore facts, methods, and procedures for growth makes possible mutual respect between people and exemplifies the most meaningful form of education.

Extension educators, more than any other group of educators, should realize that what a person knows is far more important than where he learned it. An academy, or university, reaches its peak when its personnel and programs reach out to people far away from the garden wall.