Philippines
9060001
AN-MAX-370
ISN 2-50515

A Non-Formal Education Strategy for Agricultural Development: The Case of the Bulacan Farmers' Training Center

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[illegible]22-3992

[illegible] Acquisition
[illegible]

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 5
NFE/WID EXCHANGE-ASIA
UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES AT LOS BAÑOS
JUNE, 1982

A Non-Formal Education Strategy for Agricultural Development: The Case of the Bulacan Farmers' Training Center

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous international conferences in the past five years or so have time and again exposed the failures of developmental strategies during the fifties and sixties to raise the living condition of the people in the countryside. A high Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) official recently remarked: "Why is there an increase in poverty, hunger, and want despite international action?" He answered his own question: "We have begun at the end, not at the beginning; at the top, not at the bottom; with big and not small scale industries. It is the struggle to reverse this order that could win Asia's most significant other war."

It is quite common in the Philippines to see isolated flashes of rural development successes. We hear reports about some projects doing pretty well in some municipality, barangay, or in an urban slum area. But these successes are not only limited geographically: they are also quite short-lived which reinforces a stigma that we are often reminded of in this country: the so-called "ningas kogon" trait, the tendency to initially flare up in enthusiasm and energy only to fizzle out leaving behind gloomy vestiges of what was once glorious.

This lack of sustained momentum in the area of rural development can perhaps be traced to the nature of past developmental programs of the government. Most of them were externally determined and many times imposed upon the people. Of course, the people benefit from these programs because they are provided basic infrastructures such as roads, schools, rural industries and institutional services. But such external forces and directions also create dependency upon the outsider and prevent the development of internal capability for self-determination, local initiative, self-reliance and self-direction. No wonder that when the government man leaves the village, the impetus, initiative and direction for developmental activities dies down too.

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To reverse this trend, what is needed is a strategy that will evoke local will, generate local energy and channel these into internal growth and development. There is an emerging approach to help realize this objective. This approach tries to improve the quality of the human person through non-formal education. As a purposive and systematic set of learning experiences, it does not follow the systems and procedures of formal education. It is oriented to behavioral changes related to the needs, problems, goals and interests of the learner rather than those of the teacher/change agent or his agency.

This approach of education attempts to continuously and responsively provide learning opportunities to rural folks and access to information, knowledge and resources which are needed for their transformation. This grassroots-oriented education makes possible the infusion of new inputs of technology, opportunities, skills, perspectives and commitments that will energize the inner systems such that their transformation may be hastened.

The non-formal education approach starts with the individuals – the people – the most important resource of the community. Unless there are changes in the basic resource, the community becomes tradition-bound, assumes a static condition and maintains the status quo. Thus, the most vital investment is in improving the human capital.

Such theory hinges on the assumption that, in the absence of external inputs into the rural system, that system would predictably become tradition-bound and concerned with the maintenance of the status quo. A system that is closed also assumes a static condition. All these affect the way the people in that system think and also shape the image they have of their world.

The actors that will transform the rural system are the people, the individuals. They are the most vital resource of the system. This is why societies with insufficient financial capital resources have to invest more in the improvement of the human capital. For the improvement of the human capital has a multiplier effect. Improving the quality of the human capital will increase the capacity of the system to adapt to changes in the environment. The system will produce life-long learners through a non-formal way. It will also lead to redistribution of national resources and provide more opportunities for self-development.

But improving the human capital is also a process of totally transforming the person's level of knowing, doing, inspiring his whole way of life. Every new learning experience that a person encounters adds to his total structure of knowledge which, when accumulated overtime, can lead to a threshold resulting in what Kenneth Boulding refers to as "systems break" or a break-away point or reorganization of the total system. This is really what social change is and development is a special type of social change.

Non-formal education is basically a strategy of building human capital by means of widening the person's sphere of learning experiences that is immediately rewarding because it is functional to his present actuations, needs, problems, interests and resources. These continuing series of learnings will eventually bring about greater system dynamism, greater productivity, higher economic prosperity and, ultimately, greater attainment not only by the individuals but by the bigger system of which they are a part.

BRIEF HISTORY

"Masagana 99," a national rice production program, was launched by President Ferdinand Marcos in May, 1973. The purpose of this national program was to attain self-sufficiency in our basic foodstuff — rice — as quickly as possible. The program was launched in the midst of a crisis precipitated by a string of calamities — typhoons, drought, and an epidemic and devastating infestation of a virus disease — tungro. Internationally, the stock of rice was also low because the same problems that hit the Philippines were also experienced by the rice-producing countries in the whole of Southeast Asia.

There was, therefore, a need for a massive mobilization of technological, institutional, organizational and political resources and systems to implement the program. Like many other provinces, Bulacan was faced with a major constraint involving the lack of personnel to implement the program. Governor Ignacio Santiago of Bulacan realized that his extension field personnel, numbering about 70 at that time, were inadequate to seriously undertake supervised credit, agricultural extension activities, and other support activities in the 543 barangays (the lowest political unit) in the 25 municipalities throughout Bulacan.

In response to this need, Governor Santiago thought of an idea of utilizing successful farmers with leadership qualities to serve as local demonstration agents and local "technicians." The farmer leaders, however, cannot perform this new task unless they themselves know the recommended new package of rice technology as well as the government procedures for supervised credit. This led to the conception of establishing a training center for farmers.

The initial construction of the Bulacan Farmers' Training Center (BFTC) was done in September 1974, at the present site, the foot of Sierra Madre ranges, some 17 kilometers from the poblacion. A new road had to be etched into this interland to make the place accessible. The funds for the construction of the original two buildings came from the provincial government and partly from the Palayan ng Bayan Project.

Awaiting completion of the training facilities, Governor Santiago solicited the assistance of the University of the Philippines at Los Baños (UPLB). He designated a member of his Provincial Development Staff to serve as the training director of the Center. He immediately instructed her and a Peace Corps Volunteer to make contacts with the UPLB.

The first training class was conducted on December 2-7, 1974, with UPLB assistance. One UPLB rice production expert came to serve as a resource person. Other agencies involved in this first class were the Bureau of Soils, the Bureau of Plant Industry, the National Food and Agriculture Council, the Bureau of Agricultural Extension and the Department of Local Government and Community Development.

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[1]Under the sponsorship of the First Lady, Madame Imelda R. Marcos, this program was launched to make resources available, through loans, to Provincial Governments to develop new lands to produce rice, corn and other food crops.

The Bulacan Farmers' Training Center Facilities

At present, the training center complex has six buildings: a kitchen and dining hall, a two-story administration building that serves as staff sleeping quarters and ladies' dorm, two-story dormitory, classroom buildings, a guest house, and a farm machinery shed. Undergoing construction is an amphitheater, a basketball court facility.

Water and electricity are provided through a generator. The Center's communication link with the front office in the provincial Capitol is a single-band radio. Two vehicles, a jeep and a travel-all, are permanently assigned to the Center. Instructional facilities and materials consist of a slide projector, sets of instructional slides and tapes, farm machinery and equipment (small tractors, dryers, small-model rice mill, small tools), rice display-plot, practicum plots, charts, pictures, print materials and print-illustrated materials.

Through a loan from the World Bank, the BFTC will receive additional facilities from the national government in the form of a new administration building, staff housing, some site development and additional instructional facilities.

Administration and Management. The BFTC is directly under the Office of the Governor. It gets an annual appropriation for personnel, maintenance, trainees' subsistence, supplies and other operating expenses. Agency and personal donations in kind and in cash come often through the personal influence of the Governor. To give an idea of the funds involved within a period of two fiscal years, here is a report from the BFTC accountant.

Fiscal Year 1974-1975	
Appropriated Amount	₱41,591.25
Donation	40,500.00
Total Amount Received	82,091.25
Total number of participants	321
Expenses per head per week	₱ 255.73
Expenses per head per day	36.53

Fiscal Year 1975-1976	
Appropriated Amount	₱201,248.00
Donations	68,775.00
Total Amount Received	₱270,023.00
Number of Participants	832
Expenses per head per week	₱ 324.54
Expenses per head per day	₱ 46.36

Presently, the Center has 10 personnel under its budget: a training director, an assistant training director, a curriculum development officer and trainor, an administrative assistant, a secretary, one artist-illustrator, one training aide, one typist, one driver, one janitor-messenger and one security guard.

The accounting and auditing of funds is done through the regular government systems and procedures. Disbursement of funds is done through the provincial treasury and any financial donation is also deposited and entered into the books at the provincial treasurer's office. As far as tuition is concerned, in all of the programs at the BFTC, Bulacan participants are free while those from other provinces pay ₱20.00 per day for board and lodging and training materials.

Specific Programs at the Center

To date, a total of 2,180 farmers have studied at the Center with varying time duration, purpose, content, clientele, cooperating agencies and admission system. Of this number, about 50 have come from other provinces such as Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Zambales, Antique, Catanduanes and Davao Sur. A brief description of the program offered by the Center is given below.

1. **Regular Rice Production Technology Course** — This is a one-week program dealing on a package of new rice technology.

The objectives of the program are to:

(1) acquire information on the technology recommended by the National Masagana 99 program;
(2) understand the concepts and principles behind the recommendation;
(3) diagnose rice production problems and come up with solutions;
(4) acquire additional rice production operational skills based on new technology; and
(5) know the systems and procedure of the supervised credit program of Masagana 99 including all other support services under the program.

One thousand six hundred seventy nine (1,679) farmers have already gone through this program which is given once a month. Applicants for training may be recommended for admission by Center alumni, government technicians or local groups and associations. The Center's staff evaluates the application and makes the allocation to different municipalities and barangays based on distribution of previous trainees, leadership role, and strength of recommendation. Part-time farmers are excluded; so are those who cannot read or write and those below 18 years of age. The cooperating agencies in this program are the Bureau of Agricultural Extension (BAEx), the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), the Bureau of Soils (BS), the National Grains Authority (NGA), the Rural Banks (RB), the Philippine National Bank (PNB), the National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC), and the University of the Philippines at Los Baños (UPLB).

2. **Re-training Course on Rice Production** — The purpose of the course is to prepare would-be Barangay Technicians (BT). A more detailed description of the BT program can be found in another section of this paper. The course consists of three parts:

(1) A review of rice production technology particularly on the recommended cultural practices of the Masagana 99 program;

(2) Preparation of farm plan and budget and other bank procedures; and
(3) Local leadership and effective communication.

These are the areas of competency necessary for the task of a BT. The course duration is one week. Participants are admited based on local leadership, standing as a farmer, successful attendance of the first rice production course, and willingness to serve as BT's. An applicant has to be recommended by the bank that he will serve later or a local organization or government technician. Two hundred-sixty six (266) individuals have gone through this program. Out of this number, only 188 have been given appointments as BT's by the provincial governor. The same agencies as in the regular rice program provided the resource persons.

3. **Out-of-School Youth Training on Rice Production** – A one-month course on scouting and rice production was given to twenty-six (26), 15-20 year-old out-of-school youths in March, 1976. The purpose of the program was to prepare the participants to obtain employment in rice production under corporate farming system, self-employment, or employment in the province Palayan ng Bayan Project. The same agencies as those in the regular rice program cooperated in this program.

4. **Training on Livestock Diseases First-Aid** – Livestock is a very important industry in the province. When the province was hit by a series of typhoons and strong rains in May and June in 1976, there was an immediate on-set of livestock diseases. To help contain the spread of diseases and to prevent high mortality, first-aid measures were needed. Towards this end, the BFTC jointly sponsored a series of 3-day seminar-workshops on first-aid on livestock diseases with the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) and the UP College of Veterinary Medicine. The seminar workshops were conducted for all the 24 municipalities of Bulacan within the whole month of June, 1976. A total of 580 farmers received this training.

5. **Livestock Re-Training Program** – Following the concept and experience of the rice BT, the BFTC jointly sponsored and conducted with the BAI a one-week training on livestock production and management for 56 participants. The livestock BT is the counterpart of the rice BT. The content of training was a combination of production technology, supervised credit, and extension-communication.

6. **Post-Harvest Technology Seminar** – With the hope of reducing after-harvest losses, which are quite substantial (estimated to be from 10-25%), the BFTC jointly conducted a 3-day seminar on post-harvest technology with the NGA. One hundred thirty participated in this program which was offered in two sessions.

7. **Training on Compact Farming** – Basically the same as the regular rice production program, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) concept and procedure of compact farming were added. This program was participated in by 41 NIA technicians and compact farm leaders.

THE LEARNING SYSTEM

Over a period of almost three years, the BFTC has established some patterns with respect to curriculum planning, designing and development, instructional methodology and techniques which are invariably applied to any training program it manages. The BFTC always jointly prepares curricula with technical agencies concerned. For instance, all its rice training programs were jointly designed with BAEx, BPI, BS, and UPLB experts during a workshop designed for the purpose. In its livestock training program, the curriculum design was jointly prepared with representatives of the BAI and the UP College of Veterinary Medicine. The post-harvest course was designed with NGA experts.

The instructional strategy used is multi-channel, that is, a variety of teaching strategies and techniques are used over the whole training duration. If the objective is to learn certain operational skills or procedures, method demonstration followed by field practicum is used. If the objective is learning to identify rice production problems, a combination of slides, actual specimens, pictures and field trips is used. For this purpose, the Center maintains a display plot where a collection of varieties are planted. Trainees are brought to this plot to study varietal characteristics and recommended cultural practices. In the classroom, chalk-board and charts are commonly used. Instructors are encouraged to employ the informal dialogic and discussion techniques for high participation and to encourage interchange of experiences among participants.

Experimentation on the use of modern instructional technology was done at the Center by UPLB experts. A slide-tape production was pre-tested and five sets were eventually produced by the UPLB for the Center. These slide-tapes are now regularly used in the rice training programs. The use of video-tape recorder to record trainees' sessions during training was experimented on. This project is still at the initial stage.

The other features of the training design are: physical exercises every morning before breakfast, flag raising ceremony just before the first session in the morning, socials and quiz shows in the evenings and ground improvement either early in the morning or after the last session in the afternoon.

In an in-depth study of teaching styles and techniques used at the BFTC and conducted by UPLB researchers, the following instructor characteristics stood out as most important as mentioned by the trainees: (1) mastery of the subject-matter; (2) ability to keep a class alive and attentive; (3) personality that inspires confidence and respect yet pleasant in manner; and (4) organized presentation using the vernacular, delivered in a loud voice, and relating the subject to actual conditions.

External Linkages

As an institution, the BFTC has established cooperative working relationships with various specialized agencies and institutions. This can be seen in the frequency of teaching by resource persons from these agencies as shown in Table I. This period covers the years from 1974 to 1977.

The participation of the BAEx is quite substantial. It is to be expected that the BFTC as a non-formal educational institution supporting agricultural

development has to have close interface with the agricultural extension system. As a matter of fact, one World Bank expert commented that this is the kind of institution that the agricultural extension organization ought to have to support its field programs.

Another observation is the increased involvement of the UPLB in 1975 and 1976. This is because of a formal tie-up between the Province of Bulacan and the UPLB. The agreement provided that the UPLB would extend technical assistance/consultancy to the BFTC for a period of three years. More specifically, the following areas of assistance were pinpointed; curriculum and program development, planning for site and program development planning for site and physical development, planning for the development of instructional system, and staff development.

All these project areas have been substantially worked out to date. UPLB assistance has been sought and provided for, in all the curricular programming at the Center. The UPLB has been instrumental in including the BFTC into the network of the Philippine Training Centers for Rural Development (PTC-RD) for which the BFTC will receive financial assistance for physical development, development of instructional facilities, and staff development. Through the UPLB's request, the IRRI has accepted two staff members of the BFTC into a six-month rice specialist course. One has already returned to the Center and has been very valuable not only to the Center but to the whole rice program of the province as well.

Next year, as the UPLB's BFTC participation phases out, as per agreement, the PTC-RD will provide support to the BFTC.

One very important development in the instructional program of the BFTC is the sudden emergence of the Barangay Technicians as instructors in 1976 and 1977. Since Bulacan started to use selected BFTC graduates to serve as auxillary extension technicians (para-professionals), growing number of them stood out to be effective teachers. So, the BFTC decided to tap some of them to serve as instructors in its rice production training program.

In the recent in-depth study of teaching style and strategies used at the BFTC, the following statements were mentioned by the trainees concerning the farmer-instructors: (1) "they give us boost, inspiration, and good example," (2) "their approach is heart to heart," (3) "we understand them easily," (4) "they have a more direct approach to the subject and to participants," and (5) "we believe what they say because they say what they have experienced."

Another evidence of external linkages established by the BFTC is in the number of institutions, agencies and individuals that have given donations in cash and in kind. The following is the list of donors as of June 1977:

Ford Foundation
National Grains Authority
Palayan ng Bayan (National)
Planters Product
Bulacan Federation of Rural Banks
Rice Millers Association of Bulacan
Mr. Felipe F. Cruz

Table 1. Resource Persons at the BFTC (Number)

Agency/Institution	1974	1975	1976	1977 (up to June)
National Irrigation Administration	– –	6 6	15 15	15 15
Bureau of Soils	2	15	18	11
National Grains Authority	–	2	15	10
Bureau of Plant Industry	1	2	8	14
Philippine National Bank	1	2	8	5
Central Bank	–	2	3	–
University of the Philippine at Los Baños	1	17	36	8
Barangay Technician	–	–	35	20
Bureau of Agricultural Extension	4	35	37	9
National Food and Agricultural Council	1	5	4	2
Department of Local Government and Community Development	1	4	5	5
International Rice Research Institute	–	4	–	–
Rural Bank	–	1	2	–
Unified Rice Applied Research Training and Information Program	–	1	19 (one season)	–
Department of Agrarian Reform	–	–	2	–

IMPACT OF THE BULACAN FARMERS' TRAINING CENTER

The Barangay Technician Program

The main features of the Barangay Technician Program (BTP) of the province of Bulacan are as follows:

a) Selected farmer graduates of the BFTC are given re-training on new rice technology: Masagana 99 systems and procedures, supervised credit, leadership and extension-communication techniques. The basis of selection are: leadership in the community, progressive outlook and willingness to serve the community. After re-training, the graduates are appointed by Governor Santiago as Barangay Technicians and assigned to the rural banks that service their area.

b) The Rural Banks in turn utilize these Barangay Technicians to assist about 30 farmers in their own Barangays in the preparation of the farm plan and budget in the proper application of production inputs, and in the care and management of the crop. Furthermore, they organize seminars and adult education sessions where local farmers share experiences on rice production technology. During their contacts with assisted farmers, the latter are reminded of their credit obligations.

c) The Rural Banks provide the BT's an incentive allowance of ₱1.00/farmer-assisted/month for a maximum of 5 months per cropping season. In addition, the BT's get ₱6.00/assisted-farmer upon full payment of the production loan before the due date.

d) The Department of Agriculture field personnel, on the other hand, provide technical assistance to the BT by serving as resource persons in their seminars or by providing more technical information on a given problem during their field visits.

In summary, the Barangay Technician scheme utilizes the following concepts: (1) functional, work-related, non-formal education to local farmer leaders; (2) use of farmer leaders as auxiliary rice production technicians to provide local technical assistance and educational services; (3) private agribusiness enterprise absorption of some of the costs of technical services; and (4) government agricultural technician's provision of professional and technical assistance through a local channel – the change agents – rather than through individual farmers, allowing him to service a much larger area. If this scheme is ultimately followed throughout the country, the number of additional extension workers to be hired will be reduced considerably.

The BT's have accomplished the following:

1. In phase VII (ending Nov., 1976), the 64 BT's that were assigned to 19 Rural Banks and 3 PNB's worked out a total release amounting to ₱4,020,410.00. This was the total amount borrowed by 1,977 farmers assisted by the BT's (Source: BFTC 1976 Annual Report).

2. The average yield of farmers assisted by the BT's in phase VII of the Masagana 99 program was 83.5 cavans/ha. as compared to the 73 cavans/ha. provincial average (Source: NFAC Survey, April 1977).

3. In phases V and VI of the Masagana 99 program, the BT's registered repayment (of their assisted farmers) from 90-100% depending on the community and the particular bank (Source: Rural Bank and Philippine National Bank Report in Bulacan). The provincial repayment average for phase V was 88% for the RB's and 82% for the PNB's.

Some probable reasons for this repayment performance were:

(1) More contacts between the growers and the local supervised credit advisor (Barangay Technician). In these contacts, there was greater interpersonal influence through persuasion and non-formal education.

(2) Greater social pressure was exerted on the borrowers because the supervised credit advisor (BT) was from the locality and knew the borrowers quite well.

(3) There was more selectivity on who should be provided credit. Those with bad reputation as borrowers were avoided by the Barangay Technicians, thus preventing the bad credit risk from utilizing credit funds.

(4) There was greater credibility in the new technology due to the advocacy by the Barangay Technician who came from the locality. Because of this, the adoption of new superior production technology was more widespread and quicker and resulted in greater yield performance.

4. As of June, 1977, one hundred eighty eight (188) BT's had already been appointed and assigned to the RB's and the PNB's in Bulacan.

There was a substantial change in rice production practices after attendance in a one-week rice production course at the BFTC. On the use of high yielding varieties alone, the percentage of adoptors jumped from 38% to 94% among 260 respondents surveyed (Source: E. Genio, Ph.D. thesis).

From an average yield of 57 cavans per hectare before training, the yield of 260 respondents surveyed nearly doubled (107 cavans/ha.), after training. However, there could have been some influence coming from other sources such as mass media, neighbors, technicians, etc. But the provincial average in cavans/ha. for the period of the survey was 70 (Source: E. Genio, Ph.D. thesis).

As can be inferred from Table 1, the BFTC has served as an integrating mechanism bringing together the various institutions, agencies and individuals to make their inputs for agricultural development. It is extremely doubtful whether the 15 agencies and institutions listed in Table 2 along with the donors listed and the others who have given assistance to the Center would voluntarily get together for the agricultural development cause, outside the context of the Center.

Through the linkage with the BFTC, the UPLB has gained substantial knowledge, insight and experience on non-formal education and its role in agricultural development. Also, through this project, the UPLB has generated extension/training material prototypes. Furthermore, UPLB students, visitors and faculty have been exposed to the real problems of agricultural development and of learning the non-formal education dimension of the problem.

The viability and alidity of the non-formal education concept demonstrated by the BFTC has helped national and international decision-makers to

support the establishment of five other similar farmers' training centers all over the country with funding from the World Bank. Some provincial governments are also contemplating to put up similar institutions out of their own resources.

CONCLUSION

The Bulacan Farmers' Training Center is a case for a strategy in agricultural development that principally uses the non-formal education approach through the establishment of a local institution for this purpose. It is a learning resource center for rural folks to complement and supplement the existing agricultural programs.

In the company of other learners from other places, confined in an institution where the value and norms of change are impressed upon the participants, a farmer-participant gets an opportunity to break away from what might be already a dysfunctional and obsolete technology. Through exposure to new information, experiences of other farmers from other places, analysis of self, and to a totally new world of experience, the farmer participant develops new perspectives, accepts new challenge, centers on new resolutions, and becomes renewed.

All these processes could take place in a training center. And this is the rationale for an institution-based non-formal education approach to support the field programs in agricultural extension.

The following principles and generalizations are proposed:

1. A non-formal educational institution for agricultural development has to establish functional and cooperative linkages with technical agencies and institutions and has obtain wide public acceptance and sponsorship. It has to obtain this public recognition and prestige in order to instill pride among the participants who study there.

2. To be effective, the Center has to be responsive to, and supportive of, the learning needs of the field extension program. It should avoid alienating and antagonizing field programs or avoid taking a totally separate tract from the field programs. On the other hand, this kind of an institution can become an effective catalyzer or agent of change and an integrating point to channel the various forces for agricultural development.

3. The total experience that such an institution must provide the participant has to be rewarding in terms of beneficial results and has to be personally pleasant. The offerings and learnings that one gets at the Center have to be useful and practical.

4. Such an institution has to impress in the participants, in subtle but systematic persistent ways, developmental values and norms.

5. Non-formal educational institutions have to establish a mechanism for the clientele sector to participate actively in curricular program planning and development and in teaching in its training programs.

6. The staff of the non-formal education institution has to understand the nature and processes of the approach and has to internalize the crucial principle that distinguishes it from other approaches. This is the clientele receiver or learner-biased viewpoint of education and the staffers have to be committed to this calling and really know the total culture and situation of the clientele.