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Extension Cord: Powering adult education through Cooperative Extension programs

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Extension Cord: Powering Adult Education through Cooperative Extension Programs

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Abstract: Cooperative extension provides opportunities for adult learning in a variety of settings. The study identified perceptions of county agents related to their role in community development and adult education.

Keywords: cooperative extension, adult education, rural development

One important mission of the nation's land grant universities is to provide extension education to the community, whether rural or urban, with the purpose of educating agricultural producers, consumers, and other citizens about ways to improve their lives, businesses, and communities. Cooperative extension is an example of nonformal, research-based education. The programs offered vary widely in nature and scope and include topics like water quality, nutrition, crop protection and pest management, and leadership development.

Cooperative Extension employees serve as resources to the local population, planning and evaluating programs, developing curriculum, and facilitating learning events, often to adult learners with a specific focus and significant need to know. They are part of the profession of extension education and may or may not recognize the relationship between their practice, their philosophy of teaching and learning, and the field of adult education.

Purpose of the Study:

In a 1987 article in the *Journal of Extension*, White and Brockett suggested questions for extension practitioners to consider as they reflect on their own working philosophy. In the article, they provided descriptions of the five common philosophies (liberal, progressive, radical, humanist and behaviorist) of adult education and specific examples from Extension practice.

The purpose of this study is to build on the work of White and Brockett (1987) to investigate the extent to which cooperative extension employees identify themselves and their work as part of the field of adult education. The focus of this research is explore whether alignment exists between an employee's working philosophy and their view of the role of Extension in our society.

The questions guiding the study include:

- What do Extension professionals believe to be the role of Cooperative Extension for individuals and in the community?

- How do Extension professionals perceive their role advances the mission of Cooperative Extension?
- How do Extension professionals' practice and instructional strategies align with the various philosophies of adult education?
- Is this in a purely economic development lens or the wider view of social justice seen in global perspectives of adult education?

This roundtable session should be of interest to scholars and practitioners in the areas of philosophy of adult education, rural development, community development, and the professional development of extension agents as adult educators. During the session, researchers will share the preliminary results of the study and, depending on the makeup of session participants, lead a discussion on the role of adult learning in the curriculum of Extension degree programs, approaches to extension education as disseminating knowledge versus developing learner agency, the future of Cooperative Extension programs and their response to global changes, and whether the focus of Extension should reflect the individual or society.