POLICY EDUCATION VIEWED FROM "DOWN UNDER"

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After a few months in Australia it dawned on me how privileged I had been to have had a career in public policy education in the United States. Nowhere else in the world would it have been possible. This realization came into focus for me after I finished a seminar for the New South Wales branch of the Australian Agricultural Economics Association. My topic was "Problem-Oriented Research and Education—An Iowa Example." One of my colleagues remarked thoughtfully and sadly after I had finished, "I don't see how that could ever happen here." Suddenly it struck me that it could not really have happened anywhere except in the United States. The extension service operating out of a university is one good reason, and then I doubt there are many places in the world where people feel as responsible to be well informed for making decisions as participating members of representative government. It has been a rewarding career.

We have come a long way since that first national policy conference in the Del Prado Hotel in Chicago. At Iowa State Carl Malone and I began with a series on fiscal and monetary policy to avoid a postwar depression. We knew from the reception we received that we had started on something significant and exciting. Parallel programs started at Purdue, Michigan, and North Carolina, among others, at about the same time.

There was a good backlog of untaught research on farm price policy and later on agricultural adjustment policy to make a significant impact on citizen understanding for decision making. The pattern was to comb through the research literature on a relevant problem, clarify the problem, describe the alternative policy proposals, and appraise the consequences of the alternatives for key influentials. Some of us developed a core of about a thousand such leaders to teach.

This kind of adult education conducted by cooperative extension was unique in the world. In the Western world, typified by Australia, social science research is reported in the journals, and the assumption is it will be picked up by the press and political debate to enlighten decision making. In the Communist world and in the growing numbers of nations under military dictatorships,

such research is done specifically for state planning and execution.

In the United States the research and education on agricultural adjustment has had a profound impact on the adjustment as the number of people on farms has dropped from 30 million in 1940 to 9.8 million in 1970.

LOOKING AHEAD FROM 1972

The issues are becoming more complex, and the inventory of relevant research is not keeping pace with the complexity of the emerging problems. The audience, now composed of urban industrial and labor leaders and government officials as well as farmers, is more sophisticated. They are conditioned to specific information for production purposes programmed by computer. They can be impatient with less specific information for public decision making.

The university research and adult education system in the United States has the resources to conduct problem-oriented research and education. But it has not organized itself to develop the capability to actually conduct such programs on a continuing basis. Such a capability is badly needed and would be stimulating. Alternatives to such a capability by universities are limited.

The old system of one or two state specialists teaching in a year 2,000 people, recruited by county staff for county or area meetings, is obsolete and has a limited future. Even in its heyday relatively few states had extensive programs. A specialist can conduct his own specific research and then conduct intensive education, but this spreads his resources very thin.

A few of us have conducted pilot operations of problem-oriented research and education. With administrative support—and some slight coercion—an ad hoc team for planning and execution has been put together for a single massive program.

The elements of such a pilot operation are:

1. A planning task force including teachers, researchers, and educational organization and materials preparation staff.
2. An interdisciplinary research team recruited for specific research needs.
3. An operations team for scheduling and managing the execution of the educational program.
4. A teaching team to organize specific subject matter and reference material and prepare a teaching outline.
5. A materials preparation team from information service.

6. Program execution by a variety of methods including use of mass media for an umbrella of support or as a tool for teaching, direct teaching in workshops, or teaching by a combination of reading and discussion.

7. Follow-up research and education (with some education follow-up conducted by trained county staff).

Enough such pilot programs have been conducted in a number of states to assure that the programs are possible. The university has demonstrated that it can conduct research relevant to urgent public issues, that it can effectively communicate the research to decision makers, and that people welcome such a program of research and education as a legitimate function of the university. Problem-oriented research and education on a continuing basis is possible, but no university has as yet approached a continuing capability.

A tentative list of requirements for such a continuing capability includes:

1. Administrative commitment. This is an absolutely essential ingredient.

2. A small permanent core staff. The core group will include one or more full-time research leaders, an information service person, and sufficient teacher leaders for continuous programming.

3. Short-term help on research or teaching from university staff who are interested enough to participate in a particular program. Most universities have enough flexibility to permit half-year postponements of longer-term commitments to provide for such volunteer participation.

Meeting these requirements is well within the resource capability of most land-grant universities. Other forms of organization are possible; however, to be successful they must provide for comprehensive planning, a specific research base, adequate audience recruitment related to the teaching technology, and effective teaching.

Our future in this work is uncertain but the possibilities are known and exciting. If a university decides to organize itself to meet the urgent demand for problem-oriented research and education (to provide specific and relevant answers for decision makers), it can do so. The methodology is available and adequate. However, we need something more than individual Edison type research and journal articles. We will not solve public finance, environmental,

or rural and urban development problems by conducting educational programs on what is published as research results in refereed journals of the social sciences. We must have a strong, coordinated effort.

It is a new day. The past has provided a very satisfying career. The new day will be different, but it, too, promises to be rewarding.