POLICY EDUCATION: NEEDS AND METHODS IN THE 1980s

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Democracy cannot long exist in the absence of an educated population. John Adams argued that "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people. . ." (1) Without knowledge of the issues of the day, the people have no means of identifying appropriate policies and must rely totally on the unchecked judgment of their elected representatives.

Thomas Jefferson clearly recognized the need for a population well-educated on the issues of the day: "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education" (10). An effective democracy depends on an informed electorate.

Public policy education affords one avenue, among many, for increasing the "general knowledge among the people" of the major public policy issues of our time. Public policy education is an extension educational program that applies the knowledge of the university to public issues and educates citizens to enable them to make better-informed policy choices.

Need for Policy Education

The need for policy education and the public's demand for information on public issues is probably greater today than at anytime in the past. Changes in communication technology have made people much more aware of what happens outside their local area, and how they are affected by changes in the state capital, the national economy, or international trade. Citizens are also much more aware of the environmental impacts of activities such as manufacturing, forestry, or agriculture. Finally, local, state, and federal governments have as-

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sumed a much greater role in matters, such as managing the economy, protecting the public health and social welfare and improving the quality of the environment. People are increasingly interested in public policy issues and the activities of government.

The combination of changes has transformed agricultural agents, home economists, resource agents, dairy experts, and most other extension county agents and state specialists into *de facto* public policy educators. A few years ago most activities of extension agents and specialists might have been viewed as "giving technical advice." Today many of these same activities are viewed as statements on public policy issues.

For example, an agricultural agent recommending a pesticide to a potato farmer can hardly afford to be unaware of the policy debate concerning the use of certain pesticides and environmental protection. The agent's "technical" advice, especially if he expands his efforts to include a public defense of farm chemicals, will be viewed by many — perhaps even a majority— as equivalent to taking a policy position against environmental protection. Extension agents and specialists must be aware that at least part of their work involves public policy issues. Almost all extension agents and specialists are involved in policy, even if they do not realize it, and regardless of whether they like it or not. Verne House brought to my attention a very similar argument by James Hildreth of the Farm Foundation: "All education, in one way or another, involves public policy issues. This statement has become more clear in recent years. Many of the topics which used to be considered objective technical subject matter are now policy issues. . . Thus, whether you want to be in public policy education or not, you are" (8).

Extension's opportunity, or obligation, to educate the public on the major public policy issues of our day is the subject of this paper. For a thorough discussion of public policy education and some examples of policy education programs, see Verne W. House, *Shaping Public Policy: The Educator's Role* (9).

Educational Philosophy

Public policy education rests on a specific concept of the Land Grant University and its role in a democratic society. The Land Grant University in general, and extension in particular, is concerned with the problems of people and is committed to using the knowledge of the university to improve the quality of life for the people of the state.

Lest we think of extension's mission too narrowly, it is useful to recall the 1915 statement of Chairman Butterfield of the original Land Grant Committee on extension: "It will give farmers light upon taxation as well as upon tree pruning. The rural school will have as much attention as corn breeding. . .(14,p.18). Extension has a long and il-

lustrious history of participation in the affairs of state government in many states.

Public policy education is also based on a pluralist view of the democratic political process in which there are numerous individual interests and interest groups and many decision-makers with potentially conflicting interests in the various branches of government. Public policy decisions are viewed as compromises among these divergent interests. This is an extremely important concept because it implies that there is no single "public interest" and no "optimal" policy choice. The fact that there is debate means that the perceived interests of different groups conflict, giving rise to the policy issue. Any solution or resolution of the debate will favor some groups and hurt — or not help — others. Occasionally a policy issue will arise in which all groups could be made better off by some particular policy choice. Conflict occurs either because the participants in the debate are not aware of this option or because one or more of the groups favor an alternative that would make them even better-off, but that would hurt other groups (or benefit them much less), compared to the alternative in which all groups would benefit.

Scientific knowledge, the wisdom of the university, cannot be used to determine the "correct" policy choice for society because science cannot supply the value judgment that ranks the interests of one group as more important than the interest of others. This philosophical position will have important implications for teaching methods, discussed below.

Finally, public policy education is based on a philosophical concept of the value of public participation in governmental decisions. It is assumed that if the democratic process is to function effectively, the citizenry must be well-informed of the major issues of the day, and must have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. These ideas did not originate with extension. Plato argued that education was the key to developing good policy and social conditions in his ideal Greek city-state and the views of Adams and Jefferson were cited above.

The Educator's Values

To be effective in public policy education, the educator must operate on the basis of certain values and beliefs about human behavior, the democratic process, and the role of education in a free society. The educator may recognize these values explicitly, or the values and beliefs may simply be implicit in his actions.

Enlightened Self-Interest

First, the educator must be willing to believe that enlightened self-interest is a reasonable guide to individual behavior. The educator

must believe that individuals generally know when they are better off or worse off, are able to use whatever knowledge they have to decide which courses of action are most likely to leave them better off, and are willing to try to act accordingly.

Enlightened self-interest is most effective in guiding behavior if individuals have sufficient knowledge of current conditions and the consequences of various possible changes — precisely the type of information provided in a good public policy education program. The enlightened self-interest assumption should not be too difficult for most educators to accept.

Enlightened self-interest does not mean that people are totally selfish. In fact, some amount of benevolence, trust, and respect for the rights of others is necessary for any society to survive. For the policy educator, believing in the principle of enlightened self-interest simply means believing that people have the basic intelligence or common sense to be able to identify the best policy alternative, where each individual defines "best" in terms of his own preferences.

Sometimes an individual's policy choice may be dictated strictly by his own narrow economic interest. At other times individuals may favor a policy because they believe it is best for society or morally right, even though their own interest would be harmed if the policy were adopted. In the end, a belief in enlightened self-interest reduces to the proposition that individuals know their own preferences and are able to make judgments about which policies will have results that are most in accord with their own preferences — or at least individuals are able to make these judgments for themselves better than anyone else could make the judgments for them. In this scheme, knowledge of policy alternatives and consequences is absolutely essential for intelligent choice.

Democratic Process

A second necessary belief for the public policy educator is that the democratic process is a reasonable way to make decisions when not all parties are agreed on the most preferable course of action. Public policy education is based on the assumption that a well-informed citizenry is crucial to the democratic process and that the democratic process is a reasonable means of making decisions about matters in which the interests of various groups in society conflict. Although most educators subscribe to these beliefs, it is certainly legitimate to raise questions about whose interests are served by the political process and whether all interests are fairly represented. James Laue has argued that if certain groups are not properly represented in the current version of the democratic process, extension should make a special effort to include these groups in its educational programs. This point will be discussed below (12).

Actually, the public policy educator does not need to subscribe to the belief that the current version of the democratic process in the local community or in the state works perfectly. All that is necessary is the belief that the democratic process is a more reasonable means of making decisions than administrative fiat or the dictates of a single individual.

Most important, the educator must believe that (s)he does not possess the wisdom to always make the right choice for society. The public policy educator must value highly the right of individuals to make their own choices. In the end, (s)he must have some faith that a well-informed citizenry, and the democratic process, will generally produce a choice that is right for society, or at least produce a right choice more often than any other decision-making method.

Practical Concerns

If the educator's personal values are consistent with the philosophy outlined above, then it is appropriate to shift attention to more practical questions about beginning a public policy education program. There are a few prerequisites for a successful program. Assuming these prerequisites are met, the questions become: How do I know what issues to tackle? How do I know when to plan and when to teach? Whom do I teach?

Prerequisites

There are a few simple prerequisites for a successful public policy education program. These are necessary conditions for success, but not sufficient: without these a program is likely to fail, but meeting these conditions does not guarantee success. The prerequisites involve conflict, institutional support and information.

Conflict. Public policy education deals with issues that are controversial. A decision that is to be made by government becomes a policy issue precisely because there is controversy or a conflict among individuals and groups about the best course of action to pursue. For example, a decision to take bids on harvesting a part of a state forest is usually not controversial — it is not usually a policy issue. But when certain individuals and groups object to timber harvest in a certain area because it destroys scenery and wilderness then the matter may become a policy issue of some importance to county government.

If there is no controversy, no conflict, there is no policy issue. So, by definition, policy education deals with public questions or decisions over which are disagreements and conflicting interests. No matter how objective the public policy educational program, it is likely that some individuals or groups will object to the educational effort, if for no other reason than that the educational program makes the issue more visible. Besides, even absolutely factual information is not usually politically neutral.

Support. Extension as an organization must be willing, and able, to withstand the controversy and criticism that even the best public policy education project may create. Ron Powers, currently associate Extension Director in Iowa, has argued that extension really has little choice in the matter: "My own view is that an extension system that purposefully avoids issues and arenas where conflict exists is doomed to mediocrity. . .viable, growing organizations must serve emerging needs and issues and incur some risk because the alternative of being 'safe' is, in reality, also 'risky' " (13). Past experience suggests that there is generally strong support for public policy education among the leaders of extension; administrators will support county agents and state specialists if a good educational program draws fire in the political arena.

Because public policy education can be controversial, it pays to establish a good foundation for the program, both within extension and among outside groups. At the state level, a good foundation for policy education means informing extension administrators and colleagues that a program is being planned. Even for the most independent county agents and state specialists that is not a particularly odious requirement and in fact will usually occur without too much conscious effort.

For county extension agents, in addition to informing colleagues and administrators, the support of the county board's agriculture and extension education committee is extremely important. Experienced agents are usually experts in involving their committee members in policy education programs. Generally it may be easier to obtain support if committee members understand the basic philosophy of public policy education before any specific issue arises.

In many counties extension has a long history of involvement in public policy education and it may be relatively easy to obtain committee support. In other counties it may be much more difficult to convince the committee members that extension has a legitimate role in dealing with policy issues.

Information. A second step in building a good foundation for a policy education program is to inform the key individuals and groups on all sides of the issue that an educational program is being planned. In fact, many extension programs in policy education evolve because state specialists and county agents already are interacting with various groups and individuals with an interest in the policy issue. Again, it will be very easy and natural to inform the various interests that a program is planned.

The broader the audience and the more widespread the interest in the policy issue, the more important it becomes to "touch base" with all the relevant interests. For example, if the audience is the voting public, the issue is a state tax limitation referendum, and the mass media will be used to disseminate information it may be quite important to touch base with all the major interests before beginning. On

the other hand, if the issue is national marketing policies for cranberries and the audience is cranberry growers it may be less important to inform all possible interest groups of the plan for an educational program. (It still may be important to inform all the relevant factions among the cranberry growers).

Although it may not always be necessary to inform a broad range of interests about a policy education program it may be useful to do so and may help build the perception that extension educators make a sincere effort to maintain objectivity and neutrality in policy education. The only danger is that some important interests or key individuals are not informed, either because of oversight, because they had not been interacting with extension staff, or because the extension specialist or agent has already taken sides in the policy debate. In these cases the program and the extension educators are more likely to face charges of bias or political favoritism.

The basic point is this: (1) the subject matter of public policy education is policy issues; (2) issues arise because of conflict among interest groups; (3) it is possible that the policy education program will itself become part of the controversy over the issue; (4) one way to help minimize the probability of this occurrence is to touch base with interest group leaders on the various sides of the debate, before beginning the educational program. Other ways to reduce the probability of becoming a target for political flak will be discussed later.

What Issues to Choose?

Public policy education is issue or problem-oriented, as distinguished from extension programs that provide general information or technical training. An appropriate issue must have several characteristics.

Public Concern. Most important, the issue must be an important policy question, and the object of some public concern or debate. It is useless to try to design an educational program around an issue which is perceived only by the educator or a small group of extension faculty. The issue must be perceived as important by a significant part of the intended audience; otherwise people will not spend the time, energy, and money to become better informed on the issue. Issues that are defined by what extension educators are trained to do, or issues that are defined by the puzzles of an academic discipline are not likely to lead to successful public policy education programs. Similarly, the educator may correctly identify an important policy question which must be decided, but if it is not defined as an issue by the intended audience, a policy education program is not likely to be successful.

Whose Issue? This raises the question of who is the public that defines the issue. Clearly, it cannot be the extension educator alone or an extension committee. But it is also not necessary to have widespread concern among the general public in order to have a successful

policy education program. It may be quite appropriate for an extension educator to work with a small number of key people who do see an issue and are struggling to resolve it. The issue may later capture the attention of a large segment of the general public, or a large segment of some interest group, such as the cranberry growers or town government officials.

Issues change, and so must public policy education programs. In some cases, as a policy debate begins to form around an issue, the extension program might be designed to help people more clearly define the problem. As the issue sharpens, the debate may focus on the policy alternatives and consequences. Later, the issue may be resolved, at least temporarily, by some executive or legislative decision, and the extension program may change to provide information on what has been decided. Often a decision at one level of government may simply shift the policy issue and debate to a higher, or lower, level of government and the policy education program can simply shift accordingly.

In some cases, the original policy decision will later be re-evaluated and the policy education program may shift once again. There is no formula for determining the most appropriate stage of the issue to conduct an educational program. Any or all of the issue stages may be appropriate, but the program must be designed accordingly (6; 5; 2).

Values and Knowledge. Not all public policy issues are appropriate for a public policy education program. Obviously, the educator must have some knowledge to bring to bear on the policy issue, or be able to obtain that knowledge from others. Also, the intended audience must have some need for the information or analysis.

In general, the more an issue can be analyzed using the university research results or the methodology of an academic discipline, the more suitable it is for a policy education program. However, the position should not be taken to an extreme — all the facts pertinent to an issue are never available, so if any educational programs are ever to be conducted it will always be with an incomplete factual record.

Sometimes an issue may be intensely debated, but all the information, analysis, and knowledge of the university may already be known by the participants in the debate. The facts are known, but differing values lead different groups to opposite positions on the issue. In these cases the extension educator has little to add because science cannot be used to identify the most "appropriate" set of values. Note that even in this case a policy education program might have been useful at some earlier stage of the debate, before all groups had the relevant knowledge.

However, this does not mean that extension policy educators never deal with values. No policy issue is ever divorced from the values, beliefs, and emotions of the participants in the debate. This is appro-

priate, because even an objective, undisputed "fact" will be viewed quite differently by people with different values and interests. But often the facts get confused with the values, hopes, emotions, and general misconceptions of the participants.

Part of the job of the policy educator is to help people separate fact from values, beliefs, wishful-thoughts, misconceptions and emotions. The values and emotions are appropriately included in the policy debate, but a better understanding and analysis of the factual record can help everyone focus more clearly on the essence of the policy disagreement.

When to Teach?

Some times are better than others for teaching about public policy issues. It is useless to attempt to educate people about a policy issue which they do not think is particularly relevant, important or pressing. On the other hand, if the policy debate has progressed (or degenerated) to the point where everyone has a strong opinion, all the relevant leaders have expressed strong stands, personalities are closely entwined with specific positions, emotional outbursts are frequent, and the debate is bitter and rancorous, a factual and objective educational program may be ignored by almost everyone.

At some point most people have taken a position on the issue, and no one wants to be confused (or embarrassed) by the facts at such a time. Policy education may not always be impossible in these situations but the effectiveness and the probability for success are much higher if the program is delivered when the debate is less rigid and emotional before all the participants have publicly taken strong stands on the issue.

Thus, the educator must seek the teachable moment — the time at which the issue is hot enough to capture people's interest, but not so hot that everyone's decision is made and the debate is becoming increasingly bitter. The teachable moment implies that the educator must be able to foresee or predict important issues and prepare educational materials before the issue becomes the center of public attention. In effect, the educator must invest his/her time and energy gambling that the issue will develop in a manner suitable for a public policy education program. This makes public policy education a high-risk operation; one determinant of success is the accuracy of the educator in predicting (or guessing) the important future policy issues.

Identifying a good issue for a policy education program is more of an art than a science. There are no secret tricks or simple worksheets for predicting which issues will be important some months or years into the future. However, many experienced county agents and state specialists are experts in forecasting the major policy issues that will capture the attention of state and local decision-makers and the general public.

These extension educators have one common trait — they listen well. They talk to a large number of people and listen carefully to people's concerns. These concerns are often translated into policy issues, sometimes through alert elected officials who are also listening carefully to their constituents. The ability to predict future policy issue allows the extension educator to gather and analyze information and prepare educational materials before the teachable moment arrives.

The concept of the teachable moment also implies that the traditional process of statewide extension program planning may not work well for public policy education. Policy issues arise from a political process which is not highly predictable. It may not be wise to attempt to predict, 6 to 18 months in advance, the policy issues that will capture the public's attention and then base the program plans of a large number of extension faculty on these predictions. The probability, and the cost, of an inaccurate prediction might be quite high.

On the other hand, it may be quite productive to encourage small groups of specialists and agents to form on an ad-hoc basis to prepare educational materials and plan pilot programs. This can be done in one or two counties where the agents feel certain the issue will be relevant. If the issue develops into a major state-wide policy debate, it would be relatively easy to expand the educational program statewide. If the issue fails to develop as anticipated, the investment in faculty time is minimized and the effort may still be productive in one or two counties. Other planning models may be more appropriate, but it may be dangerous to rely on traditional program planning methods for planning public policy education programs.

Whom to Teach?

Whom to teach depends on the policy issue. Obviously, not all people are interested in any given issue, so the audience is dictated by the nature of the issue debated. Those most directly affected by the issue are the most likely target audience. However, it is important not to define the audience strictly on the basis of the traditional clientele for extension programs. Public policy education offers extension a chance to expand its clientele and the opportunity should not be neglected.

The two major questions in determining whom to teach are: (1) whether to focus on decision-makers or the general public; and (2) whether to focus on a specific clientele and all issues that affect that clientele or whether to focus on an issue and all the groups affected.

Decision-makers vs. Public. A major question in public policy education is whether to focus the educational effort on the key decision-makers in the county and state, or whether to involve the broader public, or segments thereof, in the program. Often extension programs are focused on key decision-makers, based on arguments that: (1) extension has limited resources and should focus on those who will ac-

tually make the decisions — if the goal of policy education is better-informed judgments then the limited resources are best used informing those who will make the judgments; (2) the leaders, if educated, will in turn educate the general public; and/or (3) key leaders or decision-makers have the ability to immediately use the knowledge provided by the program.

The argument against focusing on key leaders or decision-makers is that: (1) if democracy is to function, a large cross-section of the citizenry must be aware of public policy issues, alternatives and consequences, so that the people can inform their representatives of their preferences; (2) if extension programs reach only the leaders, there is a danger that the democratic process is reversed — the leaders use the knowledge and information selectively to explain the issue, and their decision, to their uninformed constituents.

In effect the argument to focus extension resources on decision-makers is equivalent to a trickle-down theory of education — that leaders will educate others in their constituency. The obvious problem is that the trickle-down may not occur, or that the knowledge or information that does trickle down to the public is highly selective and incomplete. The democratic system is based on the assumption that the people, not just the leaders, have the ability to use information to make intelligent decisions on public policy issues.

Although a strong case can be made against focusing extension public policy education programs exclusively on key leaders, it is sometimes simply not practical to do otherwise. In some cases faculty time or funds may be so limited that only a few people can be reached with the program. In other cases a decision on the issue may be so imminent that there is simply not time to educate the broader public on the issue. Also, the state of the issue may be such that only a few decision-makers are demanding information — the broader public may simply not see the issue at some particular stage of the debate. Thus, whether to focus on leaders or the general public depends very much on the issue, the interest among the general public, the timing of a decision, and the faculty time and funds available for the extension program.

Issues vs. Clientele. Some county agents and state specialists work mostly with one or two clientele groups such as dairy farmers, vegetable growers, or small retail merchants (9, pp. 42–44). It would be natural for these faculty to focus a public policy education program on the groups they work with most closely. Some policy issues may have their biggest impact within the group, such as dairy price policies or downtown renewal. The agent will have good relations with the group, which will make it easier to talk openly about controversial topics.

Focusing on specific clientele may also help build support for extension as an organization. On the other hand, not all issues fall neatly into the realm of one or another of extension's clientele groups. Also,

the extension faculty person may begin to identify too closely with the clientele group, jeopardizing his ability to view policy issues in a neutral, objective manner.

Neutrality and Objectivity

The only absolute rule in public policy education is that the program and the information must be objective and as neutral as possible. The extension educator must strive to present the knowledge pertinent to the issue in an objective and unbiased manner. This means that the extension educator must not become an advocate of any specific position in the policy debate.

Two Models

Teaching in the field of public policy education can follow one of two basic models. The first can be termed the Advocacy Model, in which the educator advocates one position or supports one group in the policy debate. The second model is the Alternatives-Consequences Model, in which the educator helps people analyze the policy alternatives and likely consequences of each, but does not advocate any particular decision.

The Advocacy Model. The Advocacy Model has two variations. The first is rather simple — the educator examines the issue in light of his professional knowledge and his own values, identifies the policy alternative he believes is best for society and argues strongly for his position using his interpretation of the scientific evidence on the issue.

If the educator works only with one clientele, such as dairy farmers, he may try to identify the policy he thinks would be best for his own clientele. In its second variation, the Advocacy Model is much more complex and is based on the argument that the extension educator should work to enhance the democratic process (11; 12).

There are three basic propositions to this Advocacy Model. First, it is argued that the democratic process does not work well unless all groups affected by a decision are represented in the decision-making process. Second, it is argued that education is never neutral because only those with power have the means to use new knowledge effectively, so education could result in a less fair process of decision-making. Third, it is argued that extension educators must logically either advocate a particular policy choice or must advocate the process, a fair and just democratic process, by which social choice is made. The final argument is that therefore, extension educators should be advocates of a fair democratic process, which means helping groups without power obtain better representation in the decision-making process.

The Alternatives-Consequences Model. The second model for policy education, the Alternatives-Consequences Model, has two variations. In the most common, and most often used version of the model, the

educator helps people clarify the problem or issue, outlines the policy alternatives, presents the likely consequences of each alternative, and leaves the decision to the people and the democratic process. This version is used if: (1) the audience is large; (2) the audience is the general public; or (3) if the education message (written or spoken) is directed at individuals with diverse values or interests in the issue. A second version of this model might be termed the Consequences-Alternatives Model. If everyone in the group being addressed has similar values and interests, they may ask the educator to help them identify the policy alternative(s) that produce the consequences they all desire.

In this scenario the educator is given the desired consequences by his audience and helps them understand which alternatives might produce those particular consequences and which side effects or other consequences might also be produced at the same time. This version of the Alternative-Consequences Model is often used when the group is small and homogeneous, or with a single individual in an informal conversation or meeting.

This modification of the Alternatives-Consequences Model does not necessarily transform the educator into an advocate if his/her approach is objective and educational and if the educator works with a variety of groups with conflicting interests in the issue and does not become too closely identified with any one group or point of view.

This version of the model may be useful and very practical in many situations but is also more dangerous to use because: (1) the educator assumes that the group understands the basic problem, which may be incorrect; (2) the educator must assume that the audience does, in fact, agree on the basic consequences desired, which may not be correct; and (3) the educator runs a high risk of being identified as an advocate unless he works with many groups with opposite views on the issue.

The Alternatives-Consequences Model, or some variation of the model, is the most appropriate teaching method for public policy education. The arguments in favor of the Alternative-Consequences Model are: (1) the educator has no right to assume an advocacy position; (2) the educator is not necessarily trained or competent to assume the position of a professional advocate; (3) the advocacy method is ineffective and will eventually destroy the educator's credibility; (4) the Alternatives-Consequences Model is more consistent with a democratic political system, and the philosophical basis for public policy education. In the end, however, a program which is carefully designed and perfectly objective may be perceived as politically biased and although apolitical in spirit will in fact generally not be politically neutral. These arguments will be briefly explored.

The educator has no right to assume an advocacy position. Public policy education involves public issues on which everyone is not agreed. Reasonable people disagree on the appropriate course for society, based on their values, attitudes, and beliefs and their own interests at stake

in the decision. Although the weight of objective evidence may occasionally be overwhelmingly in favor of one side of the policy debate, the vast majority of issues involve situations in which either (1) the necessary objective data are not all known; or (2) the known facts can be legitimately interpreted in two or more ways; or (3) the facts are known and have only one interpretation but different value systems lead individuals to choose different policy alternatives; or (4) combinations of the first three cases.

In the typical situation, for the educator to assume an advocacy position is equivalent to making the assertion that he has the only clear view of the facts, can make all the right interpretations and has the socially optimal or only "correct" set of values. If the society believed this, then extension specialists and agents would be proclaimed philosopher-kings. Since extension faculty were hired to be educators it is best not to assume the other role.

Second, the educator is not trained in the unscientific art of advocacy. Advocacy implies making a case for one side or another in a policy debate. Science implies a balanced consideration of facts on both sides of the issue. The extension educator is trained as a biological, social, or physical scientist, not as an advocate (7, pp. 389–396).

Third, the Advocacy Model is not likely to be an effective model in the long-run. If the extension educator advocates a particular position on an issue, he will alienate a part of the public that holds other positions. If the educator repeats his advocacy role on issue after issue, he will eventually alienate virtually everyone. At some point the educator's credibility will decline to the point that (s)he is no longer effective in an extension educational role — no one is willing to listen. Even those who focus exclusively on a single clientele group will eventually lose credibility if they assume an advocacy position on each issue.

Although their clientele may be united on some issues, the group may be strongly divided on most others. Eventually the advocate will alienate almost everyone, even in the most narrowly-defined clientele group. The Advocacy Model is also potentially disastrous for extension as an organization.

Individual specialists and agents, each choosing the Advocacy Model on sensitive issues, will collectively alienate just about everyone and may reduce the level of support for extension as a whole. Thus, the advocacy position may enable the educator to effectively advance his positions in the short-run, but in the long-run the Advocacy Model is not tenable for the individual or for the extension organization.

Fourth, the Alternative-Consequences Model is consistent with the democratic political system and general philosophy of public policy education. If the citizenry is to participate effectively in the political

process, people must understand the policy issues, the policy alternatives, and the likely consequences of each. The facts must be presented objectively, but the value judgments that are necessary in choosing the best policy alternative must be applied by the people and their elected representatives, not by the educator. The representatives of the people are elected to make the value judgments necessary in deciding on policy alternatives. They stand exposed to their constituents who may lobby them to influence their decisions or may remove them from office if their value judgments do not coincide sufficiently with the public's.

The educator's role is to make certain that the people and their representatives are presented with an objective analysis of the problem, the policy alternatives, and their likely consequences. The choice is appropriately left to the people and to the political process. Our responsibility as educators is to teach people how to think, not to think for them.

A final set of criticisms can be leveled at the version of the Advocacy Model that claims the educator should work to help empower groups whose interests are not represented in the democratic process. First, the empowerment argument maintains that information is more valuable to those with power than to those without power. This is not always true, and in fact may very seldom be true. If the public is not informed about a problem or issue, then those with decision-making power are free to do as they please with no threat of public reaction.

Information is power, and information can help those outside the formal decision-making channel at least as much as those on the inside. Second, if the educator proposes to help empower those groups whose interests are not represented, then (s)he must define what adequate representation means in a democracy. In an extreme case this might be fairly easy, e.g., everyone should be able to vote, hold office or speak freely. But in almost any practical situation it is never quite clear how much representation is enough and how much is too little.

The educator must assume the role of the philosopher-king in order to be this type of advocate. Finally, few would disagree that the democratic process works best when the rules of the game allow people to participate in making decisions that affect them. But the rules of the game are not immutable — if we think that the interests of some groups are not adequately represented, we can change the way the decision-making process works. For example, this is exactly what happened with the National Environmental Policy Act in the early 1970s which gave environmentalists a very strong voice in many decisions through requirements for environmental impact statements.

Most important for the educator is the fact that possible changes in the rules for making decisions can themselves be the subject of an objective educational program conducted in an alternatives-conse-

quences framework. The educator can avoid becoming an advocate even when (s)he deals with issues that would change the relative power of various groups in the decision-making process.

The Educator as Citizen

None of this means that the educator cannot express his opinions on public issues or lobby his elected representatives in his role as a private citizen. The difficulty, of course, is that it is not so easy to separate the actions of the educator from those of the private citizen. For many extension educators the line between advocacy as an educator and advocacy as a private citizen is not totally clear. The more visible the educator's advocacy as a citizen the more likely it is that (s)he will be perceived as an advocate in his (her) educational work.

Many extension faculty who deal with public affairs consciously decide to engage in very little, or very low-key political activity "off the job" in order to avoid confusion by the public of their roles as educator and private citizen. Others concentrate on national, rather than state or local issues. This may help but will not always avoid the problem because feelings of (local or state) citizens may run high on national issues as well as those closer to home. Sometimes, county agents and state specialists (including the author) will take a temporary leave-of-absence to work in state or local government.

Often this requires the individual to assume an advocacy position on some issues, but even if the individual follows a strictly objective program and tries to avoid advocacy, many people will assume that the individual is an advocate simply by his position in government. All of these concerns do not mean that public policy educators cannot exercise the political rights and freedoms of an American citizen, nor does it mean that the educator, the extension organization, and the state/local government should give up the great benefits that come when people move from one position to another. These issues are raised because there is an inevitable trade-off between political or governmental activity on the one hand and one's perceived objectivity and nonadvocacy position on the other. Each individual must seek a balance that (s)he believes is appropriate.

Objectivity and Political Neutrality

The relationship between objectivity and political neutrality should be explored carefully. Public policy education programs must be objective. Obviously, perfect objectivity is humanly impossible, but people generally recognize and respect an effort to be as objective as possible (4). The most important point is that the educator must avoid becoming an advocate for one group or one position on the issue. In striving for objectivity and avoiding advocacy the educator will in fact be trying to maintain a position of strict neutrality among the various interests active in the political debate.

However, objective information, an unbiased approach and lack of advocacy do not necessarily mean that the educator or his program is politically neutral. Political neutrality may be impossible to maintain, because there is an inevitable bias in the issues we choose to address, and because simply discussing an issue may favor one group or another.

The issues we choose are influenced by our professional training and our own professional judgment about what is sufficiently important to warrant our attention. Also, we all tend to work on problems that our values tell us are important; we usually do not choose to work on things that we believe are bad or harmful. In fact, many people will assume that the educator is an advocate of some alternative or another, simply because (s)he chooses to talk or write about the issue.

An objective public policy education is also not politically neutral because it alters the political balance of power on the issue. First, when we choose to conduct an educational program on a specific issue, we will be increasing the public's awareness of that issue, which is hardly a politically neutral act, even if the program is completely objective. Second, simply providing objective information to the public may upset the strategy of one side or another in the political debate. For example, when voters lack information on tax-increase referenda, they are more likely to vote NO, other things equal. Providing information on a tax-increase referendum, even if perfectly objective and unbiased tends to favor a YES vote and is not politically neutral. Third, increasing a group's information and understanding of an issue increases its ability to effectively use whatever political leverage it may have. In fact, knowledge is power. An educational program will benefit groups without good knowledge of the issue relative to groups that already clearly understood the policy alternatives and consequences.

Clearly, even the most objective and unbiased public policy education program will not be politically neutral. Objectivity and a non-advocacy method will not produce political neutrality. One implication is that even a perfectly objective public policy education program conducted in the alternative-consequences manner runs some chance of generating political controversy with which the educator and other extension faculty and administrators must deal.

On this point, Neill Schaller, former head of the Federal Extension Service noted that ". . . we cannot expect to be loved when we deal with controversy. But we will be widely respected if we do it right. So how do we make that happen? First, we should insist that those who teach and prepare materials resist the temptation or the pressure to take sides when dealing with a controversial issue. . ." (15).

Over the years, public policy educators have developed some teaching methods to reduce the real or perceived bias in their information. Identifying the groups potentially affected by an issue/problem or its

solution, and viewing the problem from their perspective can help ensure that the relevant alternatives and consequences are identified.

Many public policy educators try to avoid classifying consequences as advantages or disadvantages or pro-con because what is an advantage to one group may be a disadvantage to another. (3) Including a policy alternative to do nothing may help eliminate real or perceived bias and is often a useful way of illustrating the extent of the problem. Some educators may be tempted to advocate doing something but not advocating a specific action.

Yet if the problem is obviously so bad, the do nothing policy alternative will be quickly rejected by everyone. Asking leaders or others on all sides of the issue to review teaching materials can also help identify information that may be perceived as biased. But if one group is asked, all should be asked. In the end, the ability to listen to others' views and to empathize with others' perspectives is probably the best guarantee that the teaching materials and methods will avoid major bias, and that the educator will be perceived as striving for objectivity.

Summary

Public policy education enables citizens to make better informed decisions on public issues. It is consistent with the mission of the Land Grant University and is based on a Jeffersonian view of the importance of education in the democratic political process.

To function effectively in public policy education the educator must have faith in the democratic process and in the ability of people to make good public decisions, if well-informed. As an organization, extension must support its staff in policy education projects, because even the most objective and unbiased program may generate political controversy.

A public policy education program must deal with the issues defined by the public, not those defined by extension educators. Not all issues are appropriate subjects for policy education programs; extension educators must have the necessary knowledge, the issue must be amenable to factual analysis, and the program must be ready at the teachable moment.

The only absolute in public policy education is that the extension program should be as objective and unbiased as possible. Advocacy is not an effective or desirable teaching method; instead the educator should help people better understand the problem, the policy alternatives, and their likely consequences. This method allows the educator to apply the knowledge of the university to public policy issues in a manner that strengthens public participation in the democratic decision-making process.

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