

TEACHING AND WORKING WITH POLICY LEADERS

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We have been teaching and working with leaders in the public policy area for more than a decade. A fifteen-minute report on these activities will have to be summary in nature. A ten-year period will have to be covered to put things in their proper perspective.

In the late 1940's, our Director of Extension called a conference to consider whether the Extension Service of our state ought to conduct an educational program in the public policy area. This conference was attended by a dozen or so key county agents, all of the extension supervisors, and some members of the Department of Agricultural Economics.

At that time, the group agreed that the Extension Service had been doing some work in this area, even though not formally identified as such, since the land use planning days of the late 1930's and early 1940's. Thus, the issue became one of deciding whether our educational activities in this area ought to be expanded—and if so, on what basis?

An expanded public policy educational program was given the "go sign." But everyone present knew that administration blessing alone would not make the program go. The activity also had to be accepted or legitimized at the local level. Furthermore, public policy education would have to compete with educational activities in other areas.

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

After considering alternative methods of operating, the following tentative operational procedure was formulated:

1. Each county agent was to invite 10 to 20 local leaders to participate in an all-day district policy conference. The conferences were scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., with four hours available for organized programs. Twelve to fifteen such conferences were to be scheduled for different parts of the state. The attendance at each conference was expected to approximate 100, with a suggested minimum of 75 and a maximum of 125.

For lack of a better term, the particular type of leaders to be

invited were characterized as "kingmakers" rather than "kings." We thought it advisable to exclude public officials, legislators, administrators of programs, and heads of organizations—most of whom would likely be actively engaged in promoting or defending a program of their own. We were interested in individuals whose judgment was generally respected by the people of the community in which they lived but who were still not too closely identified with any particular political party, organization, or group, at least not closely enough to be regarded as espousers of some particular cause. We wanted individuals with no axe to grind, who would be willing to look at problems and alternative solutions and probable consequences objectively.

Stated in another way, we wanted to confine our teaching efforts to individuals interested in enlarging their knowledge and understanding of relevant public problems and alternative solutions and consequences in order to have a broader base for decision making. We were attempting to create an environment conducive to study and were inviting individuals who wanted to learn.

No organization was invited or permitted to act as co-sponsor. Wherever possible, arrangements were to be made for a noon meal to be served to the group, but each participant paid for his own lunch.

2. These conferences were to be of the discussion type. A half day was to be devoted to a problem of state or local concern, and a half day to a problem of national concern. These problems were to be real and alive.

This two-problem approach was taken for several reasons. First, two problem areas were expected to have a greater appeal than one. Individuals invited would be more likely to accept. Second, the Extension Service, and particularly the specialists involved, would less likely be accused of having a political bias or motive.

3. Should sufficient interest develop, public policy schools would be held on a county basis at a later date. These county schools were to be open to anyone who cared to attend.

4. We would spend very little of our time with other groups having a meeting and needing a speaker. We believed organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, the Republican and the Democratic Party, chambers of commerce, parent-teachers associations, taxpayers associations, and associations of university professors, all perform an important function in our society, but that under our circumstances, meetings of this type

of groups seldom afforded as desirable a situation as could be provided by other arrangements.

With slight modifications this procedure has been followed for at least a decade. Approximately 12 all-day district policy conferences are scheduled each year. The two-problem approach—one state and local and the other national—is still being followed. Attendance is still by invitation only.

At the county level, 10 to 40 half-day or evening meetings are scheduled annually.

THE SCHOOL PROBLEM—AN ILLUSTRATION

Now let us pinpoint this a little more by taking one problem area, the school problem, and following it through for a ten-year period.

We decided that a half day at one 1950 district conference would be devoted to some school problem.

Briefly here was the situation: We had approximately 1,200 administrative districts for school purposes. In 1852 each civil township, each civil city, and each civil town had been made a separate and distinct governmental unit for school purposes. In terms of pupils these units ranged from 3 to 60,000; and in terms of taxable wealth from \$1,000 to \$100,000 assessed valuation per pupil. The kind of educational opportunity being provided varied widely: We had one-room schools with eight grades to the room and teachers with 12 weeks' training beyond high school. We also had high schools with enrollments under 50, little choice of subject matter, teachers teaching in areas where they had little training, and high operating costs. In contrast, other grade schools had one teacher per grade and other high schools offered a wide choice of subjects and had low operating costs.

Variation in kinds of educational opportunities being provided in a community are due to: (1) the attitude of the people toward education, (2) organizational structure, and (3) financial strength.

In looking at the school problem we found that it was not one problem but a whole series of little problems. We, therefore, broke it down into manageable size parts.

Educational Opportunity

We took as a problem: What kind of an educational opportunity ought to be provided for the boys and girls of Indiana?

Grade Schools

- 1 room sections — 1 teacher, 8 grades
- 2 room sections — 1 teacher, 4 grades
- 4 room sections — 1 teacher, 2 grades
- 8 room sections — 1 teacher, 1 grade

High Schools

- Very little choice of subject matter
- Some choice of subject matter
- Wide choice of subject matter

Teacher Training

- 1 or 2 subject matter areas
- 3 or 4 subject matter areas

Operating Efficiency

Next, we considered in what size groups we have to get pupils together to give them what we want.

Grade Schools

1 room	25-30 pupils
2 rooms	50-60 pupils
4 rooms	100-120 pupils
8 rooms	200-240 pupils

High Schools

Little choice of subject matter	25-100 pupils
Some choice of subject matter	100-200 pupils
Wide choice of subject matter	300-400 pupils

Reorganization

The 10 to 20 individuals that had previously attended the district policy school frequently suggested to their neighbors and to the county agent that such a school be scheduled at the county level. Several hundred such schools have been held. However, after the people decide what they want, they still need help in translating their decision into action.

If we want a high school with 300 to 400 pupils in a group, how do we go about consolidating four or five or six existing units into a new unit? How do we finance a new building, etc.? These are technical problems which involve the application of existing laws to a particular situation.

We had some consolidation laws that were permissive in character; consolidation could take place when interest began to develop in a county. Some 50 to 60 consolidations were effected. Other people were involved in this also. Education departments of the state universities made surveys and specific recommendations.

Consolidation revealed some weaknesses in existing laws. Putting several townships together was a difficult job, especially when existing laws gave each one the veto power. Hodge podge consolidations developed, leaving many "orphans." This experience brought out the need for approaching the reorganization problem in a systematic manner to be sure all rural areas would be considered. Easier ways of doing the job were needed.

We now have a law which provides for a systematic approach to the job. The minority no longer has the veto power under a law which passed in the Senate 44 for, and 4 against, with 2 out in the hall. (The Extension Service had nothing to do with the preparation of the bill or its passage.)

Financing

Funds can be distributed: (1) for stimulating local units to act, (2) for equalization purposes, and (3) for broadening the tax base. This problem was considered in district policy conferences. We now have a new formula for distributing state funds which places greater emphasis on equalization.

Summary

Our purpose was to help the state and community leaders to: (1) enlarge their knowledge and understanding of what is going on about them, (2) identify problems and to break these problems down into manageable size parts, (3) enlarge their knowledge of alternative solutions and consequences, and (4) once they decide where they want to go, to help them get there.