

## *Critique: A People and a Spirit*

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*Where a book raises your spirit, and inspires you with noble and courageous feelings, seek for no other rule to judge the event by; it is good and made by a good workman.*

Jean de la Bruyère

*A PEOPLE AND A SPIRIT*<sup>1</sup> has been a part of the reality of the Cooperative Extension Service for more than a year. How is it to be judged? Has it inspired Extension workers, legislators, university administrators, government officials with noble and courageous feelings? If so, should we accept Bruyère's idea to seek "no other rule to judge the event by?"

This report of the Joint USDA/NASULGC Extension Study Committee was produced by a highly qualified group of individuals and is one of the best and most comprehensive program projection reports produced by an adult education agency. Yet this writer sees that it has only slightly inspired Extension workers.<sup>2</sup> She hasn't seen much evidence of a systematic and rigorous attempt to "judge the event" before planning whether or how to abide by its recommendations.

It seems that the typical reaction to this report is similar to that of an untrained person in research methodology, when he confronts an empirical research report: he turns to the conclusions and judges their adequacy on his intuitive sense of their rightness or wrongness.

An Extension worker's intuitive reaction to the recommendations in *A People and a Spirit* is important, and will perhaps remain the

<sup>1</sup> *A People and a Spirit*, A Report of the Joint USDA/NASULGC Extension Study Committee (Fort Collins, Colorado: Printing and Publications Service, Colorado State University, November, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> She has no means of judging whether legislators, university administrators, or government officials have been affected one way or the other.

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major determinant of what he does with the report. However, just as there are questions that should be asked about how the empirical researcher arrived at his conclusions, there are questions that should be asked about how a program-planning group (which is what the study committee was) arrived at its conclusions.

The major purpose of this paper is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the report by asking these questions. The report has many strengths, yet it's not perfect. Its weaknesses have immediate and long-term consequences for Extension personnel and programs at all levels. Those who adapt the report to their areas of responsibility must compensate for the weaknesses.

Additional purposes of this paper are to illustrate a process of analysis that might be useful to the adult educator and to suggest some of the values this process of analysis has for him in his work.

The process of analysis to be illustrated here is more than an empty intellectual exercise in logic. It could have a three-pronged benefit for the person who undertakes the process: (1) he understands the report better—its meaning, its logic and reasons, its strengths and weaknesses; (2) he is better able to deal with its recommendations in his own state or local setting—if its logic is faulty, if important data have been ignored, if incorrect or unacceptable assumptions or values have been incorporated, he can correct these faults and make adjustments as he determines priorities for his own work; and (3) after having examined someone else's work, he can apply the same process of questioning to his program-planning efforts and reports and may sharpen his thinking, planning, and writing skills.

The adult educator never has all the information he would like to have to make program decisions; he never does as well in program planning as he would like. Hopefully, program planning is a spiraling process for him: each time he goes through the process he is able to incorporate more information and perform more effectively. By examining his work and having an experimental stance toward it, he becomes more effective.

### **The Process of Analysis**

The process of analysis used here is one of listing basic questions that should be asked about any program-planning effort, applying those questions to the quality of living" sections of the report, and reporting this writer's answers to these questions. Neither the list of questions nor the answers given are inclusive; other questions could be asked and more complete answers could be given.

*The Questions*

1. How nearly does this report accomplish its announced purposes?
2. Are there unannounced purposes influencing the report or the work which led to it?
3. Was the purpose of the report important enough to warrant the time and money invested?
4. Were the procedures used by the planners consistent with the philosophy of the organization?
5. Is the report clear, coherent, and internally consistent?
6. Are clear distinctions made between assertions of convention, fact, opinion, and preference?<sup>3</sup> Is the reasoning presented logically valid (are the conclusions supported by the premises)? Are the assumptions and premises in these arguments true?<sup>4</sup>
7. What doesn't the report say?
8. Does the report provide a desirable model for others who are planning programs (or adapting the report to their work)? Each of the eight questions are in turn applied to the "quality of living" sections of the report.

*Announced Purposes?*

There are three sets of purposes stated in the report (pp. iii, iv). The committee is to be commended for accepting a role broader than that outlined in the Secretary of Agriculture's memorandum. The purposes listed on page iv are much like those in the preface, and appear to be the ones that guided the committee. These purposes are discussed as they apply to "quality of living" programs:

1. *To analyze and evaluate past contributions of the Cooperative Extension Service and assess its present posture.*

Paragraphs about the past contributions of "quality of living" programs (pp. 26-28) are largely descriptive rather than analytical or evaluative, and read like publicity brochures. The assessment of the present posture of CES fares a little better. Data were assembled—some of them original. Numbers of people reached by Extension programs are reported (pp. 26-28). (They were gathered, appar-

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller explanation of these terms, see Harry A. Cosgriffe, "Knowledge of Assertions as a Useful Step in Logical Analysis" (Pullman, Washington: Cooperative Extension Service, 1968), mimeographed.

<sup>4</sup> For a clear, concise, and practical reference on how to use the discipline of logic, see Wesley C. Salmon, *Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965).

ently, from staff prepared annual statistical reports for 1966—or was it 1964 or 1967? Each year is cited one place or another.)

In addition, the committee report includes staff time allocations to project areas (p. 22), attitudes of Extension staff on program objectives (p. 33) and on an array of other issues (pp. 31-32), and attitudes of Extension staff and selected clientele on audience priorities (pp. 32, 34-36). These data are potentially useful, but their validity is questionable; precautions taken to ensure their objectivity and reliability are not reported; interpretations of them are minimal; and no implications are reported.<sup>5</sup>

Apparently the committee tried to fulfill this purpose of analyzing and evaluating Cooperative Extension by using incomplete, possibly inaccurate, and uninterpretable data and the usual clichés and shibboleths. This is an interesting scorecard for an organization that bills itself as an agency with a “degree of objectivity and detachment not found outside the educational system” and “a proven ability to reach large numbers of people effectively, using the *knowledge resources of the university in solving problems*” (p. 40) [italics added].

2. *To review basic administrative and operational relationships between the Department of Agriculture and the respective Land-Grant Universities for the purpose of building a stronger program based on mutual understanding and direction.*

The acceptance of this statement as a purpose seems to preclude the committee's asking the critical question of whether all of the Extension Service should remain a concern of the Department of Agriculture. The issue has been with us for some time, and gathers more insistent force as more combined services come into existence, as program emphases change (particularly in “quality of living” programs), and as consolidation of educational agencies into the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare receives renewed effort. The credibility of the committee suffers by its either (1) not considering this issue or (2) not reporting considerations that may have been made but rejected, and the reasons for rejection.

3. *To examine the functions exercised by the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in relationship to other extension and extension-related programs of various executive departments of the federal government.*

<sup>5</sup> After some study of the charts on pages 34-36 of the report, this writer again wonders who is leading whom into progressive and significant programs—the professional educators or the lay leaders.

Although the committee identified the strengths and weaknesses of CES, it apparently made no systematic comparison of either present or projected functions of the organization (especially in "quality of living" programs) with the functions of the myriad of other federal, state, and local agencies also concerned with families', youth, and individuals' quality of living. Therefore the report gives no clue as to the comparative advantage of CES as it moves into expanded and altered "quality of living" programs. This omission is a significant and crucial one. Had such a task been undertaken, the process might have helped clarify the objectives for Extension's work in "quality of living" programs. It seems unlikely that CES would then have assumed the responsibility for goals such as helping people develop the basic skills required to apply for and hold a job, to develop basic writing skills and vocabulary (p. 63). To take these objectives seriously would be to usurp the public school system, manpower training, job corps centers, and others.

4. *To project the future scope, direction, and redirection of the Cooperative Extension Service in order that it may make the maximum contribution to local, state, and national goals and needs of the people it serves.*

The strength of the committee's work and report lies in its fulfilling this purpose. The recommendations are more sweeping and complete than those of the Scope Report<sup>6</sup> or of the recent NUEA statement of role, purpose, and function of college and university extension.<sup>7</sup> Cooperative Extension workers with whom this writer has talked seem to accept the recommendations as valid and meaningful—particularly those pertaining to the "quality of living" programs. But the feeling persists that the report is not really a guide for the future of CES programs as much as it is a measure of how far the organization has come since the Scope Report was written. It is also making official and legitimate the present work of innovators and early majority among Extension staffs.

#### *Unannounced Purposes?*

The first of two possible unannounced purposes of the report was

<sup>6</sup> Bryant E. Kearl and O. B. Copeland (eds.), *A Guide to Extension Programs for the Future* (Raleigh: Agricultural Extension Service, North Carolina State College, July, 1959). This report was the predecessor of *A People and a Spirit*.

<sup>7</sup> National University Extension Association, "College and University Extension: A Statement of Role, Purpose, and Function with Guidelines for Member Institutions," *The NUEA Spectator*, XXXIII (April-May, 1968), 4-10.

the aligning of CES with the mood of Congress. The reader must decide for himself if the priorities of the Congress and the wisest directions for CES are identical. It's evident that this purpose was operative in the considerations of the committee.

The second possible unannounced purpose was the changing of attitudes and perceptions of those involved in the processes of the committee's work. This may have been one of the major purposes and contributions of the committee.

#### *Time and Money Warranted?*

The committee and its report were needed at this point in the development of CES. The Scope Report is a reflection of the Eisenhower era of consolidation, and its authors hadn't foreseen the societal crises that have been underscored in the decade since its printing. Since the Scope Report, various groups have updated the objectives and priorities of several program areas.<sup>8</sup> However, these were separate projects and were not coordinated or based on an updated set of overall aims of the total CES program.

The committee set a time span of the 1966-1975 decade for their projections and recommendations. Four years of that decade are gone, and state CES's are just beginning to incorporate the report into their planning efforts—planning efforts for 1970 and 1971, and budget projections for 1972. One is anguished by two notions: (1) the committee expected too much to happen too soon—the recommendations can't be carried out fully by 1975, yet (2) the committee didn't project societal needs even as far as 1975—their recommendations are based on 1966 situations (pp. 7-16, 40-43, 58-60), and 1960 national goals (pp. 5-6). In an organization with the size, importance, and cumbersomeness of the CES, someone now needs to be thinking ahead to 1980 and 1990. Who?

#### *Procedures Consistent with Philosophy?*

One of the prime value positions in the CES is that the system of people who will be affected by a program should be involved in planning that program. It would be useful to know who was involved, and what was the nature of their involvement, in each step of the process used by the committee. The report doesn't divulge this. The committee interviewed some Extension staff, USDA officials and university presidents, and surveyed other Extension

<sup>8</sup> For example, see Home Economics Subcommittee of ECOP, American Association of Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities, *Extension Home Economics Focus* (November, 1966).

workers and selected clientele (p. 31). However, several groups are absent from this list: e.g., poor people, leaders in black urban ghettos, HEW officials, state and local governments, youth, other adult education organizations. Although hearings with representatives of these affected systems would have been expensive and time-consuming, these costs would be minor compared to the potentially immense waste of a decade of poorly conceived and misdirected programs throughout the country.

A second value position of CES is stated in the report: in problem-solving efforts, a research base and knowledge resource of the university should be utilized (p. 40). Again, it would be useful to know what research and knowledge resources the committee consulted and considered in arriving at the recommendations. It is possible that the committee and its supporting staff consulted a wide range of research, but simply chose not to refer to these; certainly the number of sources specifically cited is limited. However, if this was the committee's choice, a selected bibliography could have been included. It would have been a rich source of useful reading for those who must reconsider and implement the recommendations. Recent studies of CES work in urban housing developments or use of aides in rural slums, studies from outside CES such as the Ford Foundation report on urban extension experiments,<sup>9</sup> and bodies of research dealing with human development and alleviating poverty could have been cited. All action cannot stop until research is available to guide and direct; but if Extension is a knowledge-based university adjunct, it should demonstrate a high level of scholarship in using data that do exist.

A third value position is stated in the report: major national goals and activities of CES are established at the federal level, but these broad objectives permit a wide latitude in adaptation to the varying needs of the states (p. 19). Although the report does acknowledge this position, the emphasis is on the need for all to apply themselves to national goals. It's suspected that the principle of state autonomy will yield in the future as Congress appropriates more earmarked funds. The consequences of this trend apparently were not dealt with by the committee, yet they could be a severe alteration in the operation, philosophy, and public acceptance of CES.

#### *Clarity of Report?*

Generally, the "quality of living" section is clear and concise.

<sup>9</sup> *Urban Extension: Report on experimental programs assisted by the Ford Foundation* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1966).

However, it has several weaknesses:

1. The reader has no clue of how to relate the objectives to the priority clientele. Are all of these goals equally important to disadvantaged, alienated, young marrieds, school dropouts, and middle-class adults and youth?
2. The title "quality of living" confuses more than it clarifies. All Extension programs attempt to have an effect on quality of living; therefore this title doesn't distinguish for the reader or the public what is special or unique about this program area. The intent is explained in terms of human development or family and personal development (p. 27). Perhaps either of these expressions could be used as titles (but let's not use the euphemism human *resource* development).
3. In suggesting that ". . . a substantial reallocation of resources now being used to help middle- and upper-class Americans into programs designed specifically to help the disadvantaged . . . (p. 63)" the committee is not clear in defining how much of CES resources are "substantial," whether these resources are to come from present home economics and 4-H and youth programs, or what objectives now being served with middle-class audiences should be the target of this reallocation. In setting *priorities*, educators most often forget to set their *posteriorities*.<sup>10</sup>
4. Terms with a wide variety of meanings are never defined and no discriminations are made. A prime example is the term "urban." An urban program in a two square block area of poor people in Elkins, West Virginia is a very different phenomenon from a program in the black ghetto of Seattle, or Birmingham, or Chicago.

### *Coherence?*

Serious weaknesses exist in the coherence of the report. One of the major ones is that the objectives of the "quality of living" section are not directly related to the committee's list of highest priority concerns of the nation (p. 7). Had those priority concerns been used as a starting point for each of the program areas, the specific objectives could be related to the priority concerns. Each program area could then identify what it would do to deal with the concern of domestic peace, for example. Articulation and coordination be-

<sup>10</sup> A term meaning those things that, however desirable, will not be done if priorities are to be accomplished. Peter Drucker, *Entrepreneurship in Business Enterprise* (Toronto: Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, March, 1965).



tween program units would then be possible and meaningful. Each staff member could then know what ultimate concern his daily work was directed toward. Home economists could then interpret their work to legislators and the public in "non-home ec'y" language.<sup>11</sup>

A second shortcoming in the coherence of the report is the lack of identified relationships between the "quality of living" section and preceding sections identifying strengths and weaknesses of CES and studies of attitudes and opinions.

The third shortcoming is the lack of relationship between the "quality of living" section and the other program sections, particularly social and economic development.

#### *Internal Consistency?*

Two inconsistencies seem crucial to the "quality of living" area. First, in discussing the efforts needed to help the disadvantaged and alienated, the committee states: "Basic to all such effort must be changes of attitudes in the larger community and adjustments of policies and procedures in institutions and helping services" (p. 60). Yet at no point are objectives aimed at changing the attitudes or institutions of the larger society. Second, the statement is made that "The Cooperative Extension Service is faced with two major challenges. The first is to encourage sufficient application of knowledge to keep the mainstream moving forward. The second is to move dropout or alienated individuals and communities back into the mainstream" (p. 13). Yet the "quality of living" section largely denies the necessity for programs aimed for the mainstream, i.e., middle-class.

#### *Distinctions Between Types of Assertions?*

One of the glaring and irritating shortcomings of the report is the fact that distinctions are not made between the various types of assertions. There are a number of examples of assertions of preference being treated as conventions, as though they aren't open to question and change. One is the statement ". . . It is particularly important that stable families be established . . ." (p. 63). Several nationally recognized thinkers are advocating changes in the traditional marriage and family patterns. The statement quoted above could usefully be reexamined rather than accepted as an eternal given.

<sup>11</sup> See page 27 of the report for a statement of the need for family and home economics programs to win understanding among legislators and public policy makers.

Examples can be cited where crucial assertions of opinion are presented and used as though fact: ". . . Today the key groups in desperate need of service from Extension's quality of living programs are the disadvantaged and the young married" (p. 63). ". . . First, ethnic barriers must be removed. Then opportunities for participation . . . must be created" (p. 60). Assertions of opinion should be labelled so that the reader is alerted to examine the underlying reasoning and values.

Another important assertion is made: the employment of sub-professional aides from the target population will provide the Extension Service with more effective access. Is this an assertion of fact . . . or opinion? It should make a difference to the administrator as he decides whether to budget for 4.5 aides per professional worker (p. 75).

#### *Reasoning Logically Valid?*

In general, the report is frustrating for the reader who looks for logical and sequential presentation of arguments leading to conclusions or recommendations. Very often, recommendations are listed without being supported by justification or evidence or discussion. In terms of logic, it's nearly impossible to assess the validity of the reasoning that led to the recommendations (conclusions) because the premises supporting them are lacking or incomplete. For example, no basis for programs in consumer competences is given preceding the section on goals for "quality of living" programs (p. 61). Some specific goals have no accompanying justification, e.g., to know about family planning, to develop a recognition of the interdependence among people and nations, to acquire social skills needed to accept supervision and routinization (pp. 62-63). A logically erroneous and incomplete argument from the report that could lead to unfortunate consequences is stated as follows (p. 61):

In view of the magnitude of the problems and the high time requirements in winning the confidence of the disadvantaged and the alienated, the Committee recommends that:

1. The federal government provide additional funds to Cooperative Extension Service for work with the disadvantaged and the alienated ethnic groups by grants to states which have significant members of minority groups. [Is minority group status equivalent to being disadvantaged and alienated? Why the federal government? Why grants?]
2. The Extension Service employ subprofessional aides from the target population . . . . [This is the first time the concept of aides is mentioned in the "quality of living" section. No justification is given for the

recommendation. Why employ aides instead of professional workers from the target population? Why aides instead of electronic video recording with home TV sets?]

*Assumptions and Premises?*

Since few assumptions are made explicit, it is necessary and perhaps most profitable to examine the tacit and implicit assumptions that appear to have influenced the committee: (1) since those in the affluent half of society have material possessions, they have no problems of major consequence to themselves or to society; (2) it is better for Extension to have a broad range of concerns than to focus on one or two programs; (3) the use of paid aides will not affect the availability and role of volunteers; (4) the ultimate value of the individual is to serve society; (5) the optimum way to improve society is to improve the individual; (6) Extension should maintain or develop certain programs because of their political payoff for agency funds; (7) present staff members can alter their class and value orientations sufficiently to work effectively with new clientele and new environmental situations; (8) it is better for CES to help disadvantaged people catch up with the mainstream than it is to help direct the major upheavals of change which are occurring within that mainstream, or, to put it another way, the CES can help society more by saving the lost than by guiding the leaders; (9) the skills and knowledge of CES are insufficient to guide the leaders of society, therefore it should turn its attention to those who have lesser skills and knowledge than it has, i.e., the disadvantaged.

Most of these are value positions that cannot be proved or disproved. But the reader should be aware of them, evaluate them, be aware of alternate positions possible, and judge the recommendations accordingly.

One of the most basic sets of assumptions in the "quality of living" section is expressed in numbers 4 and 5 above. The focus of the program is society: society's problems are underscored. The plight of the disadvantaged person is a concern, not because he suffers, but because he is likely to hold back society's development, or is likely to affect us all by resorting to crime and violence. Furthermore, the committee takes the position that CES should use the individual as its avenue for improving society. It might be useful to rethink the value positions assumed here; other choices could be made concerning the focus of concern and the avenue for programming. One might also ask if Extension can possibly have enough resources to work directly with individuals and families, or if, as a part of a uni-

versity, Extension's comparative advantage is one of working directly only with other agencies and institutions, teachers, other professionals, and public officials.

### *What Doesn't the Report Say?*

Some omissions have already been discussed; others have major significance. Some are probably oversights; others are no doubt the result of a conscious decision.

An example of an omission is that the recommendations don't include a priority concern for nutrition; neither physical nor mental health are specifically identified as priority content areas. Is this an omission of oversight or of intent? The fact remains that a special appropriation was made by Congress to CES during the latter part of the committee's deliberation for a considerable increase in nutrition education programs.

A concept that doesn't appear in the report is that of alternatives. Three kinds of alternatives are needed:

1. Alternatives the committee considered but rejected and why they rejected these.
2. Alternatives to use if additional funds do not become available. Many of the committee's recommendations are based on the premise that additional funds will be available. No suggestion is made of alternatives that would be followed if these additional funds don't materialize immediately. The recommendations, to be most realistic and useful, could follow this format: if resources stay the same—then follow alternative A; if resources increase X per cent, use alternative B; if resources increase 200 per cent, use alternative C. Alternative C may not be just *more* of alternative A; there could well be major qualitative content differences between these three alternatives.
3. Alternatives to follow in case of failure. For example, recommendations X, Y, Z may not work; if they don't work after five years, then recommendations R, S, T will go into effect. An organization that outlines this kind of alternative is exemplifying a refreshing realism, experimental attitude, and objectivity about itself.<sup>12</sup> It is better able to deal with failure; it can honestly appraise its successes.

Another omission of import is that little attention is given to edu-

<sup>12</sup> This notion is taken from Donald T. Campbell, "Reforms as Experiments," *American Psychologist*, XXIV (April, 1969), 409-29.

cational methodology, other than to say that extensive use of a variety of educational methods will be required (p. 63). If major use is made of computer assisted instruction, this fact would have great implication for budgets, staffing, etc. At a time of major redirection and/or expansion in an organization, and when new methodologies and devices are becoming available, careful planning is needed. Had the committee dealt with the issue of methodology more fully, the report would be stronger and its impact greater.

An even greater omission is the lack of examination of trends in education. The above paragraph only hints at the potential impact of new educational technology. The role of the university in society and the nature of the university are undergoing vast changes. Shouldn't these be a concern of CES—which should help guide as well as adapt to these changes if it is to remain a viable partner in the university community? Community colleges were ignored, yet their rapid growth is reshaping many institutions and will ultimately affect CES programs and staffing. The committee legitimately opted to avoid a review of the general university extension services (p. iv), yet the trends within this sister organization shouldn't be ignored in projecting CES programs.

A further omission—and perhaps the greatest—is the lack of a definition of the concept of *education* for the CES of 1975. The reiteration of terms that explain nothing—educator, catalyst, change agent—isn't enough. What is needed is a rethinking of the range of value positions and philosophies—of the nature of man, the learning process, the education process—that is appropriate within CES, and those value positions and philosophies that are not appropriate within it. This kind of understanding is essential to an organization as it expands, as it tries to work with new clientele, as it tackles new and difficult objectives in complex settings, as it tries to coordinate its diverse parts. The development of this definition and of the acceptable positions and philosophies is an enormously difficult task. Yet it is the key to success for Extension in the future.

#### *Desirable Model for Others?*

Many of the strengths, omissions, and weaknesses of the report have been pointed out. Anyone attempting to use this report as a model should expect to expend effort (1) to maintain its standards of openness to change and commitment to addressing the organization to society's major problems and (2) to overcome the weaknesses and omissions.

**So What?**

If the committee had had time, money, energy, and inclination to have avoided errors illustrated here, would the results be any different? There is no way of knowing. Perhaps it has to remain an article of faith that one makes better decisions if he periodically examines his assumptions; that the more one examines the relevant environmental forces, present and future, the more relevant and better will be one's decisions; that his decisions carry more force if presented clearly and logically, with valid supporting evidence cited; that one cannot guide an agency's development by trying to accomplish hidden purposes, by ignoring crucial issues and plausible alternatives.

Many of the omissions and weaknesses of this report can be overcome as states develop their own plans—but the accomplishment of that task will be difficult. Extension workers often resent time consumed by planning and thinking and examining values and assumptions—they are eager to get on with the job. But in deciding what job it is they are “getting on with,” they, along with all adult educators, might well remember the words of John F. Kennedy: “The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. . . . We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”