

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS - 27 EDUCATION IN ISRAEL IV.
 INTELLECTUALS, PLANNING
 AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

44 Canfield Gardens,
London, NW6
England
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Mr. Richard Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017
USA

Dear Mr. Nolte:

A universal refrain from critics outside of the Ministry of Education and Culture is that there is no "planning" of educational policy in Israel. What this criticism means is not clear. In order to give it content we must first explore the relationship between the Ministry and the education intellectuals in Israeli society, for this is the context within which one must view the criticism and from which one must consider solutions if there is in fact a problem.

Generally in Israeli society intellectuals -- and especially university affiliated academics -- have extraordinarily high status. As one friend of mine put it: "In most societies it is said that those who cannot do, teach; in Israel, at least at the university level, those who cannot teach, do." When one talks to people in the Ministries he is always given opinions justified by reference to Dr. This or Professor That. And periodically, even Golda Meir visits the Social Science Faculty of the Hebrew University to defend her policies. Where else does the chief executive feel obligated to defend (him) herself to the doctors of the schools?

In spite of their status, the university intellectuals feel impotent in regard to public policy. They say that the politicians, most of whom do not have BAs, much less PhDs, do not seek their advice. And when they offer their advice to the politicians, the politicians ignore it.

It is revealing to notice that the current folk hero of the intellectual communities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv is Henry Kissinger.

A society which accords the highest status to intellectuals but which tends, at least in the eyes of the intellectuals, to ignore their advice is the background for the complaints about lack of planning in Israeli education.

If one looks at the organizational chart of the Ministry of Education, he does find an Assistant to the Minister for Planning but not a full-fledged planning branch. Nor does he find a policy research and analysis unit. So on the face of the evidence one finds a great deal of support for those who accuse the Ministry of Education of not indulging in systematic forward planning. One gets the impression that policy development in the Ministry is an exceedingly informal process whereby various civil servants, depending upon their political pull and/or friendship with the Minister, provide ad hoc policy suggestions as problems emerge. And there seems to be little formal coordination between the policies of the Ministry of Education and other ministries whose activities directly affect education or vice versa: e.g., Finance, Manpower Planning, or Housing. Although in the last case there is now coordination of building programs between Education and Housing, this is a very recent development.

However, having acknowledged that there is little systematic policy planning in the Ministry, at least in organizational and procedural terms, this does not mean that there is no rational thought about policies and their present and future implications, which is what most critics mean when they talk about planning.

There has traditionally been a Pedagogical Adviser to the Minister of Education and Culture, who has historically played a very important role in policy development in the Ministry. Indeed, even Henry Kissinger would be pleased if as many of his ideas and programs were implemented as those of Professor Moshe Smilansky, who was the Pedagogical Adviser to the previous Minister of Education, Mr. Aranne. Many of the programs for the children who need nurture outlined in an earlier newsletter (IJS-25) were direct results of Professor Smilansky's suggestions. And the present Pedagogical Adviser, Professor Minkawich of the Hebrew University, has already developed a number of new ideas about dealing with contemporary educational problems and future problems, which are quite likely to be implemented.

In addition to the Pedagogical Adviser, the Henrietta Szold Institute is a social science research institution which devotes most of its resources to research which is relevant to policy problems of the Ministry of Education. And the record of the Ministry in application of Szold policy recommendations based on hard social science research seems to be extraordinarily good when compared with the record of advice taken by HEW from major United States research and advisory organizations such as Rand or the Stanford Research Institute.

Often what the criticism of lack of planning in the Ministry of Education means is that the critic has not been asked for his views or that his views have not been accepted as policy. One complication in the intellectual community makes this complaint significant, not trivial. The Pedagogical Adviser is the Ministry link with the university world. But the university community itself is split, for

personality and institutional reasons, between the Hebrew University and the other universities in Israel. The former Pedagogical Adviser, Professor Smilansky, was at Tel Aviv (later he became Dean of the Tel Aviv School of Education, a post which he has now resigned), and he did not seek the advice of those at the Hebrew University. The present Pedagogical Adviser is at the Hebrew University, and he seems quite sparing in his search for advice outside of the Hebrew University. Even within the Hebrew University, the School of Education is, in the view of those at the school, divided between the pedagogues and the educational administrative theorists, who seem never to talk with each other. The educational administration intellectuals seem to think that advice is only sought from the pedagogical intellectuals. However true these various petty views are, and I am in no position to judge, the important fact is that the educational intellectuals believe them. And therefore the channels of advice to the Minister tend to be restricted and perhaps the substantive advice one sided.

Another problem in Ministry-university relations is the fact that academics in fields outside of education are not interested in becoming involved in educational issues. The Director of the Curriculum Center in the Ministry, Mr. Shevach Eden, identified this problem as important, because he thinks that the curriculum of the schools could be vastly improved if scholars in various disciplines would become involved in the curriculum development process. He said that in the sciences there was some indication of change, but there was little willingness on the part of the general run of academics to participate in solving school problems. This observation supports a further criticism of the Pedagogical Adviser system, in that it channels university resources into Ministry problems almost exclusively from schools of education.

Having placed the criticism about the lack of planning in the Ministry in the context of the relationship between the intellectual community and the Ministry, it is now important to recognize the truth in the criticism. In fact there seems to be no formal, forward planning in the Ministry. It has only been in the past year that there has been an attempt to organize research into costs of a few educational programs, mainly in higher education. This research is being conducted by Dr. Ruth Klinov, an economist at the Hebrew University. There is no institutional arrangement within the Ministry to provide an on-going policy analysis of alternative programs and the alternative futures entailed by various programs. All policy advice seems to be in terms of specific program suggestions without systematic consideration of alternatives. And most scholarly input is in the form of relatively raw research, not clearly stated policy objectives and programs.

There has been a response to this state of affairs outside of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation (a research organization founded to put to some use a building built for indeterminate purpose) has established the Jerusalem Planning Group to undertake a number of planning projects. The academics associated with

this Foundation, mainly faculty at the Hebrew University, believe that there is a great lack of planning throughout Israeli society. A shortcoming which they believe they can begin to remedy.

The Director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, Dr. Yehuda Elkana, is a philosopher of science at the Hebrew University. As one of the first activities of the Planning Group, he organized a committee to consider the problems of educational policy planning. He enlisted the Dean of the Hebrew University School of Education and a number of Jerusalem education intellectuals. The exercise has been an avocation for all of them. They had been talking for a year in February and had yet to agree on a substantive recommendation. However, they had come to appreciate the difficulties of educational planning and to understand the problems of those who undertake it. No mean achievement.

In addition to the education committee, there are a number of other planning committees at work. Also, there is a group of bright young men and women drawn from the Hebrew University who meet to discuss the development of new planning techniques and methodologies. This team is coordinated by Gabriel Sheffer, a lecturer in the political science department of the Hebrew University. All of the members are proteges of Yehezkel Dror, a Hebrew University Professor who once worked for the Rand Corporation and who now writes about policy sciences. This team seems to view planning as a technical activity with common methodologies applicable to most areas of public policy. Therefore, they view all planning problems as subject to technocratic solutions. So far this team has been in existence for only a few months, so they have yet to have time to develop substantive suggestions. But they are engaged in a Delphi exercise, a future studies technique which asks various experts individually to project their best guesses about the future at specified times and then correlates the results. Usually there are a number of rounds in a Delphi exercise, with each participant receiving feedback about the group results during the preceding round. The Jerusalem Planning Group Delphi Exercise seems to be a very sophisticated approach which asks some of Israel's leading citizens to give their best guesses for the year 2000 and also to provide their estimates for the intervening years as well. This exercise is still in the planning stages, but its results will be quite useful to the Israeli government and to the public at large.

The appropriate role for the Jerusalem Planning Group and the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation is not clear to those participating in them. Dr. Elkana sees the Group developing into a Rand Corporation which can provide the Israeli Government with technical expertise and perhaps even substantive planning capabilities. Other participants, especially Moshe Shani, who is a political scientist at the Hebrew University and a member of Gabriel Sheffer's team, believes that no outside organization can adequately provide such services to the Government and that the best role for the Foundation and the Planning Group would be for them to concentrate on long range futures research not tied to the particular needs of the Government.

My own impression of the Jerusalem Planning Group is that it is unlikely to command the adequate resources -- qualified people who can devote full time to policy research -- to provide technical policy services on the model of Rand. And I agree with Shani that it is naive to think that planning can be done outside of the Government.

Planning is a political process with technical components, not a technological task. No matter how some "policy scientists" attempt to mask the problem in abstruse technological jargon, the actual planning procedures must be both conceptually and institutionally part of the political process of the state.

To initiate planning in the Israeli government would require innovation in the organizational structure of the whole system in general and the Ministry of Education and Culture in particular. The requirement of institutional responsibility for planning within the Ministry of Education and Culture is especially important in Israel, because of the manner in which the party key system has in the past brought general political considerations into the total workings of the department. The only way one will have planning in educational policy within the Israeli context is institutionally to force the political process within the Ministry to take account of longer term implications of ad hoc policy decisions. And this cannot be accomplished from outside.

What can be done from the outside is to inform public opinion about alternative futures not generated within the Ministry. And this could be the important contribution made by an organization such as the Jerusalem Planning Group. It could become a cross between the Brookings Institution and Nader's Raiders, to draw on American examples, and thereby inform the Israeli public about policy alternatives and their implications for the future. My impression of Israeli public information is that there is an ample supply of pamphleteer's production but very little in the way of systematic policy suggestions supported by hard research data. Such could be the contribution of the Jerusalem Planning Group: a good use to which to put the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation building.

But there still remains the problem of planning and educational policy development in Israel. As you can see from my earlier remarks, (especially IJS-25) I do not agree with those who believe that the Israeli record for dealing with policy problems in education is so bad.

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1. "Party key" is the term applied to the allocation of patronage and influence within the Ministries.

Two of the more perceptive critics of planning and policy development in Israel, Chanon Rapoport and Jitold Jedlicki of the Henrietta Szold Institute, complained that Israel always bought the cheapest shoes in education and therefore had to buy them ever so much more often than if it had planned ahead and bought a better pair in the first place. My response to this criticism is that a country which changes so fast and which has to meet so many problems which are unlikely to be predictable by even the most sophisticated planning methods is well served by cheap shoes whose style and size can be changed very often. Indeed my prescription to any institutional planner in Israel would be to opt for the "cheap shoes" approach in order to maintain a flexible position. To make this argument is not to suggest that there should be no planning, at least in regard to education. But it is to argue for a relatively low key and informal planning process with low order and flexible substantive plans.


Add to the pace of change the dynamics of the Israeli political process and one has a strong argument for a small scale but high powered planning and policy development unit placed strategically at the fulcrum of the political process.

Rapoport and Jedlicki argue for a group of professional social scientists and planners advising the Ministers and also the Knesset.

I would suggest that at least in the case of education an enlarged but still small scale office of Pedagogical Adviser to the Minister would provide an appropriate place for long term planning in the Ministry. The Adviser would be a post still held by a distinguished professional on a part time basis, but he would be supported by a full time group of professionally qualified educators, economists, sociologists, and even "policy scientists." Such a group could contribute much to the rational consideration of long term implications of present policies, within the political process where such considerations are likely to have some impact.

Supplement such a policy reform with the external criticism and analysis generated by an organization such as the Jerusalem Planning group, and education in Israel would be well served in terms of policy planning. And in the course of improving planning in Israel, some of the problems in the relationship between Government and the intellectuals might be solved as well. New amplifiers for intellectual voices will have been provided.

Sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.