

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS - 6: CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

44, Canfield Gardens
London, N.W.6
England

August 20, 1971

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

In my last newsletter I outlined a number of different conceptions of education and explored one, the model of initiation, in some detail. I also generally explored some of the policy implications of each model, although I left the question of the relationship between concepts and policies open. I now turn to this problem.

Perhaps the best way to indicate the character of policy implications of a conceptual model of education will be to share with you a model which I have developed and then analyze its policy implications. I shall then examine the nature of the relationship between model and policies. This strategy will allow me to suggest a model of education which I believe improves upon the initiation model and at the same time explore the logic of policy analysis.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. Spitzberg, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Irving U. Spitzberg, Jr.

I. EDUCATION: THE MODEL OF THE GUIDE AND TRAVELLER IN A FOREIGN LAND

The cues for this model came from three sources: first, my personal experience; second, Wittgenstein's description of the learning of mathematics as being similar to the exploration by a traveller in a foreign land; third, from Peters' account of where the process of initiation ought to lead if one has a good teacher - "The good teacher is a guide who helps others to dispense with his services."

This model of the guide and the traveller attempts to account for both the role of the teacher and the role of the student. This account should be especially meaningful to Fellows and former Fellows of the Institute of Current World Affairs.

The details of the model are as follows: the guide/teacher meets the traveller/student in the beginning with only limited means of communication; their first task is to communicate with one another. This requires associating certain activities with certain concepts. Then it requires the creation of situations which allow the traveller to use the new tools of communication himself. Next the guide must show the traveller the important landmarks along the main roads of the countries, along with some of the byways. There are of course many roads leading to any given destination, some through cities, others over country hills and dales. The "best" road for reaching a destination depends upon the interests of the traveller as much as the knowledge of the guide. The guide's actions must be designed to help the traveller become accustomed to the topography and culture of the country so that he can make intelligent decisions about both destinations and the ways to reach them. And the culmination of the process is not the guide doing himself out of a job; instead, it is the development of a partnership of exploration, with the traveller and guide together discovering new destinations and new roads to old destinations. The essence of this goal is best put by the case of de Tocqueville: he learned much from many different "guides" during his travels in America; but his guides later learned even more from and with him about their own country.

This model is an evolutionary metaphor: what is appropriate early on in the process may not be appropriate later. However, throughout the process, the traveller is considered to be an active participant in the process. This model, more than that of initiation, emphasizes the joint nature of the educational endeavor and the culmination of the process in a partnership. Just as much as the initiation model, this metaphor acknowledges the public character of the knowledge to be learned and the importance of the student "getting on the inside" of it. And it allows for the development of cognitive perspective, because coming to understand a new land requires that one put a series of discrete learning experiences into the perspective of a larger whole - his and that of the natives. Also, nothing forces one to put his own parochial experiences into a new perspective better than a confrontation with a culture alien to his own. So should be the impact of all experiences which we call educational.

As one would expect, the policy implications of the traveller/guide model differ from those of the initiation model. For example, one cannot force the traveller to understand a new country (the traveller might spend his fortnight at a Hilton); the thoughtful guide must make the experience attractive. There is no assumption of ceremonial authority of teacher

over taught. This model of education rules out strategies based on any authority other than the expertise of the teacher and the consent of the student. This model focuses on the active participation of the student in the choice of both destination and way to get there; choice is integrated into the model, not left at the door as in the initiation model.

The open classroom is quite consistent with this model; however, the metaphor of the guide and traveller would counsel very close attention to the demands of the public character of the knowledge to be mastered. There would be constraints on the sets of choices open to student and teacher even in an open classroom.

If one carefully examines each of the models only briefly outlined in the last newsletter and this one - the imprint, growth, skeptic, initiation, and traveller models - he will find both common and disparate emphases. It is clear that one who views the educational process in terms of a tabula rasa would support approaches quite different from those espoused by devotees of the traveller model. But the exact character of this relationship between models and particular policies is still to be determined.

II. MODELS AND POLICY DETERMINATION: THE LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP

No model of education provides the answer to any particular educational problem; nor does it entail any particular action. The relationship between models and policies is much too complex to yield up simple and guaranteed policy prescriptions. First, there is the problem of relating general rules to particular actions, a problem which the programmatic and normative character of the concept of education presents. H.L.A. Hart, the philosopher of law, has observed in regard to legal rules that any generalized statement must be open textured in application to particular situations, that is, under any general rule prescribing or proscribing actions, some actions obviously fall in, others out. However, there are always difficult cases where decision will change the rule in some way. And any particular case allows for a varied number of conditions which no general rule can ever exhaustively account for in advance. For both these reasons, rules have open texture - they change in application - and cannot be said logically to entail particular actions. If this can be said about rules, how much more relevant this observation is in regard to models, metaphors, and analogies. They are much more sophisticated and complicated than the formal rules referred to in legal and moral discussions. For example, are not Peters' three criteria, which are rules, much clearer than his model of initiation? However, his model provides a more comprehensive and subtle guide for overall strategies of actions; although at the same time it is less precise. So one would never claim that his model logically entails a particular action.

But one can claim that a model establishes burdens of proof - a standard of evidence to be reached before accepting a particular policy - and thereby rules out certain activities. Locke's tabula rasa model places a burden of proof to be overcome by one proposing an educational scheme, which requires that he show that his scheme will convey sense-data in a logical way. Therefore, the tabula rasa would rule out a strategy which would allow the student to pursue his own interests in a rather unstructured learning environment. When one moves to more complicated models such as Peters' or mine, then the articulation of burdens of proof

and proscriptions becomes more difficult. However, my traveller model implies a burden of proof which requires that anyone who suggests a rigidly structured program or rote learning exercise must show that such an approach would enhance the sense of discovery and evolution into a learning partnership, which the model suggests is the essence of the educational process. Indeed, one could say that the model effectively proscribes such an educational strategy; which indicates that the logical character of the proscription is no stronger than that of overcoming a burden of proof. To say this is not in any way to minimize the importance of models in policy development: burdens of proof decide many cases in courts of law and even more decisions in every day life. But is important to see how these conceptual schemes interact with empirical evidence in the decision-making process, for burdens of proof are one means in law of using legal theories to organize empirical evidence.

III. MODELS AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Few decision makers in government or teachers in classrooms would self-consciously refer to a model when deciding questions of educational policy. However, both would immediately refer to various sorts of empirical evidence to support a particular policy. A classroom teacher would refer to his experiences in the classroom, probably in an anecdotal manner; also, he might refer to quantified test results to support his position. The government analyst is likely to refer to the results of statistical surveys and projections to justify his recommendations. All of these types of empirical evidence are necessary for enlightened policy decisions. But it is crucial to see that none of this evidence by itself justifies any particular decision or general policy. Such evidence must be organised by some conceptual scheme and evaluated by some set of values.

Models of education, implicit or explicit, are always at work in both organizing schemes and evaluative perspectives. But to say this is not to identify the exact logical relationship between models and evidence; it is only to acknowledge that some relationship exists. In this newsletter I cannot tackle this problem in detail, for this is an example of a general problem which has plagued philosophers for centuries: what is the relationship between that which is and that which ought to be? The only statement which I am willing to make without substantially more complex arguments about this relationship is that if the evidence does not seem consistent with the conceptual and ethical assumptions of the model, then one is bound to reconsider the model and perhaps modify it. However, in saying this one must understand that models of education are ethically normative - that is they assume a framework of values. And this normative character rules out falsification of value assumptions through traditional empirical investigations. The value framework can be challenged only in terms of moral arguments; although these arguments must always be couched in terms of socio-economic and historical context. Which leads us to a final question about the models, although not to a final answer.

V. HOW DOES ONE CHOOSE THE BEST MODEL OF EDUCATION?

In the course of this newsletter and the last, I have discussed five models of education; how can one choose among them? Because educational models combine both epistemological and moral considerations, one must test models in two ways: 1) how does a particular model clarify the process of learning? 2) how consistent is a particular model with the value

framework which is appropriate for its society at a given time?

Answers to the question about clarity can be phrased in precise philosophical terms. However, for the purposes of the policy maker, whether he be in the classroom or in government, it suffices to suggest that one's common sense reaction to whether or not a model helps deal with the problems confronted on a day to day basis will provide a satisfactory answer to the question. Does a developmental model of the process of education such as the one suggested by Piaget or a behavioural reinforcement model such as the one suggested by B.F. Skinner better explain the actual experiences of the teachers and the taught? This question is best answered by a careful and critical examination by each policy maker of his own experiences and the empirical information available to him. This test may look like a "I know it when I see it" standard, but it is open to challenge by comparison with the results of following various conceptual schemes.

The answer to the question about values is much more difficult. This question entails an analysis which involves a thorough statement of values in relation to society in general and a justification of a particular ranking of values in regard to education. One must be prepared to justify his actions in terms of values understandable by reasonable men. These value questions involve not only the values assumed by the model, but the interaction of these values with other social values. For example, the model of the guide and the traveller makes an assumption about the value of freedom, so to justify this model one must justify freedom in general and in particular relation to the process of education. But what about other values? There is little in the model which tells one about the importance of equality as a value; but this does not mean that equality is not an important value in the educational process. To reconcile demands for equality with this model, one would have to identify the conflicts between freedom and equality inherent in policies consistent with the model and then justify the costs of various strategies in regard to each value. This sort of analysis requires discussions of particular cases but with the general arguments always at hand. I cannot undertake such a detailed analysis here; I only indicate the importance of this examination.

To opt in favour of any particular model, one must be prepared to justify his support in value terms. This means being prepared to justify one's position; not to stop the argument by saying it is "a question of values" and thus not open to discussion. Indeed, such a statement must only be the opening of the argument.

CONCLUSION

The implications of this position for policy decision making and policy research is that we must be prepared not only to report about possible policy changes and then to take ad hoc actions in response to particular problems; instead, we must, as reasonable men, be prepared to justify these decisions in terms which relate particular issues to more general views of society. In the realm of educational issues, this means relating policy to conceptions of education and its place in society.

For my research these canons of analysis require that I be prepared not only to describe an experience of another country in dealing with, for example, racial integration in educational systems or in structuring

university finance; also I must be willing to evaluate these experiences within a conceptual framework of education and society and to justify this evaluation by referring to an explicit ordering of social values. Finally, I must be willing to re-evaluate my conceptual framework.

In this newsletter I have offered, though only partially justified, a model of the educational process to which I shall refer in future arguments about educational problems. Throughout the course of future discussions, it will be incumbent upon me to elaborate this model and justify it in terms of its contribution to clarification and its enhancement of explicit values.

To conclude this newsletter with a statement of personal intellectual obligation is to take a risk: now I shall be evaluated by my own canons. But the obligation is not just mine but is that of everyone seriously interested in solving social problems in general and educational problems in particular. And the statement of this obligation itself better illustrates the positive role which conceptual analysis can play in policy making than another example I could offer. Reasoned analysis will not by itself solve the problems of education; but these problems will not be solved without it.

Received in New York on September 3, 1971.