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Planning Educational Futures

Over the last decade the commitment to national and regional planning in education has rapidly grown and the technology of educational planning has vastly improved. This is true in the highly industrialized nations as well as in the less developed nations. It is true where there are market dominated economies and in the socialist states. While the degree of centralization or decentralization of planning efforts varies with governmental style, probably over 80% of all countries have at the national level an administrative unit responsible for planning.

Gone now are the grand ethical issues over whether to plan or not to plan. Gone are the debates over whether educational planning is compatible with "open societies" and "participatory democracies." Even for those intensely concerned with protection of the democratic ethos the question now is how to define the parameters of democratic or participatory educational planning.

Planning, including sectoral planning in education, is then a concomitant of our times. The desire to husband scarce resources, to take advantage of new developments in the administrative sciences and, frequently, to make more than incremental changes in society or its subsystems has resulted in overt public policies to promote control and coordination through a formal planning mechanism. Although planning may not be an essential activity in every social system, its need apparently increases with the size and complexity of the system. What W. Arthur Lewis said in 1949 with respect to national development planners can now be said with respect to educators: "We're all planners now."

Along with the growth in the activity of educational planning and the proliferation of documents purporting to be educational plans has also come a literature of criticism. Disillusionment and distrust in the lack of demonstrated efficiency of planning is on the increase. Yet in final analysis the questions which are being raised deal mostly with how planning should be done rather than if it should be done.

To place the report of the Alberta Commission on Educational Planning (hereafter referred to as the Worth Report) in some context and to provide a basis for comparison and evaluation, some of the characteristics of our international experience in educational planning will be reviewed.

Brief attention will be given to the different ends being sought and the means designed to achieve these ends. Also explored is the range of conceptualizations of the process of educational planning from a narrow technical exercise to a broad socio-political drama of human interaction.

Ends and Means in Educational Planning

Educational planning may be thought of as a process of designing the actions which will change education in the direction of specified ends. In spite of the possibility of planning education for any number of ends most plannng literature describes "three approaches" to educational planning. These are usually labelled the social demand approach, the manpower approach, and the rate of return or cost/benefit approach. This terminology has been employed widely in the planning literature produced by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNESCO, the International Institute of Educational Planning, the International Labor Organization and other International groups. This classification is also used extensively in the professional and academic journals which print articles on educational planning.

The rate of return approach has been largely limited to academic consideration, project evaluation or, at a national level, to supplemental evidence in the creation of educational policy. The other two approaches are frequently said to label accurately what national or regional educational planning is, or should be. Alexander King, for example, suggests that educational planning needs correspond with stages of national development:

> . . . in the really underdeveloped countries where resources are very scarce . . . policies are made essentially on national grounds . . . matters of prestige and local politics dominate . . . [for] the developing nations, exemplified by the six countries of the Mediterranean Regional Report and many Latin American states the manpower approach is probably the most appropriate . . . [in] the highly developed countries, social pressure has already developed because of the sufficiency of resources and general prosperity, and it dominates the planning.[1]

It is true that most of the wealthier countries of Western Europe and North America consider social demand the main criterion for determining overall enrollment targets. The strategy statements found in the reports under the Educational Investment and Planning Program of OECD bear this out. Reports from Sweden, Netherlands and France in particular emphasize the importance of social demand. The Swedish document is perhaps representative when it states that educational policy should contribute to economic development by "producing the right types and amounts of qualified manpower."[2] This goal, however, is seen as subordi-

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[1]Alexander King, "Educational Planning and Development: An International Approach." In Cicely Watson (ed), *Educational Planning.* Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1967, p. 11.

[2]*Educational Policy and Planning: Sweden.* Paris: OECD, 1967, p. 47.

nate to those of social demand and the satisfaction of social demand for school places is thus not subject to any restrictions imposed by estimated manpower requirements.

In England, manpower forecasts prepared for the famous Robbins Committee on Higher Education were essentially discarded because they did not appear to justify the type and extent of educational expansion concluded to be desirable on other grounds. A similar policy position could be identified in many states within the United States.

The suggestion that the "manpower approach" to educational planning is more prevalent or has more relevance in the less developed countries also has some supporting evidence. The Mediterranean Regional Project (MRP) instituted by OECD in 1960 is perhaps the most widely known effort at systematic application of manpower forecasting to educational planning. The MRP countries (included in the first phase of this project were Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Yugoslavia) agreed only to the development, refinement and modification of manpower techniques for the establishment of educational requirements. There was not, indeed could not be, any agreement to base educational policy purely on manpower forecasts.

Under the stimulation of OECD and the International Labor Organization and through their own national efforts a large number of Latin American, African and Asian countries have also engaged in national level manpower forecasts. The main impetus for the wide attention to manpower analyses was the desire to husband scarce educational resources by achieving the best possible fit between the educational system and the economy.

There is a wealth of material examining the assumptions and procedures of the manpower and social demand approaches. Some analysts, for example, have refused to dignify the social demand approach as planning — a term they would reserve for designing education for a preferred and designated future rather than merely a response to immediate pressures. Students of planning have also pointed out that a manpower approach to determining the educational needs is doomed to a high level of inaccuracy because of our inability to predict technological change and our ignorance about the relationship of education and occupation. There is a wealth of good technical criticism of these approaches and it is not productive and does not serve our purpose to retread this well worn path.

The Worth Report bears only limited similarity to planning reports such as those out of the EIP and MRP projects. The EIP reports tend to focus almost exclusively on the educational system with only modest attention offered to broader societal constraints and demands. The Worth Report, by contrast, makes every effort to discuss educational questions within the perceived social, political, economic and professional contexts. The contrast is even greater between the Worth Report and MRP or

other national reports focussing on manpower needs. These latter are essentially formal, technical documents largely emphasizing quantitative assessments of specific relationships between education, the population and the economy.

The taxonomy of the three "approaches to educational planning" is insufficient as a backdrop for discussion of broad-gauged treatises on education such as the Worth Report. This Report is more in the genre of those of the blue-ribbon commissions and committees which have in the past several years generated so many fat, comprehensive statements in nation's capitals throughout the world about preferred educational futures. For example, somewhat comparable in purpose, if not in scope, would be the Robbins and Crowther reports from England, the White House Commission reports in the USA or the National Commission on Education's report in India (1964-1966). These reports have a broad view of the possible goals of education and, at least by implication, conceive of educational planning as much more than a technical exercise of target setting.

The question arises, then, as to the appropriate framework or criteria against which the Worth Report may legitimately be examined. In order to answer this question let us reconsider for a moment what ingredients are missing when educational planning is defined in terms of the "three approaches." The implicit definition of planning as merely diagnosis of educational needs or demands is a restrictive interpretation which tends to focus on the quantitative exercise of target setting. This concentration has led to a vast accumulation of scholarly analysis and critique aimed at (1) identifying the assumptions governing target setting by the social demand and manpower approaches and (2) improving the technology of educational planning. Thus, the past few years have seen technical refinements in both supply and demand models, systems analysis and a variety of cost-effectiveness schemes. The application of mathematical models has been extended and the use of the computer has become more sophisticated.

Yet, improvements in the technology of educational planning and its increased application have not had profound effect on educational change. Some have argued that even further advances in such technology — better occupational classification systems, better research on the relations of education and occupation, better mathematical models of the internal functioning of the educational system and so forth — will suffice to make planning more successful. Such may be the case, yet recent experience throughout the world prompts more than mild skepticism. In reviewing educational growth in Europe during the 1960's, planners expressed surprise at the inaccuracy of forecasts made five and ten years earlier. These inaccuracies held irrespective of technical procedures used in forecasting. An OECD paper gives this interpretation:

"Educational planning in the 1960's remained partial, reactive, and frequently limited to the quantification of 'social demand' and manpower

criteria. These are definitely some of the reasons for the lack of a significant relationship between planning and policy." Progress in educational planning then may likely depend not only on improved technology but also on more adequate analysis of educational variables, a better operationalization of objectives, improved administrative capability, increased communication with involved political figures, and so forth. This list points to the need for more attention to the *what*, i.e., education, of educational planning and a broader view of the *how,* i.e., the process of educational planning.

In summary it is important then for examining any comprehensive report in educational planning (such as the Worth Report) to consider the following: (1) the technology of educational planning (2) the functioning of the educational system and (3) the process of planning and policy formation. The first of these has been the basis for much of the discussion thus far. Numbers (2) and (3) require brief explanation:

The Educational System in Educational Planning

The "approaches" described above typically give no attention, except possibly in terms of quantitative flows of students, to the internal functioning of school systems. Rather, education is viewed as a simple input-output process. (See Figure 1) Such models are obviously not very satisfying to educators and teachers who believe that many significant and interesting aspects of education lie in what appears inside the system — the curriculum, instructional design, teaching and administrative style.

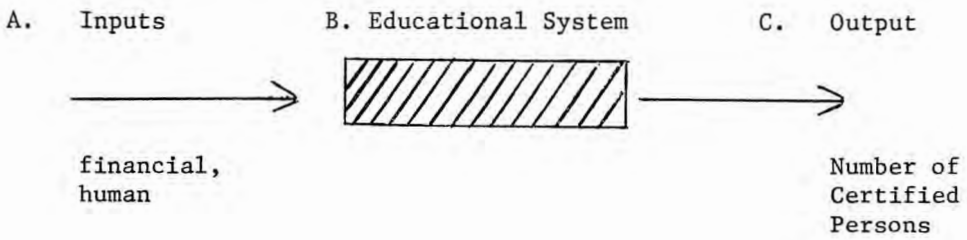


Figure 1 The Educational System: I

A more complete model would take into consideration the dynamic process of schooling as well as a more inclusive list of inputs and outputs (see Figure 2). Educational change comes in many forms and results from internal as well as external pressures. Thus far educational planners (at least at regional and national levels) have focussed almost exclusively on external influences rather than on changes generated by the system itself by means of its structures, its policy making mechanisms, the organized power of the education profession and the academic traditions.

Without trying to offer the further elaboration our argument requires, let us reiterate the general point. Educational planning should start with a systematic analysis of the functioning of the educational system. Such analysis must be seen as an integral part of educational planning and not relegated to the periphery as merely constituting background information.

A Model of the Educational Planning Process

The technology of target setting and insight into the functioning of educational systems are obviously significant aspects of educational planning. Yet these constitute but pieces of a complex human interactive process. For example, one searches the planning literature in vain for even partial answers to such questions as:

How are the goals and objectives of educational planning derived? What are the links between the goal-setting and the more technical activities of planning? What are the technical inputs to the process? Which professional, technical and political groups are involved in educational planning? How do the characteristics of the individuals in the planning groups influence intergroup relationships and styles of participation? How is the exchange of information a form of influence on each planning group?

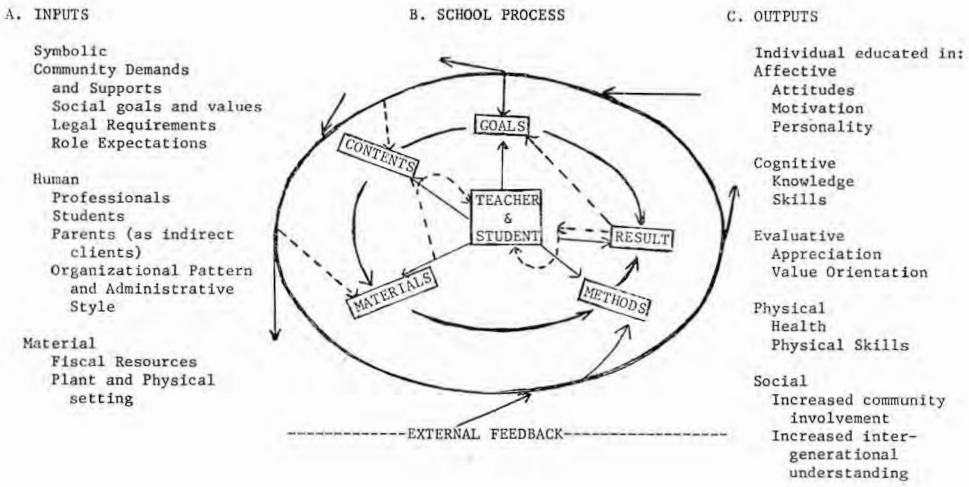
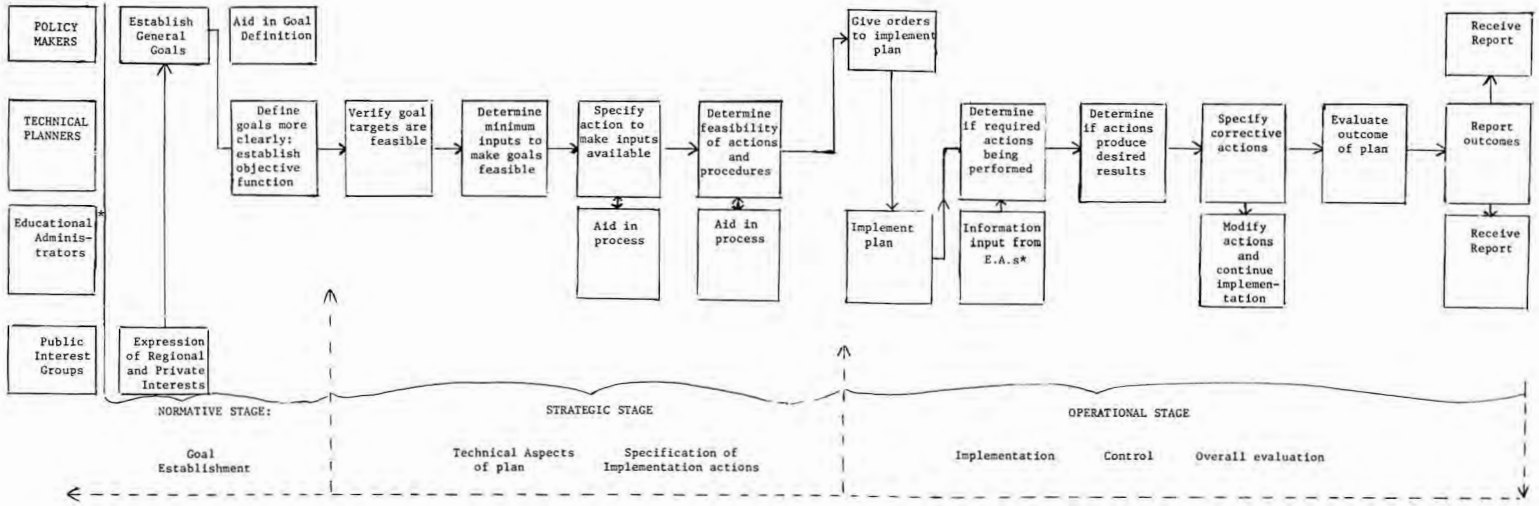


Figure 2 The Educational System: II

Figure 3 represents an attempt at conceptualizing educational planning as a process involving a number of functions and a number of planning groups. The planning process is thus seen as comprising three stages: Normative, Strategic and Operational. The normative stage corresponds closely to what is frequently termed policy making. The strategic stage, by reconciling and crystallizing the views and wants of many people, translates the general goals and values into objectives. At this level the

FIGURE 3 - THE EDUCATIONAL PLANNING PROCESS



objectives must specify time, place and populations to be affected. The Operational stage may be associated with activities of implementation. Objectives specified, targets set and plans developed must be defined in terms of new institutional structures, new personnel and new budget allocations.

The Alberta Commission Report

Against this background let us consider the report of the Commission on Educational Planning for Alberta by examining the following questions: (1) To what extent does the Report examine the educational system as a requisite for educational planning decision? (2) Has the full technology of educational planning been utilized in the preparation of the report? (3) Does the report reflect an understanding of the process of educational planning and decision-making?

The Worth Report's discussion of educational planning implicitly recognizes many of the criticisms we have earlier levelled at the over-simplifications of much of the educational planning literature. First, the Report, in identifying a number of possible objectives, does not limit itself to consideration of the technical/economic ends of education. In its specification of objectives, the Report in Part V enumerates:

(1) orderly growth, (2) economic development, (3) social change,

(4) efficient operation and (5) excellent schooling.

(1) By orderly growth is apparently meant developing an articulated response to the pressures forcing expansion of enrollments. The peculiar character of such growth in Alberta or the necessary tools and information to cope with such growth are not, however, specifically discussed. Particularly avoided are any analyses of internal pressures on enrollments generated within the system itself through, for example, selection, promotion and reward procedures, or criteria imposed by the education profession which affect the absorption of its own products, e.g., pupil-teacher ratio, teaching load and so forth.

(2) In discussing the objective of economic development, the Report notes the importance of viewing schooling as an investment in human resources and the need to optimize scarce resources. The possible contributions of cost/benefit analysis and manpower planning are mentioned as well as certain caveats with respect to such procedures: e.g., "highly skilled manpower may much more easily be substituted for each other than was previously believed" and "educational planners must be sensitive to the growing realization by society that man is more than a producer-unit". While the Report, much to its credit, recognizes that manpower data may serve various purposes depending on the values of a society, it might have commented further on the past and future prospects of manpower forecasts.

There is, moreover, throughout the Report a curious ambivalence toward the technology of education and of educational planning. Technology applied to instruction, e.g., television and CAI, are lauded (in spite of their checkered history throughout the world) while there is a tendency to denigrate the potential of technology in the estimation of educational supply and demand.

(3) The discussion of the objective of social change is largely limited to equality of educational opportunity. A brief examination of the complexities of this notion is offered.

(4) Efficient operation refers to the internal efficiency of schooling and the Report calls for improved management techniques.

(5) Excellent schooling remains an objective without any measuring sticks: "Each person likes to define excellent schooling in reference to his own aspirations . . ." While perhaps true, such wisdom is not of much use to planners trying to define requisite educational resources.

Goals (3), (4) and (5) are in the mainstream of recent educational planning thinking which is giving increasing attention to equality, efficiency and quality. Yet the complex interaction of possible policies designed for such ends are not satisfactorily examined. The Report gives rather extensive treatment to needed changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and the learning environment — variables presumably related to equality and quality in education — yet little insight is offered into the relation of such changes in inputs and process to expectations of outputs.

The Report goes on in Part V to "suggest further guidelines for the development of processes and structures for planning recurrent education . . ." The guidelines include location (planning should be linked to decision-making), knowledge (planning should be related to R&D), correlation (planning should be related to economic and social planning), conduct (planning should take place throughout the education system), freedom (planning should permit local autonomy), involvement (planning should require extensive participation.) These guidelines are, in effect, general principles and reflect both technical requisites for efficient planning and ideological or value choices.

The following two categories under the planning section are titled technology and staging. The technology section does not purport to identify specific techniques because "For most of us, it is much more important to understand where specific techniques fit into the planning process than it is to understand the techniques themselves." Thus we find as subheadings under technology: conceptual framework, identifying goals, anticipating the future, evaluating alternatives, allocating resources and monitoring operations.

While we might agree with the premise which generated this structure, i.e., that it is most important to understand where specific techniques fit into the planning process, this section sheds no light on the matter. There is a call for a conceptual framework but none is suggested — although a vague reference is made to systems analysis. Identifying goals is said to be important, but guidelines or criteria for generating goal statements are not offered. Discussion of methods of prediction and forecasting are likewise disturbingly uninformative. This section begins by mentioning the potential of quantitative, computerized models for forecasting educational supply and demand but then makes a weak compromising statement that equal attention be given to the methods of the futurologist, e.g., the Delphi technique, scenario writing and cross-impact matrix, and to the "seemingly more tangible quantitative simulation techniques." This writer happens to believe that a reasonably good case could be made that these two classes of techniques do vary in analytic rigor and potential utility. However, be that as it may, the real weakness of this section is the failure to attempt to link technique with purpose, that is, to estimate which techniques might be considered appropriate to gain answers to which questions.

In the section labelled *staging* attention is given to the formal institution and offices involved in educational planning. The Report should be praised for recognizing and specifying the planning activities associated with different groups of participants. This simple insight goes unnoticed in many planning and policy documents on education. Yet some uneasiness is again felt in the absence of even a cursory remark about the complexity and unpredictableness of the social/political process of decision making in education.

Discussion of the ingredients of the educational planning process could have been a part either of the sections on *planning, resources* or *next steps*. For example, the resources necessary to create and implement educational change are not limited to such tangible inputs as personnel, facilities, learning resources and finance. In analyzing the political resources necessary to effect change, one source identifies the following: goods and services, status, information, authority, legitimacy, coercion or violence.[3] While this list may not be as fully applicable to education planning as to the broader area of policy making in the polity, the relevance is nonetheless clear. The resources identified in the Report could largely be classified under goods and services. The present or potential availability of status, authority and so forth is not considered even though these resources are as necessary as goods and services in affecting educational change.

In the terminology of the model of the educational planning process presented earlier, one would like to have seen further discussion of the

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[3]Warren F. Ilchman; Norman Thomas Uphoft. *The Political Economy of Change.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964, p. 55.

planning groups and the planning functions found in the normative, strategic and operational stages. How does the normative function evolve? What are the links between goals and explicit educational targets? Which groups are involved in target setting? What are the mechanisms for communication between planning groups? How will research results be disseminated within the planning process? What are the mechanisms for control and feedback? What, precisely are the outcomes expected of educational planning? How will the outcomes be assessed? How will the efficiency of the process be judged? Can control procedures be established not only to feedback data which allows adjustments of targets, but which identify obstructions and breakdowns in the decision making process?

In the final section the Report raises the question: Where do we go from here? The answer to this question we are told depends on people, leadership and professional educators. All well and good. Yet what of the strategy in organizing the people, defining the leadership and educating the educators? The Report only purports to be the first stage of a development plan, not a finished blueprint. Nevertheless, in an effort of such magnitude with the obviously high professional quality of many of the contributors, and considering the boldness of many sections of the Report, this reviewer was surprised by the vagueness or caution exhibited in discussing "next steps". This section threatens to dissolve into generalities and gentle exhortations.

The discussion of strategy doesn't estimate the human or organizational resources that may be required for "next steps". Moreover, in answering the question: What are the preferences of the Commission? it suggests two factors need consideration: (1) the need for equity and (2) the need for momentum. The discussion of "momentum" again provides an opportunity to consider further planning strategy. Although we are told that "when we create mechanisms, we create momentum", we are not informed as to the nature of the needed mechanisms.

Summary

The Worth Report in many ways is an impressive, sometimes eloquent document. Its substance is progressive, at times bold; the quality of its prose is remarkably high, and its format is, with occasional exceptions, strikingly attractive. It certainly compares favorably with the many national and regional commission reports on education generated over the last decade.

One could, of course, parade a long list of skepticisms concerning individual statements found in the Report: ". . . values ascribed to economic security will likely wane . . ." — Maybe, but I would be surprised if Albertans have reached their zenith in their propensity to consume. One could point out a number of seeming incongruities. The Report speaks of more divisiveness and greater group loyalties while also pre-

dicting that the "value of work in the service of man will become more important." One can find seeming contradictions. The Report predicts that self actualization will become a reality for an unprecedented number of citizens, yet it also points out that there will be decreasing opportunities for self-fulfilling experiences. And the inevitable platitudes creep in: "to change schooling is to change teachers" — a statement which either approaches a tautology or is just plain wrong. And so forth.

Such are rather minor inadequacies or oversights. As a planner, researcher and critic of planning, however, I wish to raise two major criticisms of the Report. First, I would like to have seen more discussion of the technical, research and analytical tools which had been employed in the development of the Report and which might be employed in subsequent planning activities. The Report makes predictions of a wide variety of future states in education and society, but avoids telling us how these were arrived at. Perhaps a companion volume of a more technical nature is in order. Without such delineation of method there is limited basis for professional criticism and debate.

My second major criticism concerns the avoidance of discussion of the mechanism and process for creating, reviewing and criticizing change in education. What distinctions are to be made between planning and policy? How will technical data flow in and out of the planning process? What in terms of institution building is necessary to evolve prescription into reality?

Looking ahead, as planners are presumed to do, I can imagine educational policy makers and planners of the twenty-first century reviewing the Worth Report and other quaint efforts of primitive twentieth century man to forecast educational futures. Our descendants are certain to be scandalized at the crudity of the initial technology of educational planning. Yet amidst chuckles there just may be some muted admiration that earlier man with such primitive tools would even have had the courage, not only to attempt to foresee, but also to attempt to rewrite the future.