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Ever since Plato's *Republic*, the question of how to groom future public leaders for their future roles has been laden with philosophical, even moral, significance. Answers touch on core beliefs: What makes good public policy? What skills and dispositions would, if possessed by public managers, both inform and lend authority to their decision-making? The authors in this section engage in three interconnected debates that in a generic form were probably as relevant to the *Republic* as they remain today. Briefly, they concern the *content*, *methods* and ultimately the *consequences* of policy education.

1. What should be taught? To begin with the obvious, the fields of public policy and administration have a bountiful and diverse inheritance. Dan Durning's chapter traces the rise of public policy programs since the 1960s and the more recent advent of public management programs modeled to some extent after schools of business administration. Leaving aside the question of what separates such programs from public administration – an added layer of complexity – multiple disciplinary identities and influences have led to perennial debates over what belongs to the “core” of a policy or administration curriculum. What knowledge of economics, political science and management is vital for public administrators or policy analysts to possess, and with what skills of integration? Durning makes an interesting observation that mainstream policy analysis in quest of technical sophistication has moved away from the problem-solving orientation that inspired scholars to launch public policy as a separate discipline.

An anecdote may help to illustrate the diversity of views within public policy circles alone. Our colleagues at the newly established LKY School of Public Policy recently conducted a review of the core curricula of major policy schools worldwide. It revealed a wide range of configurations of such programs. Most included some form of economics, statistics, and political analysis in the core, but the relative emphasis varied from one to several courses in each of those fields. Other programs incorporated management or leadership courses as well. Clearly a range of visions of what an appropriate policy program should look like are available among the leading purveyors of such education. Not least since faculty members in these departments are as likely to identify themselves with component disciplines (such as economics or political science) as

with the less well delineated ‘policy sciences’, it is likely these debates will be with us for some time.

The same review turned up a mandatory course entitled “Democratic Governance” at a prominent policy school. The course title itself might sit uneasily in the core curriculum of some countries otherwise keen to promote policy education, even though the content is probably not vastly different from less colorfully entitled courses in ‘political and organizational analysis’ at other institutions. This raises a second area of tension regarding the content of policy education. To what extent, and how, is it necessary to localize the content of policy education to fit non-Western contexts? Or to put it more radically, are entirely new models of, and modalities of teaching, policy and administration necessary for such settings? The question takes on a particular edge in the attempt to transplant core curricula – and the content underneath course titles – from countries with long-established ‘democratic’ traditions to authoritarian or one-party governance settings. And it takes the form of a visceral frustration for many educators of policy and administration programs in non-US-settings in particular; so many of the basic texts – let alone the textbooks – of public policy and administration are built around that country’s rather unique set of institutions.

Several of the authors in this section address such issues. Ngok Kinglun outlines the development of teaching of public administration and policy in China. Developing a relevant curriculum has been especially important due to China’s shift from planned to market economy requiring new institutions and mindsets in the public sector. Boulderstone and Paddy O’Toole highlight the interesting case of international students studying public administration in Australia for whom the existing curriculum and mode of delivery may not be entirely appropriate and require modification. It is far from easy to introduce modifications to key courses in these fields that maintain coherence while catering to a diverse student body. Robert Laking gives a detailed account of how this challenge was addressed in training Vietnamese participants in public management.

2. How can public administration and policy be most effectively taught? The question of what teaching methods would best serve adult learners has long been debated in universities and in the specialist literature on pedagogy. One form this challenge takes for teachers of policy and administration is how to prepare students for the complexities of a public sector environment, in which ethical dilemmas, conflicting notions of the ‘public interest’ and multiple accountability pressures are all common.

The generic answer in many professional schools has been to promote *problem-based learning* in various forms. It arises from a long-standing critique – much in vogue in university centers devoted to teaching methods, and given a new interpretation in Steven Aufrecht and Xie Ming’s chapter – of hierarchical, lecture-based methods. These methods take various forms. Faculties of medicine perhaps have the most plausible application: rigorous, closely supervised clinical education to accompany theoretical learning. Yet the subjects of policy analysis and administration are rather unlike the controlled environment of hospital examination rooms. Business schools have developed a more applicable model, emphasizing group work, internships and applied case analysis. An important point to note is that none of these methods is free of controversy or practical challenge.

Take the use of case studies. They are widely employed in both business and public administration classrooms, and are widely thought to provide the opportunity to integrate political, economic and organizational analysis for ‘real-life’ problem-solving and to stimulate the development of managerial ‘wisdom’. Yet typical public policy cases have also been criticized as portraying the policy world in terms of “high-level, lone protagonists beset by hostile political forces”, and of deemphasizing the institutional and historical contexts of policy action (Chetkovich and Kirp, 2001:283). If the critique rings true for American policy contexts, it may have even greater traction when case studies ‘cooked’ in Western contexts are served to current or future public managers from developing or non-Western country settings.

Several chapters look beyond case analysis for problem-based learning methods. Carole Comerton-Forde and her colleagues from the University of Sydney explore group work in public policy programmes while Richard Hayllar offers a detailed description of the use of extended role-plays “to develop policy and decision-making skills in cases where interpretations of what is in the ‘best public interest’ are strongly contested,” as put in his evocative title. While no chapter focuses on e-learning methods, there is little doubt that this new technology will be increasingly important in the years to come, and an important way to provide distance education and in-service training to public sector personnel in a wide catchment area.

3. Does it matter? This is a third type of question that can be asked of policy education. Put differently, what impact does training in public policy and administration have on the practice of governance or the quality of governmental decision-making? The question may sit uncomfortably for educators; indeed, only one of the chapters in this section – that by Mangahas on the potential impact on Millennium Development Goal attainment – addresses this type of issue. The reluctance stems largely from the general difficulty of quantifying the impact of higher education in any field – except on the subsequent wages of graduates, a measure which is

decidedly unhelpful for the public sector. The question may also be uncomfortable for university administrators. After all, policy and administration schools – particularly those catering to students from developing countries – probably have among the highest percentage of students whose tuition is paid by third parties among all the professional schools. Are these generous funders – whether donors or governments – getting their money’s worth?

In this regard one might recall Chambers (1983) evocative (if simplistic) description of the cultural and attitudinal gulf separating “positive practitioners” – for whom every problem is solvable with the right mix of resources and skills – and “negative academics” – annoyingly insisting on the profound structural constraints on effective policy intervention. Professional schools of public administration and policy everywhere straddle, even embody, this divide. But it is a tension that can border on ‘schizophrenia’ when the context is policy education in less developed settings. We know that the productivity and ‘room for maneuver’ for individual public managers depends heavily on how facilitative their work environments are – on the incentives, resources, information, and public authority that these managers can mobilize. If all such incentives and resources are weak to the breaking point in many developing country settings (as many ‘negative academics might contend), what will a better grasp of benefit-cost analysis bring our well trained public servant? To put the question more strongly, how tenuous is the link – for it must be tenuous – between the short exposure of mid-career managers to expensive, short-duration executive education programs and the quality of policy outputs emerging from the systems in which they must operate?

There may be good answers to this question. Indeed, some aspects of developing country environments may *enhance* managerial discretion and, by extension, the importance of its sensitive application (Grindle and Thomas, 1991). But to ask the question underlines the difficulties of moving the pedagogical discussion from one based (to use public management-speak) on the “process and outputs” to the “outcomes and impacts” of policy education.

Ultimately, educators of the ‘guardians’ of once and future *Republics* can always fall back onto Oscar Wilde’s famous dictum: “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.” But perhaps we can do better than this. Examining the impact of policy education in producing not just more capable, but more *effective* public managers, is an important future arena for discussion – one the chapters point towards without directly addressing.

Works Cited:

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