

Political Science and the Educator

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THE POTENTIAL contribution of the political scientist to public education can be suggested in a sentence: The political scientist is a student of government; the public schools are governmental institutions. This is not to imply that the political scientist, as such, can tell the educator anything about the professional aspects of developing and carrying on a sound program of education. Neither can he tell the administrators of highway departments how to build roads, of recreation agencies what constitutes a good recreation program, of police departments how to deal with juvenile delinquency. But as public services all of these have two things in common—they are subject to public control through elected non-professional governing bodies and they involve the management of public employees in administrative organizations. It is in the area of these common elements that the political scientist might make a substantially larger contribution to educational administration than he has made in the past.

The problem of establishing lines of communication between the educator and the political scientist is not readily solved. The educators, for their part, have spent several generations of effort in establishing their independence of local government and "politics." The political scientist, in his study of government, has tended to leave the public schools outside his span of attention, except for occasional studies of school-governmental relations that tend to end up with a plea for greater "integration." To the educator, this smacks of some kind of a plot. To the political scientist, in turn, the educator's denunciations of such studies look like a sacred cult's reaffirmation of articles of faith.¹ There the matter rests

¹ A recent study at Stanford University is by Carl F. Stover, working in cooperation with the writer and the Pacific Southwest Cooperative Project in School Administrator Education. This study has brought the basic difference in viewpoints between educators and political scientists on the integration issue into better perspective than has existed heretofore. See his *Local Government and the Schools: The Debate Over Independence* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Stanford University, June 1955).

today. The net result, as it appears to this writer, is a considerable loss to both parties.

Perhaps if we focus attention for the moment on the two elements common to all public services—public control and administration—some breach can be made in the communication barrier. But terminology at once threatens disruption, for the political scientist defines the process by which public policy is made and control established as “politics.” Everyone knows that education must be “non-political.” And so it should, in the sense that no sane person wants the schools used to reward political workers, to finance a political machine, or propagandize the young. When, however, the antipathy to politics leads to obscuring the process of public participation in setting educational policy or minimizing cooperation with other governmental agencies—where none of the evils mentioned are involved—the principle loses its value and its meaning.

The simple fact is that public school administrators are immersed in “politics,” as the political scientist uses the term, for it means the same thing that the educator means when he talks about “community relations,” getting the “right people” elected to the school board, countering “attacks on the schools,” or securing “parent participation.” All of these are means of building public support, meeting criticism, or trying to influence the direction school policy shall take. Politics can be usefully defined as competition for influence. Schools are under constant pressure from those who would influence what they teach and how they teach it. Since the schools are public,

these are legitimate matters for public debate and the political process will determine the *modus vivendi* at any given time. It seems obvious, then, that the school administrator, standing at the focal point of decisions on educational policy, stands to profit by becoming familiar with what the political scientist may have learned about the political process.

Contribution of Politics

The possible contribution of the political scientist to education in the realm of politics (as distinguished from administration) is essentially twofold: (a) what is taught about politics in the classroom and (b) the art of politics as practiced in educational administration. The public schools are presumed to instruct the young on democratic values. This is a field systematically taught by political scientists in our universities, yet the author's experience is that relatively few future teachers or school administrators turn up in classes of this kind. It must be assumed, therefore, that they receive their instruction on the subject in schools of education or that it is left to chance. The latter being untenable, we are left with the possibility that schools of education are overlooking a useful resource in political science departments.²

The well-known influence of John Dewey and his disciples upon schools

² Untenable or not, there is perhaps too much evidence that civic education, as far as public school teachers are concerned, is in fact being left to chance. For a discussion of this issue, see Robert A. Walker, “Political Education—A Lost Art?”, *Social Education*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (February 1948), p. 69-72 and “Important Political Documents in Civic Education,” *Social Education*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (April 1947) p. 170-72.

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of education has created a view of "democratic participation" that might profit from exposure to other viewpoints. Political scientists, as outside observers, sometimes get the uneasy feeling that the schools have democratic debate and majority rule confused with unanimous acquiescence, the latter achieved more by boredom and resignation in the face of "unstructured" talk than by counting the votes on a well-defined issue. The writer has actually been told by teachers and school administrators, when he has taught courses for students of education, that putting an issue to a vote, when discussion had not resolved all differences, was "authoritarian." He has been told even more often by the same students that all political philosophies are just a matter of opinion. This fades readily into an excuse for having no opinion that the speaker is prepared to defend intelligently. How such a teacher can create other than confusion among his pupils about democracy and the logic that supports it is difficult to see.

The teaching of politics, of course, can be greatly enriched by the better knowledge of American government, of the government of foreign countries, and of the great continuing issues in American public policy—all of which the political scientists can help supply. This is too obvious to need elaboration. The greater problem of ends and means in democratic self-government, already mentioned, is both less obvious and perhaps more important.

At the second level, the art of poli-

tics, the basic problem is the role which professionals in a public service ought to play in democratic control over that service. Here the political scientist, having studied the problem in a variety of public services, might be of quite practical assistance to the educator. It is a complex and difficult problem in many fields. It is clearly defined in public education. The school superintendent, as a professional, is hired and directed by a lay board, itself responsible to the citizens of the community. Once employed, he is expected to perform the delicate feat of at once telling the public what it ought to want (professional advice), and finding out what in fact it does want (interpreting opinion). Since teachers and school administrators are prepared in professional schools, there is marked danger that they will be over-impressed with their mission to instruct the public and under-sensitive to, or intolerant of, dissent. This is not to underestimate the political skills of some superintendents. They are undeniably impressive. The point here is simply that this political role might profitably be identified earlier in the training of administrators, and put in a setting which will encourage collaboration with students of the art—the political scientist. There is no value in letting the more palatable vocabulary of community relations, parent participation, and other synonyms for "political support" confuse the future practitioner or deny him the insights into the political process which modern political science might be able to provide. He may learn, too, that there is an ethics of public service and responsiveness to public opinion which has a value of

its own over and above professional convictions.

The systematic study of the political process has progressed rapidly during the past few years. Much of the past emphasis on history and description in dealing with political institutions has given way to a probing into the sources of political action and behavior. More careful attention to the characteristics of pressure groups, analysis of status and leadership factors in opinion formation, and concern for personality structure in shaping political behavior have characterized recent research and writing in the field. The work of the sociologist and the psychologist is being actively tapped to illuminate the political scene. Modern work of this kind finds its roots largely, but not entirely, in the so-called "Chicago School" of political science that matured during the nineteen-thirties. Here Charles E. Merriam,³ Harold D. Lasswell,⁴ and Harold Gosnell,⁵

³ Among Merriam's writings, the educator may find particularly interesting his *New Aspects of Politics* (1925), *Political Power* (1934, and reissued in H. D. Lasswell, C. E. Merriam, and T. V. Smith, *A Study of Power*, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950) and *Systematic Politics* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1945).

⁴ See especially his *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930), *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (1935), *Power and Personality* (1948). His more recent contributions to "content analysis" in political communications are reflected in H. D. Lasswell, Nathan Leites, and Associates, *Language of Politics: Studies in Quantitative Semantics* (1949). His "Policy science" orientation is described in "The Policy Orientation," in Daniel Lerner and H. D. Lasswell, *The Policy Sciences: Recent Developments in Scope and Method* (1951).

⁵ See his *Voting and Non-Voting* (1924), *Getting Out the Vote* (with Charles E. Merriam, 1927), *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* (1937), and *Grass Roots Politics* (1942).

respectively, stimulated a group of students to explore related disciplines, to seek for a "science" of politics divorced from value preferences, and to utilize more precise statistical tools for analyzing political action. Contemporary literature stemming from these origins is much too extensive to cover in the space available here.⁶ Some of it is exciting in the new light thrown on questions of why people act as they do in political situations; some of it—particularly that devoted to quantitative methods at all costs—suggests that the struggle for methodological improvement has been more impressive than the new knowledge gained thereby. The worst of these add up to statistical elaborations of the obvious. But the effort to gain precision may well turn up valuable new methods for measuring and predicting political trends. The educator will be well advised to keep in touch with future developments in this area of political science if he is to bring to his role of "decision-maker" in educational public policy the best knowledge available.

⁶ Particularly valuable to the educators might be David B. Truman, *The Government Process* (1951), V. O. Key, *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (1947), James K. Pollock, *Voting Behavior: A Case Study* (1940), Paul F. Lazarsfeld and others, *The People's Choice* (1948), Leonard Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (1948), Louis H. Benn, *How to Predict Elections* (1948), and Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure* (1953). Special reference may be made to the continuing series of studies issuing from the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan under the leadership of Rensis Likert, Angus Campbell, and others, and to the extensive bibliography of literature in this field by B. L. Smith, H. D. Lasswell, and Ralph D. Casey, *Propaganda, Communication, and Public Opinion* (1946).

Toward Better Administration

The second major area of possible contribution by the political scientist to education, mentioned at the outset, was that of public administration. Systematic study in this field, as in politics, has progressed rapidly in the past twenty years. Also like the study of politics it has profited greatly by the contributions from related fields of social inquiry. The psychologist, sociologist and anthropologist have thrown new light on human motivation, on the influence of the small group on individual conduct, on the nature of leadership, and otherwise have exposed some of the geotropic roots of human behavior in organizations. Since intelligent guidance of such behavior for specific purposes is the essence of administration, it is inevitable that the student of public administration should have given these influences an increasing amount of attention. Concomitantly, he has given progressively less attention to the tedious mechanics of administration—the housekeeping details of putting budgets together and managing janitor services.

As a result of having taught administration to graduate students in school administration, the writer would suggest two major contributions that the political scientist might make to the educator. One is a better understanding of the principles of organization. The second is to assist in a synthesis of the contributions of modern social science as they illuminate the administration of all public enterprises.

For reasons not at once clear, the literature of public school administration has been over-concerned with the mechanics of administration and weak

in presenting clearly the elementary principles of administrative organization. Although some of his colleagues in the field of public administration may dissent, the writer is convinced that the accumulated experience of business, military, religious, governmental, and other social organizations has given us some basic guiding principles in the grouping of specializations, and in the relations among these, that have useful and widespread application. All large organizations demand such groupings; all of them present the continuing problem of coordinating diverse efforts, directing these toward predetermined goals, and appraising the results as a guide to future decisions. These needs have given rise to certain "principles" of organization, among them the need to keep lines of responsibility clear, to limit the numbers of subordinates that any one person is expected to supervise, and to distinguish between line and staff services.⁷

Some of these ideas at times seem to be surprisingly new to even advanced candidates for educational administration degrees. They seem often to struggle with vague fears that talk about clear lines of responsibility, or distinguishing sharply between line authority

⁷ The literature here begins with Max Weber's "pure model" of bureaucracy as set forth in his *Essays in Sociology* (translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Oxford, 1946) and includes such works from industrial and governmental sources as Henri Fayol, *Industrial and General Administration* (1949), James D. Mooney and Alan C. Reiley, *The Principles of Organization* (1939), Luther Gulick and L. Urwick, *Papers on the Science of Administration* (1937), and L. Urwick, *The Elements of Administration*. The most forceful dissent from the validity of the search for "principles" is found in Herbert Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (1947).

and staff advisory services, is somehow authoritarian. One almost suspects that they have been taught that administrative confusion is "democratic"! It seems also to come as something of a revelation to such students, when they come under the influence of political scientists, that education is not the only field of public service that has made substantial gains in professionalization and non-corruptibility in the past fifty years. There is more than a little evidence that they have been sold on the doctrine that schools must remain independent of other local governments if they are to escape "political corruption," that they have assumed all other governmental endeavors must be corrupt. In brief, it seems desirable that we increase as far as possible the cross-fertilization of ideas between the educator and the public administrator, both in the universities and afterward. Each side will benefit.

The final point for consideration in this brief paper is the synthesis and application to administration of what we are learning from the related social sciences. The implications are far-reaching. Studies of supervision and employee morale from business enterprise, of status and leadership from sociology, of personality structure and psychic needs from modern psychology are opening up new vistas in organizational behavior.⁸ Some of these findings have been applied to classroom teaching, some to educational administration. But here again there may be real gains to educational administration if the significance of these contributions is seen in the setting of a larger universe of administrative experience and practice. It is a limiting

thing for the administrators of any field to see their problems as unique, or to be unable to distinguish between what is peculiar to their speciality and what is common to all parallel endeavors.

It is precisely in developing an awareness of what is common in the politics and administration of all public services that the political scientist can contribute most to public education. If we can overcome the communication barrier, dispel the fear that young educators will be misled, and enhance the respect of political scientists for the problems peculiar to education, we will have entered upon an era of highly profitable interchange for both parties.

* Among the best efforts to analyze administrative organizations, and the role of executives as decision-makers in the light of modern psychology, sociology and anthropology are the following: Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (1937). Herbert Simon, *Administration Behavior* (1947). John Gaus, *Reflections on Public Administration* (1947). Alexander Leighton, *The Governing of Men* (1945). Philip Selznick, *T.V.A. and the Grass Roots* (1949). Paul Appleby, *Policy and Administration* (1949). Rensis Likert, "Motivational Dimensions of Administration," in R. A. Walker, (ed.), *America's Manpower Crisis* (1952). See also the collection of papers in Robert K. Merton, *Readings in Bureaucracy* (1952) and Robert Dubin, *Human Relations in Administration* (1951). A number of articles appearing in recent issues of the *Public Administration Review*, quarterly journal of the American Society for Public Administration, contribute to the synthesis under consideration here, including Morton Grodzins, "Public Administration and the Science of Human Relations," (Vol. XI, Spring, 1951, p. 88-102), Robert A. Dahl, "The Science of Public Administration: Three Problems," (Vol. VIII, Winter, 1947, p. 1-11), Herbert Simon, "A Comment on the Science of Public Administration" (Vol. VII, Autumn, 1947, p. 201-03), John Gaus, "Trends in the Theory of Public Administration," (Vol. X, Summer, 1950, p. 161-69), and Robert A. Walker, "W. A. Jump: The Staff Officer as a Personality," (Vol. XIV, Autumn, 1954, p. 233-46).

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