PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION—A MODEL WITH EMPHASIS ON HOW

Charles P. Gratto, Extension Economist
Iowa State University

The past proceedings of this conference show that a major commitment to devising and improving public policy teaching methods was made at the first conference in 1951 and has continued to the present. Material presented here has ranged from technical discussions of adult education methods to case studies containing elements useful to those engaged in public policy education. The discussions during more than two decades have been diverse, rich, and fruitful.

This paper seeks to extend that commitment by taking an approach that has, up to now, been neglected. An attempt will be made to integrate, in a single model, the main features of more than twenty years of work in public policy education. The reasons for developing the model are: (1) to enlarge understanding of the process of public policy education, (2) to facilitate communication among practitioners, and (3) to provide a basis for further development in theory and practice.

THE ISSUE CYCLE

Participants in the resolution of a public issue generally proceed as follows:

1. People become disturbed by some condition. The concern, tension, or anxiety aroused by the condition causes people to search for some sort of relief.

2. The search for relief generates discussion which gives the issue a name and defines it in action terms. At this stage the issue is not defined very scientifically. Information about the problem may consist largely of folk knowledge. Some real or imagined adversary is often singled out.

3. The cutting edge of the issue clashes with the realities of budget making, resource limitations, or the interests of those who are either neutral or antagonistic toward those with the problem. When the clash of interest is of sufficient magnitude, debate on priorities ensues.

4. The debate forces a ranking of priorities and sets the stage for resolution of the issue.

5. During debate, participants are led to a more realistic view of the problem. More objective and scientific knowledge comes into play. The structure of the problem is seen more clearly. While value judgments may converge but little, objective views of the issue do converge. The stock of available knowledge is augmented by research, or at least existing scientific knowledge is carefully organized and applied.

6. Alternatives are considered and the effects of each are laid out. Participants weigh the effects of alternatives on a complex scale having many social and economic dimensions.

7. A public choice is made.

8. Action follows. Action may imply change, or it may simply be a continuation of the status quo.

9. The action is evaluated; its effects are measured. If people are "satisfied" with the action, the issue recedes. If they are not "satisfied," the cycle resumes and the process continues until the issue is finally resolved.

The issue cycle is shown as a flow chart in Figure 1. Implicit in the flow chart is some time dimension. This is usually measured in months at least, and issue cycles often span years.
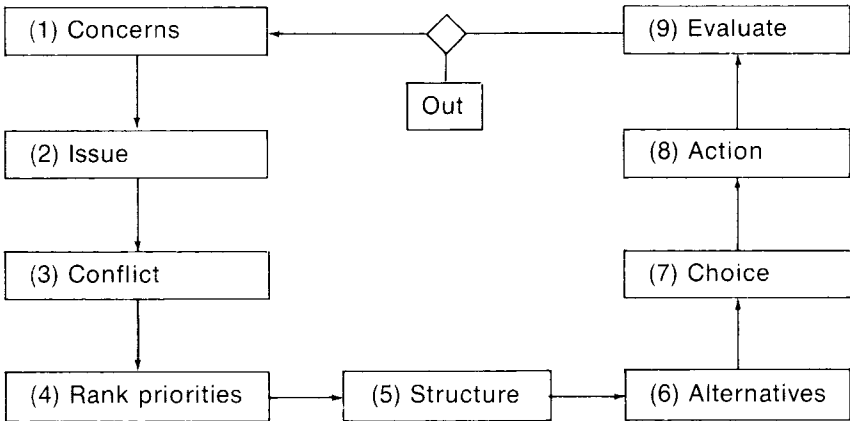

FIGURE 1. Issue cycle flow chart.

THE INTERVENTION CYCLE

When it is decided that a public policy education program is in order concerning a particular issue, a second time cycle is set up. This is termed the intervention cycle. Figure 2 shows the issue cycle and the general form of the intervention cycle. The interven-
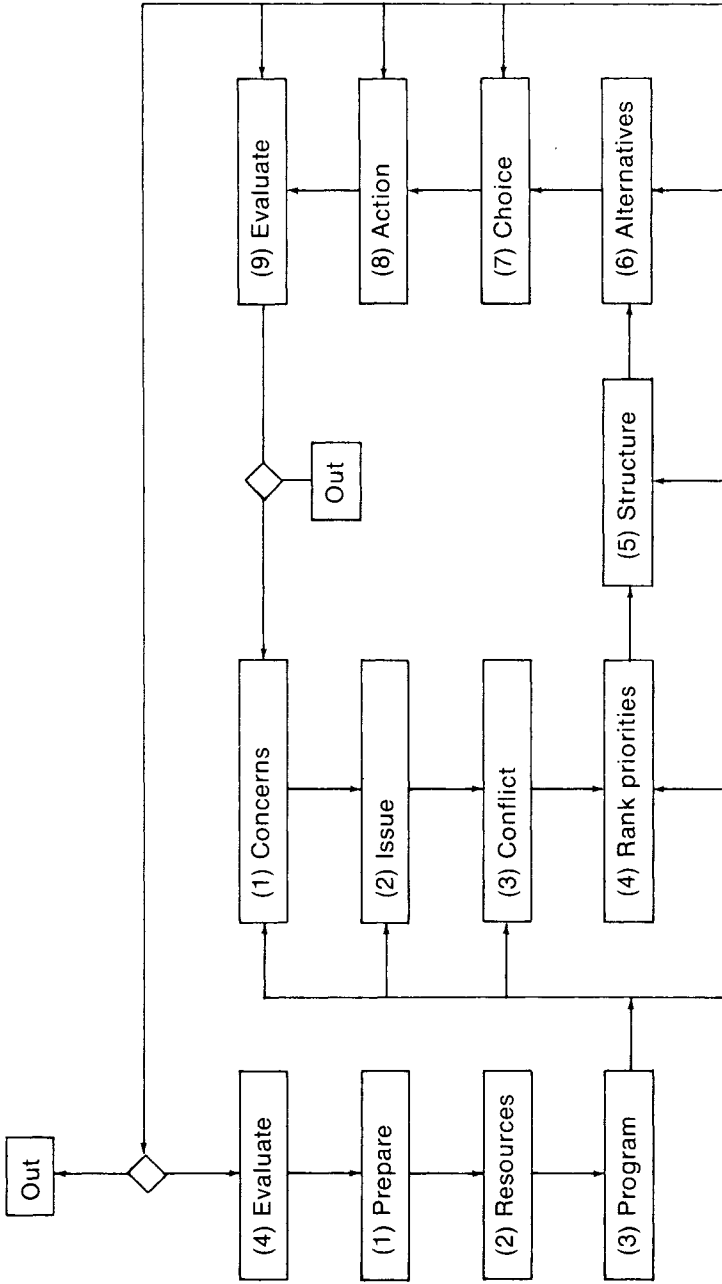
FIGURE 2. Issue cycle with intervention cycle.

tion cycle consists of four cells: (1) preparation, (2) resources, (3) program delivery, and (4) evaluation.

The cell definitions are quite straightforward. The preparation cell contains those activities which are required to initiate a program. These include planning, study of the issue, and preparation of the first versions of the teaching materials. The resources cell has to do with the accumulation and deployment of teaching resources—teacher time, space, travel, materials, and coordination of the program effort.

The program cell includes all of the learning activities which impinge on the issue cycle. A partial listing of such activities might include personal contact, conferences, fairs and exhibits, radio and television, meetings, short courses, workshops, seminars, and written communications ranging from leaflets through monographs and including correspondence. The evaluation cell includes activities designed to measure the effectiveness or the impact of the program.

Note that the intervention cycle, through the arrows from the program cell to the nine cells of the issue cycle, is portrayed as impinging on all cells in the issue cycle. Intervention, through public policy education, is possible at any point or cell in the issue cycle.

In general, awareness education programs have intervened in cells: (1) concerns, (2) issue, and (3) conflict. Typical policy education programs have intervened in cells: (4) rank priorities, (5) structure, and (6) alternatives. Programs conceived to explain the options created by, and the effects of, a public choice intervene in cells: (7) choice, (8) action, and (9) evaluation.

INTERVENTION STYLES

Client Versus Issue Orientation

It is useful to point out here that each cell of the issue cycle contains all of the people involved in the problem at any point in real time. As the issue cycle proceeds, the number and diversity of people increases from cells (1) concerns, through (7) choice. Thereafter, the number and diversity probably decline.

This raises crucial questions regarding intervention styles. Public policy education can, at one extreme, be aimed at a specific and limited group of people, for example, commercial farmers, local officials, or community leaders. At the other extreme, public policy education programs can be oriented toward an issue, for example, environment, education, or health. Then the program

is aimed at all of the people in all of the cells in a particular issue cycle.

If the program is aimed at a particular set of people for a long time, then programs are called forth which are appropriate to the issue cells in which those people are found at various points in real time. For one issue, a particular set of people may be found in the concerns cell, and intervention there may continue as long as they remain in the issue cycle. For another, a particular set of people may enter the issue cycle at the priorities-structure-choice stage. For still another issue, they may not be involved until the cycle is nearly complete. In short, one extreme is programs designed for, and in conjunction with, a narrowly defined client group. This mode of program design will be called "client oriented."

At the opposite pole is issue orientation. Here the program is directed at the issue and is meant to serve all of the people in a given cell or cells (sometimes all the cells) in an issue cycle. The program may be directed at a particular cell or may follow the issue cycle in its entirety. The issue is chosen first; selection of clients follows. This mode of program design is termed "issue oriented."

While it is not intended to debate here the relative merits of the client-oriented and issue-oriented program approaches, it is appropriate to list some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

A client-oriented program has as its strong point a very close communication with a given set of people. The practitioner knows his students; often he has had or develops a close and long standing relationship with them. He has their trust. He understands how they think and knows how they like to learn. On the minus side this close relationship, by its nature, limits the number of persons who can be served by the program. In addition, the program may become a captive of the client group unless an unusual degree of educational leadership is exercised by the practitioner.

An issue-oriented program allows the practitioner to probe deeply into the issue and to develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of the problem. He may become an expert in a field of knowledge on which the issue cycle depends. He reaches large numbers of diverse people and groups. His main problems are to protect his reputation for objectivity, to deal effectively with action-oriented groups when he is education minded, and to

reach a constantly changing audience, all or part of which may be new to him.

Figure 3 shows the several intervention roles which are theoretically possible.

Specialist

Specialist–Teacher

Teacher–Specialist

Teacher–Resource broker

Teacher

(chart: vertical axis labeled "Subject orientation" from 100% at top; horizontal axis labeled "Process orientation 100%"; a diagonal line descends from the 100% point at top-left to 100% at bottom-right.)
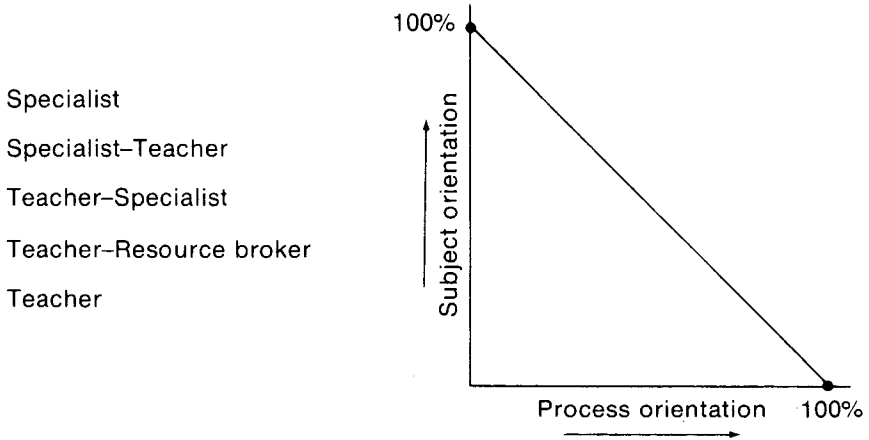
FIGURE 3. Roles for intervention.

In the specialist role the professional views himself as having a main or even total obligation to his subject matter area. His other skills are secondary and are developed only as they are needed to promote his subject matter interests.

The specialist-teacher role is familiar to most extension workers. In this role much attention is given to the maintenance of a high degree of professional skill, but a substantial portion of the specialist's time is also given over to teaching methods.

A less common role is that in which the specialist's main interest is in teaching. His subject matter competency is secondary but respectable. He has a strong professional interest in educational methods and actively seeks to advance his skill and to contribute systematically to the stock of knowledge on methods.

In the role of teacher–resource broker, interest in methods dominates. The learning and problem-solving process is paramount, but the role includes an additional function, to assist in obtaining resources that will help the process along.

The final role is that of teacher only. Here the process is all. The special competence hinges on helping groups understand themselves and thus carry on their business more effectively.

The role in which a specialist casts himself largely determines the style of intervention and so shapes the entire programming effort.

For example, the specialist role implies little in the way of intervention. It means going about one's professional activity and responding to specific extension teaching requests without actively seeking them. No organized extension teaching program is included in this role.

In the specialist-teacher role active intervention is implied. Learning resources may be brought to bear at any point in the issue cycle. Programs may be directed either to the entire population of a cell or cells or to that part of a constant client system which is in one or more issue cycle cells.

In the teacher-specialist role, intervention is still implied. The program is intervention oriented. Subject matter is still specific but takes second place to learning.

In the teacher–resource broker role, intervention is aimed at groups, and the learning is not closely directed. Various outside resources are brought in as the teacher or the group perceives a need for them.

Finally, in the teacher role, learning elements are not strongly directive but are aimed at helping the group understand itself and so improve its performance. No precondition is placed in subject matter, and the group itself is to perceive needs and acquire needed resources.

LEARNING ELEMENT MODEL

Programs will vary according to: (1) the particular issue cycle chosen, (2) the client group chosen, and (3) the perception of the specialist role, and thus the choice of the model of intervention and the degree of direction of the learning process. However, all practitioners seek programs that are composed of effective program elements.

Interestingly enough, the model for an ideal learning element bears a close resemblance to the issue cycle–intervention cycle model. The major difference is in the time dimension. The issue cycle and the intervention cycle proceed in real time. The learning element proceeds in learning time.

In the learning time dimension, it is usually impossible to deal with the entire issue cycle. Ordinarily, the best that can be done is to go from concerns through alternatives and back to concerns.

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Simulation as a teaching method can extend the issue cycle, in its learning time dimension, through choice, action, and evaluation.

Put another way, in a learning situation there is a person or group of people who are caught up in an issue cycle. The goal is to proceed as far as is practical through the cells of the issue cycle and in a manner that increases the stock of useful knowledge held by the person or group.

Any particular learning element can be evaluated in terms of: (1) how well it permits the issue cycle to be traversed by the participants, (2) how well it allows for articulation between the teaching resources and the issue cycle in learning time, and (3) what it costs in relation to other alternatives.

DISCUSSION

The model focuses on a few key components. These are: (1) the issue cycle, (2) the intervention cycle, (3) intervention styles, and (4) learning elements. Because these components are common to all public policy education programs, they can be used as a basis for a checklist of questions which each practioner may ask himself.

1. Issue cycle

    a. What is the structure of the issue?

    b. How far has the issue cycle progressed?

    c. Should this issue cycle be added to, retained in, dropped from the list of program concerns?

2. Intervention cycle

    a. Where is intervention desirable, appropriate, possible?

    b. Are sufficient resources available to conduct a program that will make a difference?

    c. What is the best way to assemble and deploy available resources, provided they are sufficient?

    d. Is the intervention issue oriented or client oriented? Which should it be?

3. Intervention style

    a. What intervention style is proposed? Is it appropriate to the issue, the intervention cycle, the client system, the abilities and interests of the practitioner?

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b. Would another intervention style be more effective in this situation?

4. Learning elements

   a. Does the design of the learning elements (meetings, written material, media) harmonize with what is known or has been decided about the issue cycle, the intervention cycle, the client system, and the intervention style?

   b. Does the design of learning elements maximize the chance of the participants to explore the issue cycle within the limits of the learning situation?

Every practitioner (or team of practitioners) will give somewhat different answers to these questions. Differences will be due to varying conditions in each state, experience, skills, professional goals, available resources, the views of those with whom he (or the team) works, and similar objective constraints. Subjective considerations or value judgments enter also.

Considerable variation in the answers to questions in the check-list is tolerable. Part of the difference would be due to objective factors beyond the control of practitioners. Part of the difference would be due to a divergence of values, and that part should, for now, be isolated from a study of methods.

However, variation not due to objective considerations or differences in values should be reduced. This variation is mostly due to a lack of knowledge of adult education methods in general and public policy education methods in particular. At this writing there is no measure of the variation due to the need to improve knowledge of "how to teach" public policy.

The author must leave to each reader these tasks: (1) testing his program and perceptions against the model and discussion given here (or against a model of his own construction if he finds this model inadequate), (2) finding which parts of his program diverge from his chosen standard, (3) finding which parts of the divergence could be remedied by improving public policy teaching methods, and (4) attempting to carry out the improvement and communicating the results of such efforts to his fellow practitioners.

SUMMARY

It is possible to identify a sequence of events termed an issue cycle. The progression involves the steps taken by people as they resolve public issues. A public policy program is an intervention

intended to increase the amount of objective or scientific knowledge used by the people who are involved in the issue. A program may be issue oriented or client oriented and may intervene at any point in the issue cycle. Intervention styles vary from directive to supportive. A program consists of learning elements which should be designed to maximize the use of the resources available for learning.

The descriptive model sketched above can be used to generate a list of questions which stimulate the public policy educator to look at his program and how he executes it. The answers given by public policy educators will vary due to objective differences among states, values of the individuals, and lack of understanding of policy education methods. Variations due to the first two sources are unavoidable, but variation due to lack of knowledge of methods should be remedied by individual and group study of how to conduct public policy education programs.