

# PROGRAMS OF EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

## We Must Clarify The Purposes They Are Meant to Serve

*E. Raymond Platig*

Throughout the twentieth century Americans have been on a seemingly endless search for that device or approach to international relations which would remove from such relations the harsh reality of tension and violence. At various times during this period arbitration treaties, international organization, collective security, international law, information programs, economic aid and technical assistance have been set forth as the keys that would finally unlock the door to perpetual peace. In the era since World War II, the device of exchange of persons has often occupied the center of the stage of hope. Its right to that central position was reaffirmed when President Dwight D. Eisenhower placed the considerable weight of his personal prestige and high office behind the concept of peoples-to-peoples diplomacy.

The way in which the exchange of persons can be looked upon as a device which will supply *the* answer to the basic problems of the world is seen clearly in the "platform" adopted by the Public Relations Committee of the People-to-People Program at a White House conference: "Every dollar we spend for defense—every atom bomb we can build, every ship, every gun—is wholly negative. . . . We use them to hold off potential enemies while peaceful ideas take hold, and peoples come to friendship and understanding which will make them unnecessary."

Having thus suggested that friendship and understanding will relieve us of the cost and threat of armaments, the "platform" goes on to make the rather remarkable observation that actions and statements by governments are "often suspect" abroad, but that "the actions and statements of individual citizens are universally accepted as a true measure of the attitude and atmosphere of the country from which they come." The obvious conclusion then follows: Only a people-to-people program can "do the job of achieving friendship and understanding for America on the part of the citizens of other nations throughout the world."

Such exaggerated hopes for the exchange of persons may not be held by all Americans, but one

Mr. Platig is a staff member of the Social Science Foundation and Associate Professor of International Relations, University of Denver. This article is a revision of an informal paper he presented to the International Affairs Section of the 1960 meeting of the Adult Education Association.

suspects that their expression evokes a sympathetic response from a vast majority of citizens. As he grapples with public issues, the average citizen of good will is always tempted to believe that proposals which are humane in conception and relatively inexpensive in execution must also be successful on a grand scale.

It is likely, therefore, that the average adult American who manifests any interest at all in exchange programs carries around in his head a fairly simple model of how these programs should operate and what they ought to accomplish. I propose to construct that model in broad outline in the belief that it can serve usefully as a point of reference for the discussion of issues connected with the exchange of persons. It should be made clear that the model presented here is not based upon the results of any polls or surveys conducted among the members of a scientifically selected sample of the American populace. Strictly speaking, therefore, the model should be viewed as a series of hypotheses; to put it in non-academic terms, the model should be viewed as a more-or-less straw man.

•

In the minds of most Americans who think about such matters, their ideal model of an exchange program begins with the country of Newland. It is, of course, an underdeveloped nation, but a proud one. In it we find a bright, eager nineteen-year-old student who wishes to become a civil engineer but, alas, there are no engineering colleges in his home country. His government, slightly authoritarian and not exactly a representative democracy, is nevertheless enlightened (certainly enlightened enough to be anti-Communist) and has developed its first five-year plan calling for major construction projects. It recognizes that it will need two hundred highly skilled civil engineers as soon as possible. Both our student, who is a devoted patriot, and his government recognize that it would serve the interests of them both if he were to study engineering abroad—preferably in the United States.

So strongly is the government of Newland convinced that an engineering education for our student will serve the interests of the nation that it is quite willing to finance his four to five years of study. But unfortunately the dollar exchange required for such

a venture is simply not available. However, the United States government, caught up in a Cold War with the Communist bloc, has demonstrated some concern for the success for Newland's development program, looking upon that success as a barrier to Communism. After prolonged negotiations, during which the American government tactfully but successfully suggests some changes in the five-year plan that will make it more realistic, an agreement for technical and economic assistance is signed and dollars become available to finance our student. There is, it would seem, a happy coincidence of the interests of our student and of the national interests of the United States and Newland, as an enlightened American or Newlander would expect.

Arriving in the United States, our student is awe-struck by the nervousness of neon lights, the constantly augmented array of automobiles, the ubiquity of gleaming, tiled, flushing plumbing fixtures, the neck-cracking height of tall buildings, and the vastness of agriculturally rich rolling plains. He soon learns to accept these symbols of bustling prosperity as the fruits of the American way of life. He then settles down to his studies and establishes a brilliant record in his chosen American college. On evenings and weekends, he often speaks to American audiences, charming them with his appreciativeness and graciousness and gently dispelling their ignorance and misconceptions concerning his homeland and the policies of his government. In the homes of his American hosts he learns that Americans are a decent, church-going, hard-working, peaceful people who love their children.

With degree in hand our student is somewhat tempted to try his newly won skills in the Land of Opportunity but, recognizing his duty, he somewhat sadly but nonetheless proudly departs for home. Back in his home country our graduate engineer is somewhat disappointed by the contrasts he can now see, but at the same time he is pleased with the progress made in his absence, and quickly loses himself in building new highways which will carry the mineral wealth of the interior to the growing industry on the coast. He becomes uncomfortably aware, however, of the fact that the government of Newland is not as democratic as it could be, that private initiative doesn't have as much free play as in the United States. Gradually, he and others of like mind succeed in liberalizing the political economy of Newland by institutionalizing the universal truth, which is enshrined in all American institutions, that freedom and progress are inseparable. Thus Newland, through both the political and technical-economic efforts of our American-trained engineer and others similarly blessed, becomes a progressive democracy, a prosperous bulwark against Communist expansion, a warm proponent of international peace.

Some of the assumptions on which this ideal model is constructed are obviously fallacious. Others, however, cannot be identified until we are clear as to the purpose or purposes which exchange programs are meant to serve. Disagreement at the level of assumptions, concepts, and purpose provide us with some of the more basic issues that should concern those engaged in exchange programs. There are at least three such issues which require more attention than they have had.

•

Our model suggests that by educating foreigners in American universities in the same manner in which we educate Americans we promote the interests of our nation in the world at large. Put another way, our model suggests that American education, just by making itself available to foreigners, serves as an instrument of national policy.

Many Americans in both government and educational circles are coming to see that the service which American education can perform for national policy does not come about automatically and inevitably as the result of mere exposure. They are therefore calling for more joint planning and a proper division of labor between government agencies and educational institutions involved in exchange programs, especially those programs which affect the growing number of underdeveloped nations. More and more one hears, particularly from educators, a clarion call for the universities and other educational institutions to enter the national service. To this one hardly can raise serious objection provided the educators and the government officials involved mutually acknowledge several important implications.

First it must be recognized that simply opening the doors of American universities to adequately financed foreign students may well not be enough; special and often extraordinary programs may be required. Secondly, the universities must take seriously their responsibility to serve the national interest and not turn a program supported by public funds into a boondoggle designed to implement some educator's pet scheme. Third, the universities should insist that the government pay a full and just price for any such service in the same way that industry demands a full and just price when it goes into the national service. Fourth, moves to put more "foreign area" or "international" studies into the general liberal arts curriculum ought to be viewed as overdue attempts to bring the liberal arts tradition up to date and not be advertised as a national service in order to justify a claim on the federal treasury. Fifth, and most important, universities and educators that go into the national service must take care not to neglect those educational purposes unrelated to the national interest which can be served by international exchange.

The past few years have seen a display by Amer-

ican institutions of an imaginative array of special and even extraordinary programs. A number of American universities have inaugurated or have been planning a variety of schools, institutes and programs designed to train Americans in the skills of "overseasmanship" and to train foreigners, especially those from the new nations, in the economic, social political, ideological and even moral skills of "development administration." All of this is predicated upon the assumption that the interests of the United States are best served in the underdeveloped areas of the world by helping the peoples of these areas carry through their revolutions of rising expectations. If this assumption is correct, one cannot object in any basic way to the effort to create within American universities trade schools for the training of administrative technicians who will serve the national interest in a variety of settings around the world, provided once again that the points mentioned earlier are kept in mind. And provided also that the university which decides to launch a special program in this area not give in to the ever-present temptation to build permanent institutions and programs to meet what, from the point of view of the national interest, may be temporary needs—unless, of course, the university, apart from all political considerations, is convinced that the program ought to be a permanent part of its intellectual endeavor.

•

The most disturbing aspect of the developing political awareness of American educators is to be found neither in the proposition that universities can serve national political goals nor in the specifics of the programs suggested. Rather it is to be found in the extent to which these educators tend to see educational exchange programs exclusively in the context of national policy.

It may well be true, as an educator in charge of one of the newest graduate programs in this field puts it, that "Shakespearean studies would hardly be of most value to young Nigerians who want to be of service to the development of their country." And it may also be true, as many observers testify, that in some underdeveloped nations there are numbers of nationals who are unemployed and disillusioned because their Western-style educations did not prepare them to perform the developmental tasks that now need doing. But even so, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that there is a mysterious process of learning and discovery that takes place both across cultures and within cultures, a process that has an integrity of its own and deserves to be nurtured and appraised independently of political considerations.

One hardly could maintain—though it is often suggested—that the American government has an obligation to give financial support to such "pure" educational efforts on behalf of foreign students. In

a world of sovereign states it is necessary to acknowledge that the obligations and needs of a government may be conceived differently when it considers its role in relation to the education of its own citizens and when it considers its role vis-a-vis non-citizens. One must acknowledge also the impossibility of drawing a sure line which can separate those learning experiences which serve the national interest from those which are detrimental or irrelevant to the national interest. It can be hoped that government officials would incline to the broad view and err on the side of supporting programs which occasionally are irrelevant. Nevertheless, the distinction between education per se and political education is an important one to maintain.

One could hope, however, that educators, universities, and philanthropic foundations would see the value of and lend support to educational exchange for the sheer sake of knowledge and thought. Who is to say what rich new insights may flow from the mind of a Nigerian Shakespeare scholar? Or from the mind of an Indian schooled in the political thought of Machiavelli?

It would be a sad day indeed if American educational institutions were to forget, in the rush to serve national political purposes—as important as they may be—that education is more than training for a job; it is the conservation, reproduction, cross-breeding, and expansion of the world's mental resources, always in short supply and to be treasured for their own sake.

In the early days of educational exchange Americans rather naively assumed that *any* educational experience necessarily served American purposes. Today we may be in danger of believing, just as naively, that any exchange of persons and ideas which serve American purposes deserves to be dignified with the name of education and should be given priority over other educational efforts.

The second basic issue which should concern us can be put in the form of one observation and one question: Everyone seems to agree that "understanding" is the desired fruit of the exchange of persons. What do we mean by understanding and why is it desired? This is a very simple question but one that is seldom raised.

If "understanding" means anything in the context of international relations, it means that the person who "understands" grasps the truth about the ambitions, capabilities, behavior and accomplishments of the peoples and governments of other nations. Why is understanding desirable? The answer would seem self-evident: Understanding is desirable because it provides us with a more realistic basis on which to rest our approach and actions toward others; thus it provides us with an increased opportunity to select goals which are achievable as well as desirable and to pursue them with success.

As self-evident as this may appear, the usual an-

swer given for the desirability of understanding among the peoples of different nations is that it makes it possible for those nations to live together peacefully. But does it? If my neighbor is an arsonist, and if I understand him perfectly, it is quite likely that the very act of understanding may disrupt relations which were kept amicable by my ignorance. Understanding, in other words, may contribute not to friendship and peace but rather to enmity and war. The best evidence of the validity of this statement as an international political proposition is to be found in the civil wars of history, for in the situations preceding such wars the possibility of inter-cultural misunderstandings was frequently nonexistent.

As far back as 1948, in the very early stages of the Cold War, the proper relationship between understanding and international conflict was pointed out by one of the most eminent of contemporary political scientists. "An intelligent and successful foreign policy," wrote Hans Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations*, "depends upon the Americans' and the Russians' understanding what both nations are and want. Peace between . . . [them] depends in the last analysis upon whether what one of them is and wants is compatible with what the other is and wants." And yet the popular fallacy persists, that there is at all times a positive correlation between understanding and peace.

The third and final basic issue is closely related to the second; in fact it may be but an esoteric variation of the popular fallacy just cited. It is often suggested or implied that the purpose of the international exchange of persons is to get both Americans and foreigners to understand that the American way of life embodies in its institutions and orientations certain universal social principles which must find expression in the institutions of other societies if they are to be modern, progressive and prosperous. Such suggestions are usually accompanied by the warning that American institutions and practices cannot be introduced without change into other cultures. But still there is a widespread belief that there is in the American way of life a universal essence which can be reduced to a series of basic principles transferable to other cultural settings.

This raises the question as to whether or not it is possible to identify principles of social practice and organization that have universal validity and applicability. One can raise the question without necessarily slipping over into a rootless cultural relativism. It is possible to argue that while there are certain universal *values*, such as peace, freedom, equality, etc., to which all men aspire, there are no universally applicable *principles*. Once man attempts to make social rules and arrangements whose purpose it is to concretize the values to which he and

all men aspire—once, in other words, he moves from the realm of value to the realm of principle (or rule of behavior)—he becomes engaged in a highly complex socio-ideological task which deprives the rule of universality.

There are two reasons for this. First, operational rules, unlike our more vague aspirations, have to take into account the fact that equally desirable values often make conflicting demands upon human behavior. Such, for example, is frequently the case with the values of freedom and equality, or with the values of peace and justice. Second, operational rules or principles, unlike the values to which we aspire, have to cope with the peculiarities of a particular culture and unique situations; in so doing they become time- and culture-oriented if not bound.

For these and other reasons there is room for grave doubt that there are in the socio-economic-political principles of the American way of life universals which are applicable in any useful sense to other national cultures with which we do not already share certain basic and well-established practices. We do share certain values with the peoples of other cultures, but the precarious relationship between a value and the principles meant to implement or concretize that value is shown by the fact that we share a good many values (such as freedom, peace, equality and knowledge) even with the Communists for whose principles we profess a disdain the intensity of which is equaled only by its reciprocity.

The correct answer to the question raised here about the possibility of identifying meaningful and applicable universals in the American way of life is a matter of basic importance. For it is an issue that affects not only our approach to the exchange of persons but our whole approach to the Cold War, especially as it manifests itself in our relations with the non-Communist world.

If there are transferable and transplantable principles in the American way, then perhaps we are justified in taking seriously the brave talk of our national spokesmen who speak so glibly of "extending the area of freedom." But if there are no such principles, then perhaps we should stop deluding ourselves with talk of an ideologically grand national purpose and confess that what we mean by "freedom" for other nations is simply freedom from the control of international Communism. If the newer, underdeveloped nations of the world can maintain with our help that kind of freedom, then it will be not so much the frantic efforts of American and American-trained development administrators that will shape in ways appropriate to the twentieth century their national patterns and practices. Rather that job more likely will be done by the effects of time, traditional culture, the accidents of politics, and the mystery of confident, politically relaxed, genuine educational exchange.