




Helping People Help Themselves:
It's not just the **What**
but the **How** that Counts


David P. Ellerman

Visiting Scholar, Philosophy Dept., UCR
Fellow, Center on Global Justice, UCSD

The Setting

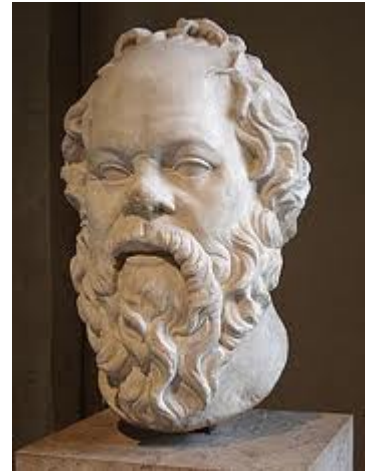
- 
- Helper-Doer relationship:
 - Development agency-Client Govt.;
 - Foundation-think tanks;
 - Think tankers-Policy makers.
 - The **What** = Messages that need to be “transmitted” from helpers to doers.
 - With fall of communism, the **What** is standard: private property market economy and political democracy.
 - So is the work of think tanks now simple and easy?? No!
 - The **How** = Multidimensional situation that determines whether or not real, transformative, authentic, and sustainable learning takes place.

The Many Dimensions of the **How**

- 
- Active versus Passive learning;
 - Indirect versus Direct teaching;
 - Intrinsic versus Extrinsic motives for learning;
 - Internal versus External motives for learning;
 - Subjective versus Objective road to learning; &
 - Horizontal versus Vertical learning (our main topic).

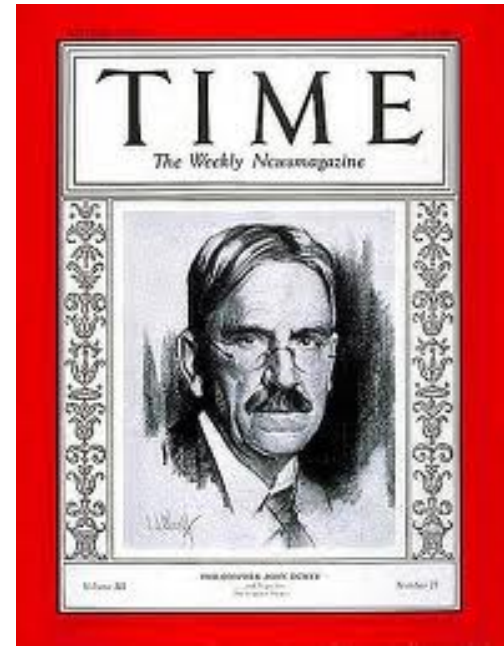
Active versus Passive Learning

- Socratic dialogue based on doers asking questions and Socratic helper not giving answers to passive learners but engaging in dialogue so doers actively develop answers themselves.
- "The cultivation of the understanding, as of any of man's other faculties, is generally achieved by his own activity, his own ingenuity, or his own methods of using the discoveries of others. Now, State measures always imply more or less compulsion; and even where this is not directly the case, they accustom men to look for instruction, guidance, and assistance from without, rather than to rely upon their own expedients."
(Wilhelm von Humboldt)



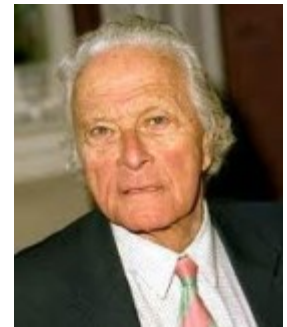
Indirect versus Direct Help

- Socratic dialogue also the early model for indirect teaching.
- John Dewey, the foremost education theorist of the 20th century for active learning, also emphasized indirectness.
- “The best kind of help to others, whenever possible, is indirect, and consists in such modifications of the conditions of life, of the general level of subsistence, as enables them independently to help themselves.” (John Dewey)



Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Motivation

- Messages coupled with significant extrinsic incentives—are largely worthless for genuine sustainable learning. Example: World Bank.
- “We will pretend to fulfill your conditionalities, and you pretend that you don't have to move the money anyway.” (Variation on old Soviet joke)
- Generalized moral hazard problem, e.g., Peter Bauer's critique of foreign aid.
- Instead of financing change, much aid ends up financing not having to change. "Less is more."




Cost of rewards: Ineffectiveness of Extrinsic Motivation

- “But soon after virtue has been ‘bought’ through aid under these conditions, the reservations and resistances will find some expression—for example, through half-hearted implementation or sabotage of the agreed-to policies—and relations between donor and recipient will promptly deteriorate as a result.” (Albert O. Hirschman)
- "If economists understand anything, it is incentives." (World Bank economist)
- The over-emphasis on extrinsic incentives would be an occupational disease of economists—if it were not their occupation. (Variation of J. L. Austin quip)



Internal versus External Motivation

- 
- Is an obstacle or impediment a natural occurrence or due to an opposing human will?
 - External motivation is motivation “supplied” by another human will (e.g., carrots and sticks).
 - Internal motivation is supplied by one’s own will (and natural circumstances).

Coercion & Oppression are externally motivated

- “The nature of things does not madden us, only ill will does’, said Rousseau. The criterion of oppression is the part that I believe to be played by other human beings, directly or indirectly, with or without the intention of doing so, in frustrating my wishes.” (Isaiah Berlin)
- “In this sense 'freedom' refers solely to a relation of men to other men, and the only infringement of it is coercion by men.” (Friedrich Hayek)




Subjective versus Objective Road


- Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) developed many of these themes in mid-19th century—which he summarized as the subjective versus the objective road to learning or decision-making.
- "But to be a lover, a hero, etc. is reserved specifically for subjectivity, because objectively one does not become that. ... And ... piety is rooted precisely in subjectivity; one does not become pious objectively." (Kierkegaard)



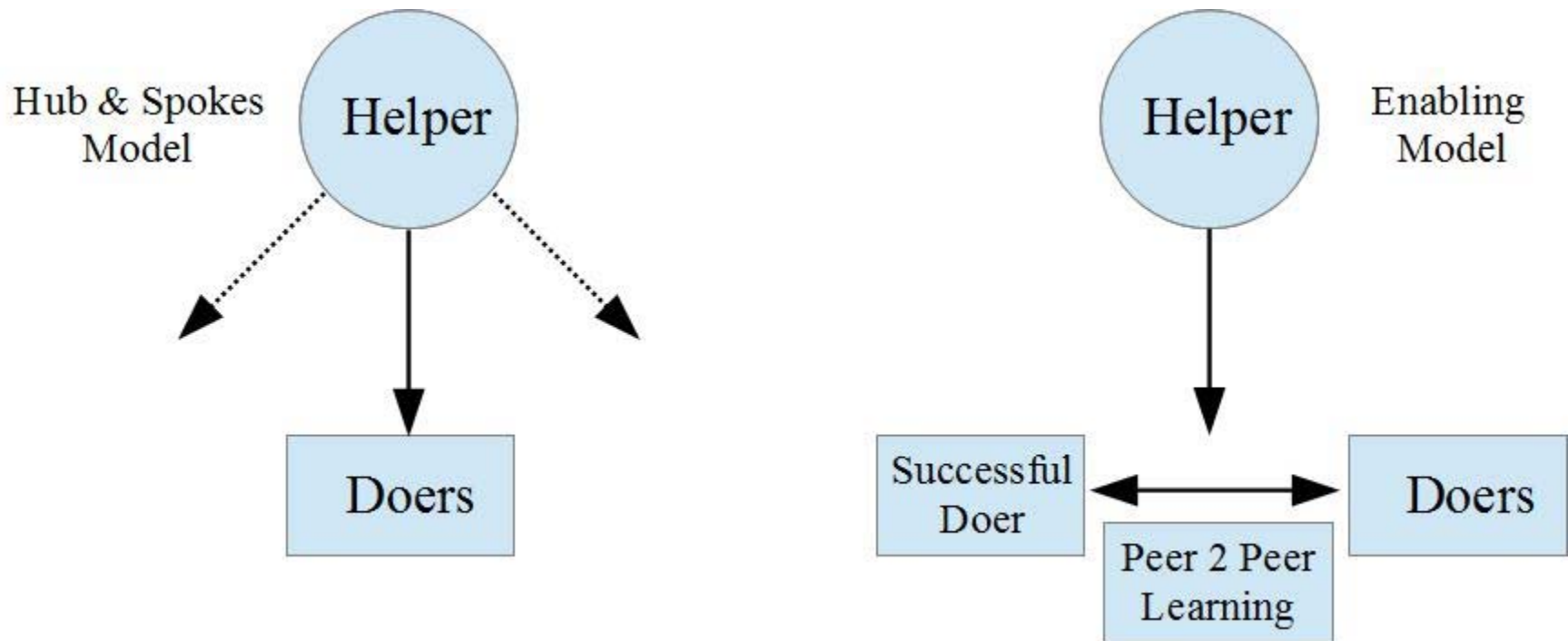
Not the **What**, but the **How**

- 
- Kierkegaard favored ironically observing the difference between genuine religious faith and the ostentatious religious hypocrisy of “honorable gentlemen.”
 - “All ironic observing is a matter of continually paying attention to the 'how,' whereas the honorable gentleman with whom the ironist has the honor of dealing pays attention only to the 'what'.” (Kierkegaard)

Horizontal versus Vertical Learning (Networked versus Hub/spokes learning)


- 
- Horizontal = networked = Peer-to-Peer (P2P) learning.
 - Not “sage on a stage” but “guide by the side.”
 - Peer-to-Peer learning resolves many of the problems in the **How** of learning:
 - No one-up relationship over another peer,
 - No aid to give,
 - No need to engineer the will of another peer, and
 - No excuses: if a peer can do it, then you can do it too.

Basic Model



- Basic Message: encourage experimentation, benchmark/document successes, catalyze/enable horizontal learning between peers.


The Know-How



Moreover, relevant knowledge is not abstract "World Banker-USAID" knowledge of "best practices" (e.g., Powerpoint slides and flip charts) but:

- "inarticulate practical knowledge" (Michael Oakeshott),
- "personal knowledge" (Michael Polanyi),
- "distributed knowledge" (Friedrich Hayek),
- "know-how" (Gilbert Ryle).

Networks for Horizontal Learning


- 
- MedPIN = Mediterranean Policy Institute Network: Mid-90s network of think tanks in Middle East and North Africa.
 - Like Atlas Foundation helping network of think tanks.
 - Or each think tank helping a network of, say, cities.
 - Secondments (“reform tourism”) to a comparable but more successful organization or country.
 - World Bank tried to have many networks on specific topics but usually succumbed to just transmitting aid-sweetened messages rather than sponsoring peer-to-peer learning (what if they learned the “wrong” thing?!).

Horizontal Learning in Social Work



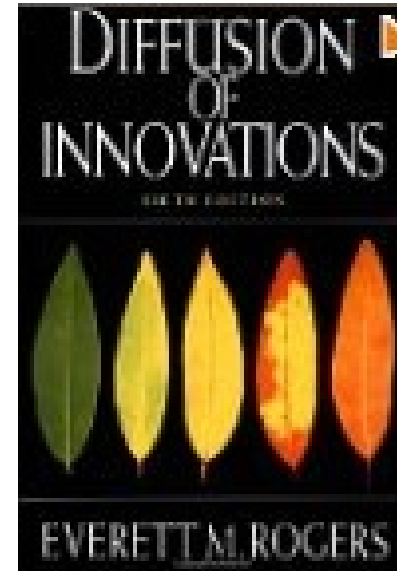
- *Family Independence Initiative* (FII), founded by Maurice Lim Miller, uses peer-to-peer learning instead of traditional vertical social worker-client relation.
- FII works with a family if they bring in a natural community (e.g., ethnic or church-related) of six to eight other families to form a peer-support group.
- Families in group are encouraged to undertake and document any of 50+ activities to help themselves in return for small monetary incentives (what would otherwise be paid to a social worker).
- When a family succeeds, say to buy a home or send a child to college, then other families know they could do it too with help from those who already did it.

Horizontal Learning in Chinese Reforms

- 
- Bolshevik tendencies exhausted in Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.
 - Hence China allowed pragmatic decentralized experimentation in agriculture and industry,
 - successes spread through unassisted P2P learning &
 - successful reforms given blessing of Beijing to spread faster.
 - Family responsibility system with long-term land leasing in agriculture, and
 - Township/village enterprises (TVEs) in industry.
 - These innovations in 70s and 80s ushered in the greatest growth episode in history.

Everett Rogers on Chinese Reforms

- "The diffusion of innovations in China is distinctive in that it is
 - 1) more horizontal in nature,
 - 2) less dependent upon scientific and technical expertise, and
 - 3) more flexible in allowing re-invention of the innovation as it is implemented by local units."

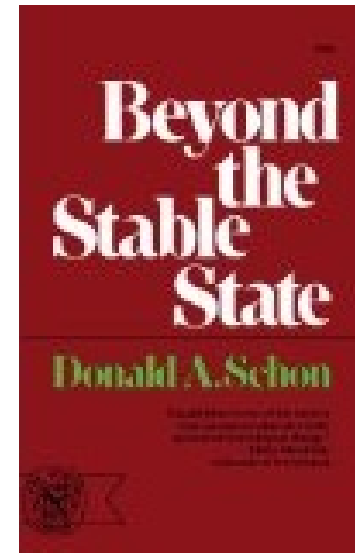


"These aspects of decentralized diffusion are facilitated by China's use of such diffusion strategies as models and on-the-spot conferences. The 'learning from others' approach to decentralized diffusion in China was adopted officially as a national policy in the national constitution in 1978." (Everett Rogers)


Donald Schon on innovation and learning

- "Government cannot play the role of 'experimenter for the nation', seeking first to identify the correct solution, then to train society at large in its adaptation. The opportunity for learning is primarily in discovered systems at the periphery, not in the nexus of official policies at the center."

"The movement of learning is as much from periphery to periphery, or periphery to center, as from center to periphery. Central comes to function as facilitator of society's learning, rather than as society's trainer." (Donald Schon)

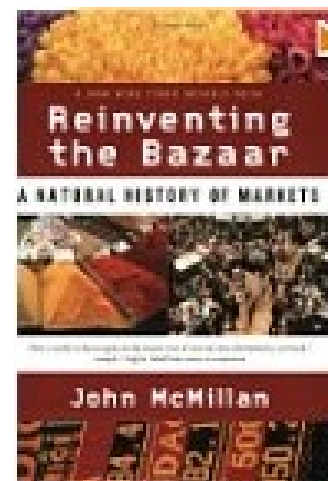


Vertical Learning in the Russian Reforms

- 
- The Russians had no need for experimentation since they already had the “answers” from the Best & Brightest Harvard economists (Sachs, Summers, and Shleifer).
 - The "market Bolsheviks" deliberately stopped home-grown privatization programs such as lease-buyouts in favor of shock therapy programs.
 - When sociologist, Ralf Dahrendorf, echoing Edmund Burke’s critique of “shock therapy” in the French Revolution, called “to work by trial and error within institutions”, Jeffrey Sachs directly responded:
“If instead the philosophy were one of open experimentation, I doubt that the transformation would be possible at all, at least without costly and dangerous wrong turns.” (Jeff Sachs)

1990s: China +10.3%/yr., Russia -4.8%/yr.


- In Stanford economist John McMillan's 2002 book praising markets, *Reinventing the Bazaar: A Natural History of Markets*, he contrasted the Chinese reforms with the Russian reform debacle.



- In Harvard economist Greg Mankiw's review of the book:

“Our profession lent some of its best and brightest to the transition effort, such as my former colleague Jeffrey Sachs. Most of these advisors pushed Russia to embrace a rapid transition to capitalism. If this was a mistake, as McMillan suggests, its enormity makes it one of the greatest blunders in world history.” (Mankiw)

Experimentum crucis

- 
- Thus in the transition-to-market strategies of China and Russia, we have a natural crucial experiment in horizontal-experimental learning versus socially-engineered vertical “learning” with the results:
 - China: greatest growth episode in history,
 - Russia: “one of the greatest blunders in world history.”
 - One could not ask for a better crucial experiment to show that it is not just the **What** but the **How** that counts!

The End

David Ellerman

www.ellerman.org

www.blog.ellerman.org

Book version of the story:

*Helping People Help Themselves:
From the World Bank to an
Alternative Philosophy of
Development Assistance.*

University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Foreword by Albert O. Hirschman.

