

## ESSAY REVIEWS

*AN INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: SOCIAL, LEGAL, AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES.* E. J. Haller and K. A. Strike. New York: Longman, 1986. 347 pages. Reviewed by Mary Anne Raywid, Professor, Department of Administration and Policy Studies, Hofstra University.

The reform thrust in general and the "excellence movement" in particular both show increasing signs of zeroing in on school administrators. Whereas teachers and students were earlier prime targets, administrators are rapidly emerging as the major flak-catchers. And even when blame is assigned indirectly, it has far-reaching consequences for the administrative role and function.

The primary manifestation of that indirect blame is "restructuring," which now appears to be the likely reform focus for the next several years. The restructuring demand is tantamount, of course, to criticism of school administrators: either that they have failed to use their power and authority to organize schools competently and effectively, or—even more directly—that their power and authority itself ought to be redistributed.

One of the continuing related criticisms has been that the preparation given future administrators equips them only for the "administrivial" functions of middle management—that they are not prepared to function as genuine leaders within their schools, much less as the "statesmen" that superintendents were once supposed to be. At least one reaction to the recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration intensely reflected this view, calling the commission's report "An American Tragedy" (Gibboney, 1987).

This sort of criticism comes both from within the academic community and outside it. For instance, many within the liberal arts see very little real knowledge which bears directly on the administrative function—thus leaving professional preparation for the school administrators primarily as a set of techniques for handling daily chores. Alasdair MacIntyre, in his widely acclaimed *After Virtue* (1981), becomes a power voice for this point of view. MacIntyre denies that there is any body of specialized knowledge grounding a managerial function and thus finds the administrative role fraudulent in its claim to specialized expertise. From quite a different perspective, many administrators themselves offer support to such an argument: They inadvertently

deny their claim to professional status by denying the relevance and importance of their preparation and asserting that they really learn what they need to know on the job.

Accordingly, practicing school administrators are likely to see improved preparation in terms of a strengthened and expanded clinical component for prospective school officials. "A number one concern," asserts a recent AASA article, "is that those training for leadership roles in schools are taught too much theory and given few, if any, opportunities to practice what they learn" ("Panel," 1987).

Others, however, tend to construe the major task of administrator improvement precisely as changing the understandings—the primary orientation—of those in the role. To cite two recent examples, *Productive School Systems for a Nonrational World* (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986) argues that the major requisite to restoring school efficacy is to enable people to view and understand schools in a particular way. *The Devil in the Classroom* (Marshall, 1985) argues that administrators must transform quite a different kind of orientation—the pervasive perception-projection of the school as a hostile environment. But despite their differences about the particular understandings faulted and sought, both these works take the primary task of improving school administration to be one of changed conception and perception.

I am sympathetic to new administrators assigned tasks they find bewildering because they have never seen the intricate forms to be completed or been through the procedures routinely required for standard situations. I tend, however, to feel that such gaps in their preparation are rarely of such long-term significance as are certain others. I am much less concerned about having them master the technique—that is, learn the skills and memorize the guidelines—than about having them come to *think* as administrators ought to be capable of thinking. This process seems to consist of two separate requisites. The first is met when the prospective administrator comprehends and assimilates the responsibility for making the whole organization go—for thinking of a *system* as distinct from the focus of a teacher who is primarily concerned with and responsible for the operation of *one component* of the system, a particular classroom. This shift in viewpoint and orientation is difficult to bring about; through much of their preparation as administrators, most future principals and superintendents are not functioning as administrators but as teachers. Thus, their vantage point and identification is likely to remain that of the teacher rather than that of the administrator.

But the second requisite of coming to think as an administrator, I should think is, if anything, even more difficult to realize: getting newcomers to think with and think through the concepts that ought to guide them in understanding and responding to situations. I am sure the challenge is well known to every professor of administration: the frequent case of the student who demonstrates competency in exams of theoretical knowledge and understanding but whose thinking about real situations and practical challenges in administration

appears to be totally innocent of any such knowledge. Ask an intricate interpretive exam question about Blake and Mouton and Fiedler, and you get a sophisticated reply. But ask a prospective administrator, under less formal conditions, what leadership theory seems most helpful—or what *any* leadership theory might recommend in dealing with a particular situation—and you get a blank stare.

The problem is not typically getting them to *acquire* the knowledge but helping them learn how to use it in particular ways—namely (unfortunately), in the only ways it can do them any good. (After all, the postgraduate school opportunities to contrast Blake and Mouton with Fiedler are fairly limited.) It is, perhaps, first a challenge of making the tyro perceive and appreciate the applicability of systematic knowledge to actual situations and then a matter of inducing him or her into doing so. The “inducing” begins, of course, with acquiring relevant knowledge; but at least at some level, the prospective administrator must grasp its relevance to be able to apply what has been learned. This is the fundamental challenge of all professional education—and ultimately of the liberal arts as well. (Interestingly, it is not just the relevance of systematic knowledge to administrators that continues under question. This time around, the liberal arts are simultaneously being called upon to demonstrate their significance to anything beyond themselves. That is, of course, the ultimate meaning of the recent extension of the accountability demand to higher education.)

How then can we induct the newcomer into the practice of *thinking* with and through the knowledge that has been acquired? It is this challenge which perhaps poses the greatest single pedagogical difficulty in preparing administrators. It is apparently the challenge least often met successfully—with the consequence that administrators continue to see “all that theory” as irrelevant and, as a result, can hardly function at professional levels.

It is this enormous and most fundamental challenge which Emil Haller and Kenneth Strike have sought to confront in their new text, *An Introduction to Educational Administration*. They have done so by attempting to model the way in which an administrator should think about actual problems by presenting eight case studies of problem situations and taking the reader through each, pointing out the concerns and considerations that must be taken into account in resolving the difficulty.

For Haller and Strike, three sets of concerns must be addressed in each case: legal, ethical, and technical. As the authors explain, “An education that provides the administrator with technical skills but fails to communicate anything of how ideals of liberty, equality, and fairness apply to administering educational institutions seems sadly incomplete” (1986, p. xxi). Thus as they set forth each problem situation, they supply pertinent legal considerations, they emphasize the underlying political theory, and they explore the ethical issues at stake. Each case offers a rich display of the multifaceted complexity of daily situations for those sufficiently knowledgeable to see and understand. Each case study also



manages to demonstrate how two first-rate minds engage familiar sorts of challenges, the knowledge they bring to bear, and the steps they pursue in applying it.

A number of concerns are pertinent to weighing the merits of such an approach to instruction. First, much obviously rests on the cases developed because they are used to marshall and articulate as well as to delimit the knowledge presented. They are also used for motivational purposes, to capture and sustain reader attention. I find the cases fascinating fare. Each is a highly plausible instance of vital, current school problems and issues, and each is sufficiently well developed to represent characters and difficulties with which many will readily identify. One outstanding pedagogical accomplishment of the cases is that a number of them will probably succeed in changing readers' minds. That is, after reading the case introducing each chapter, many readers will probably be disposed toward a perspective and a resolution which subsequent pages will persuade them to abandon.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this, however, that the book is pedantic and that material is discernibly selected to support a predictable outcome. In fact, it is one of the book's notable strengths that only at the conclusion of each chapter, when Haller and Strike bring the intervening knowledge to bear directly on the case, does it become clear just what the knowledge recommends. They thus give knowledge dramatic force. And the logic with which it is applied is sufficiently persuasive; readers would be hard-pressed to refute it—or to deny the pertinence of the knowledge to resolving the difficulties presented by the case. It is in this way that the book manages to model the process of arriving at solutions to real difficulties while demonstrating the relevance of professional knowledge to doing so. Not only should the approach keep readers interested, but it should also result in fewer of them needing to ask what difference knowledge makes. And it may even enable some to grasp the way in which the knowledge yields concepts that should function as tools (or, perhaps better, as lenses) for approaching school situations and challenges.

As should be clear, I certainly applaud the undertaking Haller and Strike have assumed in their *Introduction to Educational Administration*, and I find some major pedagogical advantages in the way they have executed their plan. But other questions need also be raised in assessing the adequacy of an introductory text. Some might concede its pedagogical advantages, yet question the book's epistemological adequacy, asking whether it manages to address the major concerns covered in the introductions. There is no question that the book fails as an encyclopedic presentation of all the major entries in all the social science categories relevant to understanding and administering organizations. Its effort to encompass ethical and sociopolitical considerations must restrict the amount of the more typical social science fare they can include, and this may disturb some. (It is an advantage in this regard, however, that Haller and Strike go out of their way to provide citations for the major works in areas they discuss

and also offer appraisals of the theories and evidence they present.)

A second complaint that some will doubtless bring pertains to the inescapably subjective nature of their approach. To take on the resolution of particular problems is to openly invite the subjective in a way that conventional, author-distancing texts appear to avoid. This is inevitable, because what one knowledgeable analyst brings to bear in dealing with a particular problem can, and does, differ from what another equally competent individual draws on. Thus the Haller-Strike analysis of the cases they present is subject to challenge.

Some might also object to a particular bias that systematically appears in their treatments: The authors appear consistently "establishment" or "by-the-book" oriented. Under the circumstances, this approach can be seen as both advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, it is a bias; on the other hand, it is probably an important part of what is involved in coming to think as an administrator, with an organization or systems perspective in preference to a unit approach.

Given the pedagogical demands of preparing prospective administrators—not only of introducing them to the field, but of enabling them at any point to appreciate the relevance of systematic knowledge to the endeavor—I can live with the disadvantages of the Haller-Strike text. The book should go far in helping newcomers see that the job of the administrator is—or should be—far more than a matter of applying standard algorithms and techniques.

## REFERENCES

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