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Educational Administration:

Its Character, Conflicts and Compromise

by R. F. WEAVER

"WHEN two men co-operate to roll a stone that neither could have moved alone, the rudiments of administration have appeared."(1)

"In common usage, the term administration is roughly synonymous with that of management. In its proper use in education, it means much more than we mean by the word government and is closely related in content to such words as superintendence, supervision, planning, oversight, direction, organisation, control, guidance, and regulation. Besides referring to the process or activity of managing people and materials, the term is regularly used to designate the person or persons, the officials, in charge of the activity."(2)

It is a far cry from the elementary action of rolling a stone to moving the mountains of educational administration that have been thrown up in South Africa since the early schoolmastering days of the 17th century *sieckentrooster* at the Cape. Each of the provinces has developed its own educational system and in addition there have come into being State systems catering for a multiplicity of forms of what it has been expedient to designate as "higher education", and a comparative newcomer under the Minister of Bantu Education. Each of the systems has its own character, with a form of organisation designed to carry out policies prescribed at top level and recognised and executed down to the minor yet indispensable cogs in the intricate machinery of educational practice.

In all systems of educational administration, the initiative for broader issues of policy and organisation rests with the topmost officers and descends in a succession of hierarchical steps to the teacher in the classroom, wrestling, shall we say, with the four rules in arithmetic. In the descent, many of the responsibilities of administration fall away, until there is a danger to the individual that the opportunity for exercising initiative will reach vanishing point. It is with sincere regard of this universal danger that the present article has been compiled and presented here.

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The Government of the Transvaal

In the Transvaal, as the Nicol Report reminds us, control, including the responsibility for the administration of education, rests with the Administrator in Executive Committee, consisting of the Administrator (appointed by the State President under section 66 (1) of the Republic of South African Constitution Act 1961) and four members elected by the Provincial Council on the principle of proportional representation. Of the present Executive Committee, three members represent the Government and one the Opposition parties. It is this Executive Committee which is empowered on behalf of the Provincial Council to carry on the administration of provincial affairs, including "educatioin, other than higher education and Bantu education, until Parliament otherwise provides."(3) In actual practice, the Executive Committee lays down educational policy for the Province, though the elected Provincial Council can deliberate on existing and proposed policy and "can, by granting or withholding supplies, satisfy the demands of democratic government."(4)

The ultimate right of control, however, of any action in connection with the educational system is retained by the Executive Committee, unless a particular right is referred by ordinance to some other educational authority.

"In all other cases it can entertain an appeal against the action of its subordinates, or it may, on its own initiative, override such action."(4)

Policy

The broad aims of provincial educational policy are set out in Section 3 of the Educational Ordinance (Ordinance 29 of 1953), which coordinates all provincial legislation on education.

This policy "shall . . . be planned so as—

(i) to provide for a comprehensive educational service;

(ii) to have regard to the general principle that, in so far as may be compatible with the economical expenditure of public funds and with the required standard of efficient instruction, children shall be educated in accordance with such wishes of their parents as may be conveyed by the parents to the Department by means of a school committee or body referred to in section fifty-two; and

(iii) to foster a spirit of national unity and to promote racial co-operation in South Africa."(5)

Provincial policy is to be carried out through the guidance and control of the Director of Education, appointed by the Administrator to be head of the Transvaal Education Department. He is also required to promote education in the Province and the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose and is empowered "from time to time to prescribe —

(i) for primary education for pupils between the ages of approximately six years and approximately thirteen years whose instruction extends from the beginning of school education up to and including standard five, courses which in respect of content shall include the acquisition of that measure of basic knowledge, interest and ideals, as well as training in the use of the basic learning skills, which are or should be acquisitions common to all persons;

(ii) for secondary education for pupils between the ages of approximately fourteen years and approximately eighteen years whose instruction extends from standard six up to and including standard ten, courses in which in respect of content, provision shall be made for the use of tte acquired learning skills in the pupil's acquisition of knowledge and for the further development of his interests and aptitudes in preparation for his participation in full civic life and for his further education; and

(ii) courses for the training or further training of the teachers or prospective teachers referred to in paragraph (iii) of sub-section (2)."(5)

Closely allied to the powers of the Director and constituting the details of administration for which he is responsible are the specified functions of the Department of which he is the head. They include: the framing and application of syllabuses; the examination and certification of pupils; the training and certification of teachers; inspection; staffing of schools; school calendar; determination of educational facilities; powers and duties laid down by the Ordinance; and the issue of educational directives.

"In over 50 sections or sub-sections of the Ordinance," says an article in the *Bulletin*, "the Director is named as the official who must make the final decision, and in almost all other cases in which the Administrator has the final decision, the Director is required to make recommendations."(6)

It is obvious that the appointment of a Director saddled with such grave and arduous responsibilities should not be undertaken lightly, and there is every evidence that the appointment has always been made only after very careful consideration of the many-sided qualities required in the holder of the office. The former Administrator of the Transvaal, Dr. W. Nicol, was Chairman of the Provincial Education Committee which expressed in its report of 1939 the qualifications it expected of a Director of Education:—

"The Province has the right to seek for the very highest qualifications in its Director of Education. By natural endowment he should be a man with force of character, initiative and resourcefulness, combined with that broad humanity which will give him the necessary influence with parents and the general public interested in education. By training he should be an expert educationist in possession of a high academic degree and one who has shown that he has a complete mastery of the problems of his profession. By experience he should have actively participated in as many branches of the educational system as possible, and, while bearing in mind the desirability that he should still be of an age that would assure a comparatively long period of service, the Province should nevertheless aim at finding a man who will readily be accepted by senior and junior officers as their guide and counsellor."(4)

A Free Hand

The same report goes on to maintain that any Director accepting the responsibility for admini-

stration should be free from all outside interference:—

"It will apear from the observations and recommendations contained in" (previous paragraphs) "that the Commission is convinced that the Director of Education should have as free a hand as possible in the control of the Educational System. It is clear from the terms of the Education Act of 1907" (the predecessor of the present Ordinance) "that this was the intention of those who drew up the Act. It is nevertheless a remarkable fact that, since this Act was passed, not one Director of Education has remained in office until reaching the ordinary retiring age. In some cases, including that of the capable servant of the Province who died in office, their protests against the working of the system are on record and it would be futile to maintain that the position of a Director of Education, as that office is expected to operate in the Transvaal Province, has been a happy one during the last quarter of a century. We would urge that his decisions should be interfered with as little as possible, except, naturally, in cases of formal appeal to his superiors against his decisions."(4)

"It should not be possible for influential members of the public to have their wishes in educational matters carried out without first submitting their case to him. It is of the greatest importance that the prestige of the Department shall be maintained. If there is any truth in the assertion that educational matters are being decided by improper influences, including political influence, the only solution is that an officer of high standing, such as the Director, who can be readily impeached, who is subject to discipline for any irregular action, and who has all to lose under such impeachment, should be held responsible for individual decisions after the general policy has been laid down by the representatives of the people."(4)

Advice

One of the most welcome features of the Education Ordinance 1953 was the provision made for the Education Advisory Council to be established in continuance of the advisory functions of the Professional Council of Education, in existence since November 1951. Appointed by the Administrator after consultation with the Director, the members of the new Council were to be: a chairman nominated by the Director, two inspectors of education, three representatives of the teaching profession (usually nominated by the teachers' associations) and two others (probably chosen from university staffs) who were to be thoroughly conversant with educational matters in the Transvaal.

This Council, on its own initiative, advises the Director on research into educational problems, the provision of technical and professional guidance to schools, and the reform of school syllabuses and organisation. It also advises him on any educational matters that he refers to the Council for their consideration.

. . . and Assistance

To assist the Director in shouldering the educational burden, there are a deputy director, a chief inspector of education, a professional assistant and a corps of nearly 40 inspectors, aided by teams of subject advisers. There is a bureau of educational research, as well as a psychological service employing psychologists, counsellors and visiting teachers, and a schools library service.

Parallel to the professional organisation there is in the Department a large body of officials which, divided into main sections dealing with staff, planning and finance, examinations, professional administration, school boards, statistics, publications and equipment, acts as the administrative liaison between the Director and the institutions and personnel that come under his control. School board seretaries perform local administrative duties within their areas.

Centralisation and Otherwise

As in the other provinces of the Republic, the system is a highly centralised one, and the directives issued to provincial education institutions and their staffs tend to induce uniformity and conformity to pattern.

The effects of varying degrees of centralisation were, in fact, seen by the Overseas Mission which, led by the present Director, visited America, Canada, the United Kingdom and some European countries in 1955 to study practices in secondary education and thereafter to devise a plan for differentiated secondary education, and the necessary curricula, for the Transvaal.

The Commission found and reported as follows:—

"On the Continent, it was found that the more centralised system of control of education results in the schools having comparatively little choice

in the matter of deciding what the curriculum shall be or in making up the schemes of work.

"*Belgium* and *Holland* both have systems in which the state plays a large part, and little scope for differentiation is allowed. In the former, the syllabuses and curriculum are laid down by the department concerned and principals of schools are given very little latitude. In Holland, the position is much the same."(7)

"The greatest measure of centralised control," the Report goes on, "is found in *Denmark* where the state or government has, in comparison with other countries, fettered the schools to a considerable extent. The education system is very uniform in its structure and organisation and the curriculum has been settled by the Education Act, while the purpose and content of education have been determined by regulations. Even a standard time-table drawn up by the Ministry has to be followed. Nearly all the subjects in the secondary school are compulsory . . . The times to be devoted to each subject are also laid down."(7)

In contrast, "The greatest freedom of all exists in *England*, where the only controlling factor over what subjects shall be studied and over the subject matter contained in them appears to be the requirements of the General Certificate of Education Examination at the end of the course in all Grammar and some Modern Schools. The examination is not written by all the pupils in England, so that some of them are able to enjoy an enviable measure of freedom in the work they will do. The Ministry of Education, however, gives guidance by stating that all the pupils in secondary schools should learn English, physical training, social studies (i.e. history and/or geography) and natural science. These subjects may be considered to make up the core curriculum, though this term is seldom employed in England. The syllabuses for these and other subjects are left to the individual heads of school to work out to suit their own conditions, thus giving them a freedom from control enjoyed by no other country whose education system was investigated."(7)

What was the position in the Transvaal at the time of the Report?

"In the *Transvaal*, too, a fair amount of control by the central authority exists oxer both the curriculum and the syllabuses. The core curriculum or compulsory subjects for Std. VI are prescribed, with a slight choice regarding the introduction of a third language and mathematics being allowed. The choice of subjects then becomes more elastic in each succeeding standard until the Matriculation examination is written, when the pupil's choice of subjects must conform to the requirements of that examination. Even the non-examination subjects are largely prescribed by the Department and all pupils take such subjects as scripture, physical training, vocational guidance, and, up to Std. VIII, manual training or domestic science. The Std. VI course is intended to be exploratory and to give the pupils an opportunity of ascertaining their aptitude for certain subjects. As regards the syllabuses, the position is that the Department has published a suggested course for each subject and the principal is free to decide how much of this will be attempted in his school. He may, if he wishes, also add to the syllabuses, though all such omissions or additions are subject to the approval of the Circuit Inspector.

"Provision is, however, made for adjustment classes which are intended mainly for pupils transferred to the high school on age. For these classes the time for the two official languages and arithmetic may be increased while reducing it for other subjects and the syllabuses may be adjusted to meet the needs of the pupils."(7)

The system of differentiated secondary education that was introduced in 1958 and which completes its initial cycle this year retained the control mentioned in this section of the Van Wyk Report. Certain subjects are compulsory to specified levels, and the curriculum is laid down for all standards together with the number of periods to be allotted to each subject. All that is required of the school principal is to decide what subjects he will — or can — offer and to draw up his timetable accordingly.

Syllabuses continue to be suggested, though teachers have at times been given to doubt whether this latitude is permitted them, and a teacher's journal recently felt obliged to publish an announcement for their reassurance. But content is certainly not "left to the individual heads of schools to work out to suit their own conditions."

That there are controlling factors restricting freedom of choice is readily acknowledged; that the scheme is in its infancy is recognised. Amendments have been made, and the perfection of the system will no doubt call for further changes. The problem which has been taken as an example

and many other educational problems are common to educational systems throughout the world. The nature of the system does not necessarily make solution impossible, and with the co-operation of all whose task it is there are various ways of getting a stone to roll.

New Zealand has as yet seen no reason to change its centralised system of administration. England, with its decentralised system under a central Ministry, is in the happy position of leaving matters of detail to its 146 local authorities and the individual schools. In neither country is there dispair over educational standards. That in both countries there is criticism is beyond doubt!

The 1944 Education Act

The commonest criticism of England's Education Act of 1944 was that it was a compromise. In reviewing the effects of the Act after eight years, on the occasion of the Jubilee celebrations of the University of London Institute of Education, its architect, the Rt. Hon. R. A. Butler, accepted the criticism unreservedly: it was a compromise between the present and the future, between what to adopt and what to retain. He went on to say:

"We have resolutely set our face against placing control of the whole educational machine in the hands of the central executive. That is why the universities must retain their liberty. That is why there can be independent schools outside the national system. That is why within the national system itself we have shared and dispersed power among Local Education Authorities. That is why we have insisted on the special rights and rôles of the managers and governors of schools. That is why Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools merely make 'suggestions' to teachers; guiding them, but not directing, not ordering. And, finally, that is why the voluntary schools keep within the public educational system their identity, character and status."(8)

This was in spite of the fact that the State had never had greater authority than the Act had given it. (For the first time, for example, there was a Minister of Education.) They had tried to create a synthesis between order and liberty, between local intiative and national direction, between voluntary agencies and the State, between the private life of the school and the public life of its district, between manual and intellectual skill and between the better and less well endowed.

Compromise and Caning

A practical example of the working of this spirit of compromise is afforded by a report of "Questions in Parliament" published in the "Times Educational Supplement" of 5th May 1961:—

> MR. KENNETH LEWIS (Rutland and Stanford C.) asked how many education authorities forbade headmasters and teachers to use the cane; and how many authorities forbade teachers but allowed headmasters to use the cane.
>
> SIR DAVID ECCLES. — Individual authorities have discretion in this matter and the information asked for is not available. I would hope that local education authorities in their turn leave to head teachers the choice of disciplinary methods.
>
> MR. LEWIS.—It would do much to help the Home Secretary if the Minister requested education authorities to allow corporal punishment, and not to forbid it as some of them do.
>
> SIR DAVID ECCLES.—This is a matter in which we should leave the local authority discretion. Good discipline in schools is largely a matter for the head teacher. If he thinks the use of the cane is one method I hope he would be supported."

Conflict

Education and administration are often incompatible. There are educational requirements attached to curricula, to syllabuses, to time-tables. But they often have to bow to expediency and the most urgent needs of administration. The needs impinge on the ideals, plans, interests and comfort of the teacher, whose only answer is resentment, a resentment directed against this ogre of administration which he would gladly see slain. Yet without the ogre of administration, even within the walls of the school, there are conflicts, chaos and confusion. No one can predict the time necessary to complete a project in the creative arts, in research or the solution of problems: a class period may be fifteen minutes too long or half a day too short. But every teacher has his work to get through and all must finish at the same time, say after thirty-five minutes.

And it is on this basis that the time-table is drawn up.

"The educational administrator," says Walton, "by virtue of his responsibilities, is more likely to hold the general values of society, and in somewhat the same hierarchy, than are teachers, scholars, artists, and intellectuals in general. One of the values that holds a disputed rank is efficiency. For administration, efficiency does not mean mere effectiveness, but rather the maximisation of results with the minimum of resources. For an organisation to accomplish its objectives with as little expenditure of time, energy, and money as possible is an administrative desideratum . . . .

"Academic personnel, on the other hand, are not likely to give efficiency as high a rank as administrators. Particularly is this so when to invoke it might threaten to inhibit or jeopardise the activity in which they are engaged. Better in their minds to be prodigal with means and to fail in efficiency than to take the chance of failing in the intrinsic activity in order to succeed administratively."(9)

To Succeed Administratively?

A. E. Campbell, Chief Inspector of Primary Schools in the Department of Education, Wellington, has attempted to define the characteristics of a good administrative system. One of them ties closely with the definition of administration that heads this article and refers to "the process or activity of managing people." Speaking to the Sixth Annual Convention of the New Zealand Institute of Public Administration in May 1954, he said:

"The system should give wide scope for everyone concerned with the schools to make his full contribution to their welfare. This applies both to teachers and to parents and other interested laymen. A good school cannot be made to pattern. It is something that grows to a distinctive shape as it learns to meet the real educational needs of the particular children in its care, to respond to the demands and opportunities of its local environment, and to use to the full the particular abilities and enthusiasms of all the members of its staff. A good administrative system will foster this kind of natural growth and not cramp it. Likewise, the individual teacher should have a real measure of freedom to determine his own aims, do his own thinking, and exercise his own initiative.

"As Kandel puts it,(10) 'Educational administration is successful, in other words, to the degree that teachers feel that they are actively participating members in the educational process rather than privates in an educational army, appointed to carry out orders and prescriptions from above'."(11)

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