

The Changing World

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THE CHALLENGE TO EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

NO MATTER how generously one appraises the talents of American teachers and educators he must, if he is realistic, concede that the present educational task cannot be accomplished without more dynamic and creative leadership than has been characteristic of education in the past. Leadership is, of course, a very broad enterprise inclusive of much more than the activities of administrative officers and supervisors. But the fact remains that as schools are now organized, administrators and supervisors occupy key positions. Even though they may be incompetent of positive leadership, their mere presence in their positions can militate against effective work on the part of the teachers with whom they are associated. It is, therefore, important that in dealing with all of the important problems that now confront American education we give attention to the area of administration.

We are, I believe, in a transition stage in the realm of educational administration. The patterns that were developed in the first four decades of the present century have in large measure outlived their usefulness. The line and staff organization, the separation of planning and performance, and the authoritarian attitudes characteristic of the older industrial management were borrowed from industry and military affairs and applied in education with too little consideration for the peculiar nature of the educational enterprise. The findings of research concerning the nature of the human organism and its growth, together with new interpretations of democracy in social, economic, and political areas, have all led to a serious questioning of the soundness of the old administrative patterns. This criticism of the old in administration takes many forms. Teachers are disappointed and often disillusioned with the quality of the leadership they are receiving. In other instances parents are unable to understand why our educational institutions cannot be adjusted to the changing character of the times.

In our large cities particularly, there is a growing discontent with the offerings of public education, and a rapid and alarming growth of private schools and private school attendance. In our institutions of higher learning, administration has almost always been rather crude and poorly developed and under the conditions we now confront is even more to be characterized as of the "horse and buggy" variety. There are many people who feel that administration has become a brake upon educational progress instead of being a creative and dynamic force for educational progress. There are many indications that this point of view has a real basis. In any case it is important that both teachers and administrators recognize the key position of administration and the importance of creative developments in this field.

This column is too brief for the presentation of suggested administrative programs, but a few important areas for study and experimentation can be suggested. We need practical experimentation, with a wider participation on the part of teachers, parents, and school pupils in the determination of educational policies. We are badly in need of more democratic attitudes on the part of administrative officers themselves. Similarly we need more positive leadership on the part of administrative officers in the improvement of teachers' salaries and other conditions of employment. Administration needs to become a more dynamic force in the average institution and community for forward-looking developments and programs. As a practicing administrator, I am well aware of the many difficulties involved in these various undertakings, but we cannot let the difficulties keep us from an experimental point of view and from intensive efforts along the lines of building effective administrative policies and procedures. If we fail in this undertaking we may, as administrators, occupy the unenviable position of being obstacles instead of aids to educational progress.

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