

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERS NEED THE HUMANITIES

Using the arts and humanities as tools for leadership is beginning to receive more of the attention it deserves. For example, the National Endowment for the Humanities sponsors seminars in which school administrators explore a wide range of issues of national concern under the direction of scholars in the humanities.<sup>1</sup>

Too often the humanities have been disregarded or dismissed as a source of knowledge. We tend to look only at their entertainment value. This may be because we live in an age of science, of quantification, and the humanities are neither scientific nor readily quantified. Nevertheless, art, literature, theatre, film, and television can increase our awareness of the complexities of being human, help us develop sensitivity to moral problems, and improve our ability to interpret and analyze.

Like the sciences, the arts describe the world as it is, but unlike the sciences, the arts interpret or raise questions about the way the world is or ought to be. Scientists develop theories to enable us to view ourselves dispassionately as complex beings controlling and controlled by social institutions. Artists create imaginative situations to enable us to see ourselves in all our emotions, frailties, passions, despairs, and doubts.

I am not suggesting that the concerns of the arts are more important than those of the sciences, nor that

everyone should hasten to enroll in art and literature courses. However, in addition to course work in the social sciences and specialized training, we should avail ourselves of the insights and skills that the humanities offer.

One approach is to use the fictitious accounts of artists as if they were case studies of organization and leadership, interpreting them for our own ends. An example is Francis Ford Coppola's film, *Apocalypse Now*. On the surface, the world of soldiering in Vietnam bears little resemblance to a school. However, if we view the film as a case study and identify with Lt. Willard, vicariously experiencing his feelings, we can learn about the mind and the heart of an individual given a questionable order. We won't be ordered to kill a colleague, but we may be expected to discharge, deny tenure to, or reprimand a colleague. The settings vary, but the situation provided by the artist can be realistically applied to our own experiences.

Fictionalized accounts used as case studies can also give us practice in making value judgments. *Apocalypse Now* raises basic questions about the moral implications of following orders, as does Melville's *Billy Budd*. In *Apocalypse Now* we watch the man who has been given the order; in *Billy Budd* we watch the man who must make the decision and give the order. If *Billy Budd* is taken as a case study, we can analyze the external and informal pressures on a leader—Captain Vere—who is torn by the inherent conflicts of his position, caught between his concern for production and his concern for people.

The situations in good fiction are not straightforward but ambiguous, as are the real problems faced by educational leaders. To understand ambiguity, we must interpret and thereby strengthen our ability to analyze. The interpretive process can give our imaginations full reign, particularly if it requires defending a point of view, as we often must on the job. We can defend Lt. Willard's decision or argue Captain Vere's. Using Benchley's novel, *Jaws*, as a case study, we can identify with Sheriff Brody's position, consider the moral questions regarding the value of human life versus the value of money, and analyze the conflict that develops between the mayor and the sheriff.

In sum, to improve analytic skills and increase awareness of and sensitivity to human behavior and human dilemmas, I urge educational leaders to experience the humanities—not from the perspective of the art critic, but as human beings studying human behavior. Consider artistic accounts as if they were actual case studies of leadership and organization. Apply your own practical and theoretical knowledge. Interpret and analyze the characters and conflicts depicted and the moral issues raised. Read Etzioni and Drucker, but also read Wouk, Updike, and Cheever. The combined subjective and objective insights can aid in the making of those enlightened decisions expected of us all. ■

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: For information, write: Professions Program, Division of Fellowships and Seminars MS-101, National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C. 20506.

Elizabeth Graham is Supervisor of Language Arts, Westwood Regional School District, Westwood, New Jersey.

Copyright © 1980 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.