BOOK REVIEWS

CASE STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
A COMMONWEALTH COLLECTION

Compiled and edited by John & Pamela Weeks
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Fiji. 1981, 77 pp., F$3.50

Tutors of educational administration employ all manner of techniques in order to close the gap between theory and practice. Perhaps the commonest and most cost-effective device is the case study. The case study is simply a factual account of an event — a slice of reality — which can be read and absorbed quickly, then discussed in a classroom context. While tutors vary in the extent and manner to which they use case studies, there would be few courses in school administration that did not make use of the occasional case.

A well-written case study can be invaluable for opening up a theme for closer theoretical examination; they are useful for exposing the range and complexity of the dilemmas facing school administrators; and they can often be used to allow students to apply newly-learned skills and understandings to ‘real’ situations. But if they are to capture the imagination and interest of students they must ring true and they must be concerned with the kinds of schools and the kinds of problems with which students are familiar in their own school systems.

When Professor W.G. Walker was pioneering the teaching of educational administration at the University of New England in Australia nearly twenty years ago, he found it necessary to devise Australian-based case studies to replace the American-based case studies that he would have been exposed to as a graduate student. These Australian cases were eventually compiled and published as The Principal at Work (Brisbane: Queensland University Press, 1968), and have made a continuing contribution to administrative training in Australia ever since. John and Pamela Weeks have attempted the same task for the Commonwealth and have assembled some three dozen case studies in a slim, attractively produced publication. Their cases are drawn from several parts of the Commonwealth including Australia, Africa, New Zealand and South East Asia. But probably the majority of the cases are drawn from Fiji and the South Pacific region where the Weeks have worked most recently. Whether the collection will have broad appeal throughout the Commonwealth remains to be seen. On the whole the collection seems to have been aimed at the developing nations of the Pacific region, and its appeal is likely to be highest in this region.

Technically the cases are excellent — well written, clear and succinct. They are models of good case writing, each case describing an event with great economy, yet leaving the tutor several possible lines of analysis and discussion. The editors have included just a few of these possibilities in a series of study questions at the
end of the book. They are also, for the most part, intrinsically interesting, describing highly dramatic events in the life of the school — parents storming along to school threatening to do the principal an injury, sit-down strikes by young members of staff, love affairs among the teachers, summary dismissals, demotions and the like. This emphasis on critical, high-profile, high-stress action, rather than on the run-of-the-mill cycle of routine behaviour seems to be a common feature of such collections. The case study method lends itself particularly well to the analysis of crises. The central problem is acute, easily identified, and firmly located in time, place, and principal characters. More mundane, routine events are either more difficult to present in case study form, or else they simply do not occur to the writers of cases as worthy of attention.

This leaning towards the dramatic and the critical seems to influence the themes which are addressed as well. Over two thirds of the cases focus on problems of human relationships.

More specifically, almost one quarter of the cases take pupil discipline as their main focus; another quarter are about the appointment, promotion, demotion, or dismissal of staff; somewhat fewer focus on unprofessional conduct by teachers, and about fifteen percent, discuss difficulties in the school-community relationship. The remaining seven cases cover such widely ranging problems as delegation, school inspection, staff work loads, timetabling, professional leadership and executive decision-making.

The stress on human relationships is quite deliberate on the part of the editors. "To be effective", they write "administrators . . . need to know how to work with people, to understand their aspirations and expectations and to encourage them to achieve these". For this reason there are very few cases on the more technical aspects of school administration. The business management function of financial management, office management and resource allocation are given little attention. And nor do the instructional leadership function of staff training, supervision and curriculum development find a place. This is not a criticism of the collection.

In a volume of this size it is not possible to cover every aspect of school administration. The editors have chosen to exploit the full potential of the case study by focussing on those aspects of school management best suited to this mode of instruction.

The school administrator in the Pacific region is coming under increasing pressure: modern curricula and teaching method demand new patterns of organization and control; a better educated teaching force insists on a greater involvement in executive decision-making; the public expects the schools to maintain a tradition of academic excellence while serving the more immediate needs of community life; and more and more important leadership functions are being taken away from central office personnel and put back in the school where they
belong. If school-level administrators are to cope with these new challenges they need to be able to think constructively and analytically about their work. This collection of case studies provides a most useful and timely framework for such thought and discussion.

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STANDARDIZED TESTS OF ACHIEVEMENT (STAF) FOR FIJI

by Warwick B. Elley and Sneh Achal

This report on the development of standardized tests of achievement for use in Fiji schools outlines clearly the historical background leading up to the decision to develop the tests, the policies and strategies adopted in the construction of the tests and the technical details of the finished products.

As stated by the authors, the decision by the Ministry of Education of Fiji to carry out such a project arose out of an identified need to introduce into the education system a form of evaluation device which is non-selective in function but which might be used rather as a means of helping teachers to determine the levels of development of pupils in the basic subjects, and thus to gear their teaching to the learning needs of their pupils.

The report itself is a testimony to the meticulous and methodical manner in which Dr Elley and Mrs Achal undertook the task of developing the tests. It also bears witness to their sincere concern to ensure that the most suitable and effective strategies are employed in testing the skills, knowledge and understandings that pupils are expected to have gained in each subject area by the beginning of the class 6 year.

Apart from the obvious value of such a report for educational administrators, curriculum officers and teacher college staff, there is much to be gained by practising teachers, both at primary and secondary levels, from studying this report. For primary teachers, in particular, the report offers not only further clarification of the purposes of the tests and how to use them, but also some thought provoking, if not disturbing, revelations about the results obtained in the course of standardizing the tests, and the conclusions drawn from them. For all teachers and other educators generally, there is a wealth of information to be gained on the construction of standardized tests of achievement, the suitability or otherwise of different types of questions for testing particular subject areas, and the kinds of skills that could be profitably assessed at class 6 level.
Although some sections of the report, particularly those dealing with the technical aspects of the tests, may prove somewhat too difficult for a reader with little background knowledge of testing and evaluation processes to grasp the details fully, there is little doubt that in respect of the basic information most relevant to teachers and educational administrators, the report conveys its message very clearly and precisely.

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