

ATTITUDES IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

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In recent years, social psychologists have given attitudes a most significant place in their attempts to develop a more acceptable understanding of human conduct. Some of them, the more renowned, in fact, such as Mead and Allport, have used attitudes as a sort of central theme to their sciences. That they have enabled us better to understand the processes of human behavior, there can be no question. On the other hand, there is little evidence that the knowledges developed by them have penetrated as far as they deserve and as rapidly as they merit into other fields. Especially would it seem that their materials have wide application to school administration, because school administration is itself, a social field. While it is impossible to dwell long upon the general applicability of a theory of attitudes to school administration in a brief article, one can present the point of view of the social psychologist and can then analyze some of the problems of school administration in terms of it.

It is the contention of the social psychologist that an understanding of attitudes seems essential to an understanding of human behavior, since they form the background out of which a given individual or social act emerges. Naturally, the most satisfying way of explaining an act would be to do so by directly identifying it with the physiological process in which it originates and out of which it develops. Obviously, in the present state of knowledge, this is impossible. We can closely approach this method, however, by identifying the act as attitude. An attitude may represent various organizations of parts of the nervous system *which are going to be responsible for acts*. These hypothetical organizations we recognize under the appellation of attitudes. In this way of looking at behavior, attitudes constitute a form of behavior potential which will be influential, at least, in shaping the character of the individual act in its initiatory stages.

School administrative theory as it has been developed in this country seems to have lived apart from these knowledges and interests of the social psychologists with respect to behavior. Much of it has been channeled in a course which runs counter at many points to the beliefs of the social psychologists in general and runs counter almost at every point, in particular, to which social psychologists believe to be true of attitudes and of the significant part they play in problems of human relations.

If attitude is as potent a factor in shaping the character of the social and individual act as social psychologists believe it to be then it would seem that school administration must become more concerned in the future than has been true in the past with taking it into account when problems of human relations are being dealt with. Not only must administrators be able to identify attitudes but they must be able to effect desirable changes in them. This holds for their own attitudes as well as for the attitudes of others.

Probably the most effective way to study attitudes is by the method of direct observation by a skilled observer of each individual person. It seems doubtful that they can ever be satisfactorily measured. Assuming that they could, the problem of predicting the bearing each would have upon an individual act would still not be a simple one. Obviously, mass study by self identification of attitudes has serious weaknesses. On the other hand, the method possesses at least one good feature. It permits the rendering of a generalized judgment by a group of people with respect to what they conceive their attitudes to be toward certain specified items. This thereby makes possible certain general conclusions with respect to how conditions should be changed if we wish to eradicate or to intensify such attitudes. Thus, it directs attention toward factors which operate to build or destroy attitudes in people.

The way in which an understanding of

attitudes could affect school administration was impressed upon the writer by several studies he has made in the past in the field of supervision, particularly by the results of one of the studies¹ published two years ago.

The method was that of mass, self-identification. We may draw upon some of the findings of that study for examples of administrative practice which make for good and bad attitudes. Let us first list practices which, for most people but not for all, result in attitudes which have an antagonistic quality. They might be itemized as follows:

1. The practice of having superior officers rate teachers.
2. The practice of superior officers of giving negative criticisms after seeing a teacher teach.
3. The practice of helping a teacher to employ a particular method of teaching.
4. The practice of having teachers plan without in some way providing an organization which will enable plans definitely to become action.
5. The practice of having schools organized into departments and having each department administered by a head.
6. The practice of organizing the school around numerous functionaries.
7. The practices of class-room visitation, and visitation followed by conference.
8. The practice of having regular classroom teachers do demonstration for their colleagues.
9. The practice of holding regularly scheduled faculty meetings.

The attitudes toward these practices as held by most teachers and administrators included in the study were distinctly antagonistic. Yet these practices are among the commonest employed in the whole field of administration.

Certain practices, in the main, arouse favorable attitudes. Among these are the following:

1. The practice of giving constructive suggestions to teachers which lead to improvement in teaching.
2. The practice of giving active aid to groups of teachers who are planning or carrying out some joint endeavor the results of which promise to bring general

professional improvement to those participating.

3. The practice of allocating the supervisory function to one person in a school, to one person alone and with the understanding that supervision is to be his sole function.

4. The practice of having teachers act as chairmen of subject matter groups, (as opposed to having superior officers act as heads).

5. The practice of having planning done by small groups and of having meetings held by small groups, the groups to be formed on the basis of homogeneous interests.

6. Practices such as:

- a. helping a subject group to plan some group study or project as a result of which the teachers will be able to proceed more intelligently.
- b. providing groups with educational data and information, the need for which has grown out of the work for the group.
- c. making available certain professional articles and studies which bear upon educational topics being discussed by teachers.

If, as we said at the beginning, attitudes form the soil out of which an individual or social act emerges and in terms of which the complete act is developed, a mass study of attitudes, despite the admitted weaknesses of the method, leads to the feeling that a number of points in school administration are needful of serious consideration. Three of these seem to stand out more prominently than some of the others.

The first of these is that certain of our administrative methods will need to undergo change and some of the devices now in common use may well be discarded. Thus, everyone knows that inspection of individuals or of institutions is almost always resented. No one would inspect an institution unless he were paid to do so—fifty dollars a day and expenses. Like the judge in traffic court, the inspector works for the fees he gets. It could readily be shown that the inspection function if we only cared to do so could be handled with different results. As to rating devices, their use is now on the decline. The effect of their use in terms of the attitudes they caused to be

¹J. M. Hughes. *The Attitudes and Preferences of Teachers and Administrators for School Supervision*. Northwestern University Contributions to Education, School of Education. Series No. 12. Evanston, Ill., 48 pp.

built was definitely bad. Careful selection of teachers, indefinite tenure, automatic salary scales, stimulating teaching environments can completely abolish the need for rating scales.

The second is, that our methods of handling problems of human relations will need to be more consistent in the future with those knowledges and insights of social psychology which dictate the methods to be used. For example, many of the methods now used ignore almost completely the knowledge about emotion and its relation to adjustment and development. Some of the methods simply ignore the harm done when by their use, irrelevant or strong emotions are aroused or worry and strain are introduced.

The third is that organizational patterns will have to be set up which are less, much less, static than those which

obtain at present. The principle need of organization, at present, seems to be the incorporation of factors and elements which make change in organization a natural characteristic of organization itself. This, too, is possible as is shown by the successful operation of a number of present day organizations.

It would seem, then, that administrative theorists should not continue to advocate that administrators act in a direction which opposes the movement of the social forces observable within a staff. Attitudes furnish good cues to the direction and the magnitude of these forces, and enable one to know toward what the forces are directed. It is not easy to brave the forces of a torrential stream. Such knowledge, however, should aid us to act more intelligently, provided of course, we seek to act in ways consistent with such knowledge.
