



Preparation of Administrators for Overseas Schools¹

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The title of this address suggests three distinct questions: 1) what is a school administrator, 2) in what way is or should he or she be prepared to carry out this work, and 3) what difference is implied by the use of “overseas” as a descriptor of “schools”.

What Is A School Administrator?

When we are talking about Bible colleges and seminaries, whether within the continent or overseas, the easiest way to answer this question is to say that school administrators are former clergymen. But that doesn't help sharpen up the concept or the roles, so we must go beyond this answer. A school administrator, within the context of specialized higher education of the ministry of the church, is a professional person who serves as a coordinative leader among several aggregations of people. As such, he or she plays several distinctly different roles and relates to groups that represent virtually the whole spectrum of persons within the church.

Specifically, the school administrator functions in three major roles: 1) policy development, 2) management, and 3) public relations. These three major roles are the same whether the administrator operates within a church-dependent or a secular institution. Further, I believe that far too much emphasis has been placed on the difference between church-dependent and secular institutions insofar as administrative and instructional roles are concerned; therefore, most of the remarks that follow in this section are drawn from the same bases on which I counsel within secular institutions and organizations.

The sequence of the three categories of administrator's roles should not be seen as indicating the order of importance. In fact, there is a similar importance and a similar imperative in each of the three categories. If the administrator is weak in any of the three, no amount of strength in the other two will adequately compensate.

Policy development. An administrator serves as a sort of executive officer over the operations of some part or all of the institution. As such, he or she is a bridge person between the operating personnel and the policy group or groups. But since an educational establishment is neither a ship-of-the-line nor a business enterprise, the role of the bridge person is that of a communicator—the developer of a two-way flow of information, from the operational to the policy levels and vice-versa. The school administrator must be concerned with the faculty and staff as the policy implementers whose operations within the policy guidelines provide significant feedback data on the wisdom and consequences of the policies. This feedback needs to be properly interpreted and communicated to the policy makers.

¹ Ted Ward. Preparation of Administrators for Overseas Schools. Address to the Association for Accreditation of Bible Colleges, Chicago, October 29, 1970

In the other direction, the school administrator must stay close to the policy makers, both in terms of counsel to them and in terms of his primary task of understanding them well enough to knowledgeably interpret their decisions into practices within the institution. But within the circle of policy formulation, the administrator plays a role as a specialized participant. This specialized role has to do with interpretation: specifically, it functions as a problem-identification and a priority-setting function for the policy board. Administrators who neglect their role in policy development often find themselves playing a cat-and-mouse game with the very people who could help them most. In defense of the helpless administrator who has been intentionally or unintentionally frozen out of the policy-making function, boards should be warned against isolating themselves from the real issues of management of the institution, and should further be made aware that when an administrator is not consulted on matters of policy development his or her roles with respect to management and public relations are seriously jeopardized.

Management. Today's school administrator must operate in three areas of management: 1) development of the corporate life of organization, 2) development of the competencies of the faculty and staff, and 3) development of the sense of identity and dignity in the student body. The school is an institution; there are people on the faculty and the staff who will outlast any particular group of students. While these people are a fundamental resource of the institution, they are also a potential liability. It is small wonder that so many adversary relationships develop between administrators and faculty. Administrators are usually preoccupied with their responsibility to develop an organization. They views faculty members as less concerned about the wholeness of the organization than about the particulars of their own classes and departments. If administrators fail to challenge these assumptions they will build a career of conflict with their faculty. The administrator's foremost management task is building *with* the faculty and with the students a sense and a reality of corporate life within which the dignity of individuals can be fostered. This task is divisible into the three specific areas suggested above *if* the administrator understands the relationships of each of the areas to each other.

Public relations. For many years the National Schools Public Relations Association has stalwartly struggled to help school administrators become aware of their inescapable role in public relations. Too often administrators, the public, and yes, even the Association see public relations in terms of press releases and open-houses. This is only the beginning.

School administrators communicate among several distinct publics. Most obviously, they are called upon to put their school, its principles, its activities, and its accomplishments before the hearing of donors and potential donors. But still, this is only the beginning. Increasingly it is necessary for administrators to take a hand in the several sorts of public relations that directly affect the *students*: recruitment, student-alumni relations and, finally, job placement. Especially in the role of the administrator in public relations it is clear that institutions are becoming more student-centered. In terms of my own values I find this trend encouraging. The demands it places on administrators must be recognized and accommodated through reorganization, reassignment, and re-education.

Because to be a school administrator is to serve in these various roles: policy developer, manager, and communicator—preparation of administrators must be concerned with the development of pertinent skills and understandings. Since we are examining the preparation of a person who is to function as a professional among professionals, it is particularly important to prepare him or her through exposure to reliable data about his or her roles. There is no substitute for research on the nature of and the potentialities in the role of school administrator. In virtually every professional training field, the finest training programs are built on a base of continuous research into the nature of the specific

professional field of practice. This sort of research is going on in reference to business administration, hospital administration, personnel administration, public administration and educational administration. I propose here that the nature of roles and tasks in reference to administration of overseas schools be made a matter of research, so that new and reformed programs of administrator preparation might have a responsible basis in fact.

How Does an Administrator Get that Way?

To digress into the question of recruitment procedures is tempting, especially since I, too, have come the way of that most common recruitment device for educational administrators: “you are doing a pretty good job as a teacher (or researcher, as the case may be) so we’ve decided to make you chairman of the department, or dean, or vice-president.” Is there a more clear example of the “Peter Principle” to be found? Just let a faculty member show signs of becoming competent and we flatter him or her into an administrative job.

Administrators get their skills and competencies through experience. The structure of this experience is a secondary matter. It may be gained in a formal preparation program, a do-it-yourself session in the “school of hard knocks”, or through an in-service educational program. The primary issue in any case is whether or not administrators have had the necessary breadth of experience that allows them competently to cope with the variety of roles that they must perform. During their preparation they must come to levels of self-awareness that enable them to assess their own fitness for the job—in terms of personality and temperament—and they must learn through precept and example what others expect of, and offer to, their roles. The questions of where and how this training is best carried out are of great importance. Since many administrators move up from the academic ranks, there is special need for readily available materials for in-service education.

Especially in the overseas situation, there is a need for self-instructional materials to enable newly appointed or prospective administrators to make a competent shift from the professorial to the administrative roles. Of course, it is reasonable to gently ask whether educational administrators might better come from some more relevant specialized background than the typical professorship. (Although the analogy is defective, it is interesting to note that hospital administrators today are less commonly former physicians than in earlier years. Today hospital administrators begin their specialized training for this position in their undergraduate years).

Educational administrators are typically prepared through special graduate programs. In recent years there has been increasing willingness to tailor the experiences in terms of the particular sort of educational institution that the trainee intends to operate in. There are now special programs in small-college administration, university administration, research administration, and several other more specific positions. A close look at these different programs shows that the major factor that differentiates among them is the internship or practicum. Through an assignment to participation as an administrative assistant or as a member of an administrative team, the trainee becomes acquainted with the realities of the particular administrative role and has an opportunity for professional development under supervision befitting his or her experience and status. In general, it is the larger universities, particularly the large state universities, that are able to provide these specialized programs leading to internships in various institutions of higher education. Some of the internships that they utilize, however, are in the smaller and sometimes in the church-supported colleges. Perhaps it is time to look into the possibilities of establishing such a program specifically aimed toward the administration of overseas schools.

In any quality preparation program for professionals, there must be a high degree of concern for continual attunement of their roles to the realities of the contemporary social situation in which they must work. Earlier this year, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation granted two million dollars to ten institutions in order to “strengthen their capacity to educate prospective engineers in the solution of design problems drawn from the ‘real world.’”

This sort of concern for relevancy is far more than a fad. For more than twenty years, the new and developing programs for professional preparation have virtually all been characterized by a high degree of concern for reality. Reality, in this sense, denotes a combination of two factors: First, there must be a pragmatically defined focus on the professional roles as they are and as they must be played in order to manage the contemporary scene. Coupled with this focus must be a goal-oriented view of the potential of the situation. Training-based on these two factors can make the professional person able to lift his or her services above and beyond the limitations of the contemporary situation. This is the sort of professional needed: one who is competent for today and promising for tomorrow.

In order to build effective preparation and in-service education programs for professional roles we must have reliable data about the nature of roles and about the environments in which they will operate. Even as it was proposed in the first section that there be continual description research on the roles, here it is proposed that there be descriptive research directed toward getting a clearer picture of the overseas school in terms of its psychological climate, its sociological setting, and its anthropological function.

What is Different About Administering the Overseas School?

In view of the lack of broad comparative and descriptive studies (on any but the most local sorts of terms) it is unlikely that there is much that anyone can say today in answer to this question. Cross-cultural research in education and sociology suggests some of the areas which should be examined and offers useful hypotheses. Administering an overseas school, for an American, likely presents the same sort of problems of latent culture-conflict that any other cross-cultural professional task does; since Americans, in general, are culturally limited because of their mono-cultural up-bringing, there is usually need for training in cross-cultural sensitivity and perceptiveness. Further, since the “overseas school”, in the sense we are using the term, is typically a bi-cultural or multi-cultural institution, particular skills of intercultural mediation and communication are required.

As a sort of parenthesis here, we might observe that the growing recognition of the multi-cultural nature of the American metropolis has given rise to special training programs and internships through which educators are being retrained to function in multi-cultural institutions. If I were recruiting an administrator for an overseas school, I would look first among the graduates of these new programs. The sort of sensitivity and perceptiveness required for effective administration of such institutions, on the continent or overseas is characterized by a high degree of awareness of the limitations of one's own views and values, a deep respect for the worth of other people and their own aspirations, and a profound willingness to acknowledge the right of other value systems and ways of life to continue to exist. What is required is, in sum, an emotional as well as an intellectual development—and it does not come easily for most Americans. And neither does it come about as a result of wishful thinking or motivation alone. There are ways to deliberately bring about the desired results. The research that has been done for the State Department, and especially for the Peace Corps, has led to the development of some training experiences that actually make a difference. In simplest terms, these experiences are a sort of “frontier camp” approach where the “frontier” is not lizards and edible roots but rather human interactions with people who are culturally different. And it isn't necessary to go overseas to

find people who are culturally different, if you are willing to take the trouble to interact. In this matter, the group that calls itself the “West Coast Coalition Seminar”—Evan Adams, Robert Lehnhart and several others, are exploring ways to adapt these techniques for the pre-field training of overseas mission workers. One of the observations is a persistent cultural narrowness in the American evangelical church. Apparently there is still much difficulty in relating to any but the narrowest socio-economic sets within a community. This may well be a product of generations of avoidance behavior and immigrant isolation within the North American church which has resulted in the ignoring of cultural differences as a matter of concern for pastors-in-training in the seminaries and Bible colleges. This additional fourth question exposes my deep concern about a presupposition that I find are far too common—that Americans must always recruit themselves to be overseas school administrators.

Are Administrators of Overseas Schools Always Expatriots?

So long as we use language that implies our schools somewhere else we will have a hard time getting serious about the relationship of mission and church. We absolutely must have a return to a scriptural view of the church. I find it easy to be in sympathy with projects in which our government’s AID and Peace Corps operations ask us to devise ways to *help* achieve goals that other governments and institutions have set for themselves. But sometimes when I have on my missionary-consultant hat, I discover that I am being asked to find ways that host nationals can help us achieve our goals. And don’t tell me that their goals should be the same as ours since we are all working for the cause of Christ. Jesus said he was going to build *his* church. If educational institutions can help out, fine. But the school is not the church. And most especially, the North American church, its schools, and their accrediting associations have no right to impose or to dictate in other cultural settings. We need to learn to help when asked. I refer particularly to those vast areas of the world where, in fact, the church is already established. Our job is to find out, through the eyes of nationals where possible, what it is that God is doing and to ask if there are ways that we can help out. Yes, I know that what is most needed is our money—and it is time we educated our church at home to understand this. But we always seem to tie a measure of interference, presence, and control to provide from our shores all the administrators for the institutions that the church needs.

The compromises we have made in this very American “our-money-and-our-ideas” approach usually have taken the form of hand-picking some semi-Americanized nationals and sending them “home” to our American-style institutions of higher learning—usually the most culturally “pure” schools that we have and after they are alumni of an American school, we place them as cultural grafts into showplace positions. This isn’t going to work. Some of the most seriously out-of-tune institutions I have worked in overseas have been those where second-line administrators are American-trained nationals. In most of these cases, the thoroughly Americanized national acts more “American” than the Americans. And thus Americans continue to deceive themselves about the cultural damage they are doing. The cause of Christ will not be constructively served by Americanizing the church universal.

Summary: The first priority of concern must be for the establishing of timetables for the orderly transfer of administrative roles to national persons. Meanwhile, administrators for overseas schools must be prepared effectively through programs of informal or formal learning experiences. Such experiences should train and foster the insights and skills required in policy development, management, and public relations. Along with these skills, training in cross-cultural sensitivity, perceptiveness and respect must be provided. We need to train men and women who are administrators competent for today and promising for tomorrow—and promise for tomorrow includes a desire to relinquish roles to national persons and a willingness to be re-assigned to other roles or to administrative posts in the United States.