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Legislated Learning: The Bureaucratization of the American Classroom

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Educators must gain a knowledge of the affects of policy making on education.

Legislated Learning: The Bureaucratization of the American Classroom

by Arthur D. Wise. University of California Press (Berkeley, California), 1979. 219 pages. \$10.95.

Review by Linda L. Davenport

During the 1960s and 1970s the establishment of education policy moved increasingly away from the realm of local school districts to state legislatures, the federal government and the judicial system. Wise asserts that the bureaucratization of the education system can be attributed to the proliferation of policies made at a distance from local school boards.

The book provides an analysis of education policies and their effect on education. It explores past policy trends in education, policies existing at the time of the book's publication, and future implications for policy decisions. It shows conflicts that have surfaced because of education policy decisions. Wise contends that the direction of public school policy has been changed through legislation and litigation and the change has not been healthy.

Wise argues that one of the problems in education today is the conflict over who controls. Even though the Tenth Amendment reserves education for the states, a new hierarchy has emerged in the governance of education with the federal government at the top, then the state government, and finally, the local school board. The state and federal government have gained control of the education process through laws and policies requiring compliance with a multiplicity of rules and regulations. These regulations are imposed with a naive belief that education will be made more efficient and equitable. Instead, these policies tend to standardize the schools and have made them more bureaucratic. Wise believes that this has resulted in a national system of education or fifty state systems which are indistinguishable. Local school boards

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have lost the opportunity to develop their own policies to meet local educational needs.

Another problem Wise foresees is the effect of decisions made by legal professionals instead of educators. Judicial decrees are being used as a method of correcting education problems. Such decrees often transfer the locus of control from local school boards to the state and federal government adding to the excessive bureaucratization. He contends that the disputes are decided by legally trained professionals who are interested only in the formal legal points of law and not in the effect of their decisions on the entire educational process. Wise seems to believe that the rule of precedent (*stare decisis*), a fundamental cornerstone of the American legal system, actually interferes with education. He asserts that the rule of precedent forestalls a court's ability to look at alternative solutions to fit the unique circumstances of each local school district.

The conflict between strong educational leadership and managerial leadership is viewed as another major issue. As schools become more bureaucratic, concepts of educational leadership will by necessity change. Managers who can handle rules and procedures may be preferred over strong educational leaders. The difficulty arises because these managers may be interested in the efficiency of the systems and not in the role of education in society or in the direction education is taking.

States' rights versus individual rights is another problem confronting education. Wise believes that states' rights have become paramount to individual rights. Several traditional concepts of education have been threatened such as local control, teacher autonomy, academic freedom and educational governance. Legislated and judicially mandated education are taking their place. These all raise the question of the proper relationship among individuals, the state and society. Wise believes traditions that have worked should not be abandoned.

Wise believes if hyperrationalization, a term he used to describe excessive bureaucratization, is not diminished there will be winners and losers in the educational process. The winners will be elected and appointed officials and the staff of state departments of education who make the rules and regulations. The losers will be members of state and local school boards because their policy-making functions have been assumed by the central government. Administrators of private institutions will lose because their discretion will be diminished. Teachers will be the major losers because they will lose their autonomy. Students will lose because education policy tends to place the welfare of the state above the individual. Wise believes that "nothing less is at stake in this struggle for power than individual freedom in a democratic society."

The strength of the book is Wise's ability to present a wide range of information about educational policy making in a succinct manner. He discusses policies, which have helped create the bureaucratization of the educational system, that were developed by the federal government, state government, and the judicial system and the effect of these policies on elementary, secondary, and higher education. He presents an indepth study of *Robinson v. Cahill*, the New Jersey school finance case, as a classic study of this bureaucratization.

The weakest section of the book is Chapter 6 concerning higher education. Wise presents information about the effects of educational policy making on higher education by presenting quotes from persons involved in higher

education. The content of the book would have been reinforced if he had elaborated more fully on higher education policy making. A balanced treatment between elementary, secondary and higher education policy making would have enhanced the overall focus of the book.

The book contains information that will help anyone,

legislators, judges, administrators and teachers involved in the educational process understand the affects of education policy making on the educational system. It is imperative that educators gain a knowledge of the affects of policy making on education and this book presents a comprehensive overview of the topic.