

These flaws notwithstanding, the book should be a useful text for undergraduate courses in educational theory. When supplemented with some of the literature criticized by Nyberg and Egan and with resources concerning the nature of education, *The Erosion of Education* will enrich and focus an introductory course.

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CEA Task Force on Public Involvement in Educational Decisions. *Strategies for Public Involvement* (Final Report). Toronto: Canadian Education Association, 1981. 104 pp. \$6.00.

Based on a perceived need for "clarification of the concept of public involvement, and the exploration of its possible implications for educational governance and administration," (p. 5) the Board of Directors of the Canadian Education Association (CEA) established in 1978 a Task Force on Public Involvement in Educational Decisions. Three years later Task Force activity culminated with the publication of its final report, *Strategies for Public Involvement*.

The first of the six chapters making up the report is devoted primarily to defining three concepts judged to have major importance in dealing with the assigned topic. Working from a somewhat questionable assumption that the concepts "could be understood most clearly from a school board's point of view," (p. 10) "the public," was defined simply as "the school board's electorate." (p. 11) The second concept, "educational decisions," was equated with school board decisions or those which "are formal motions made at a duly held meeting of the board members, or trustees." (p. 12) As for the third of the major concepts, the Task Force's position was that "public involvement" occurs when (and apparently only when) a board makes the public aware of its decision to invite involvement and the public responds with a commitment to collaborate with the board. For the most part, the definitions accorded the major concepts were judged to be so restrictive as to substantially reduce the impact potential of the study.

The second chapter presents the results of a review of the literature as well as some perspectives on public involvement. Bearing in mind the declared position of the Task Force that first priority be given "to Canadian materials, or to materials dealing with Canadian systems" and "the primary emphasis should be on material dealing with public involvement at the school board level," (p. 17) the literature review is a reasonable effort both in its coverage and organization. The results of the review clearly indicate that insofar as the Canadian scene is concerned, there exists a severe shortage of quality material and, further, that which does exist tends to focus on the school level of operation. As for the section dealing with some perspectives, while one might question its placement in the report, one cannot question the success of the "attempt . . . made to encapsulate conservative, radical and liberal positions." (p. 32)

"To give a brief overview of current school board practices with regard to involving the public in the decision-making process" (p. 37) is the avowed purpose of Chapter 3. Unfortunately, this purpose is fulfilled only slightly. The first section dealing with provincial regulations and legislation does present a reasonable overview of the Canadian scene. Such a claim cannot be made for the overviews of "School Board Policies" and "Structures and Procedures for Public Involvement." Lacking in both instances is a clear indication of the number and nature of the school boards surveyed. Without such information, the reader has difficulty with generalized claims such as "many school boards . . . have an unwritten policy to involve the public whenever it seem appropriate . . ." (p. 38) Much more useful is the information given that relates to the policies and practices of eight identified local jurisdictions.

Of all the material presented in the report, that contained in Chapter 4 probably possesses the greatest potential worth for the declared primary target reader, that is, the practitioner. Starting with an examination of "six key assumptions about the nature of the educational decision-making process," (p. 46) the chapter presents two guiding frameworks. The first, labelled a "Framework for Understanding School Board Decisions," essentially is an examination of two contrasting decision-making styles or approaches open to a school board. One of the approaches, "the best solution approach," is defined as "the process which identifies a problem, considers all possible solutions and then selects the alternatives that will permit the board to most closely attain its professed goals," (p. 48) and is identified as being "strictly a rational decision-making approach" (p. 48) used when the dominant concern is for decision quality. The other approach, referred to as the "political approach," is brought into play when the prime concern is public "acceptability" of a particular decision.

The second framework, "The Public Involvement Assessment Framework," is offered as a means for "Sizing up a Situation" by a school board contemplating involving the public on a given issue. This framework is built around the five focal questions: what subjects are suitable for public involvement? why involve the public? who is to be consulted? how should the public be involved? what are the possible consequences? Somewhat difficult to understand is the reasoning which prompted this assessment framework to be preceded by a section headed "Some guiding Questions" in which the five major guiding questions are substantially the same as those around which the assessment framework was built. The end result is that the contribution of the framework and the impact of the commentary related to the critical questions are both reduced significantly. In spite of this perceived weakness in the organization of the material presented, there is little doubt regarding the logic and inherent worth of the questioning sequence suggested by the Task Force.

The fifth chapter, a summary statement related to the CEA sponsored National Conference on Public Involvement in Educational Decisions held in December, 1980, offers some interesting observations regarding the reaction of conference participants to the efforts of the Task Force as well as about public involvement in general. For the most part, the reader is presented capsule comments of thoughts expressed by some ten or so identified individuals including four Task Force members.

The final chapter contains two well-written case studies clearly illustrating the awesome challenge that public involvement poses for both elected and appointed school board officials. The first has to do with the decision of a Quebec board to close one of its schools without reference to the community most concerned. The second focuses on the attempt of a British Columbia board to implement a "public involvement process" in the study of declining enrolment issues. Each of the two cases (selected from an unspecified number commissioned by the Task Force) is deemed to be interesting and relevant reading for anyone concerned with the realities of public involvement.

Considering the report as a totality, the extent to which it achieves the declared purpose "to promote a better understanding of public involvement in educational decisions" (p. 6) is less than what one might reasonably have expected. As suggested previously, what is judged to be an unduly restrictive definitional base, questionable placement of some materials, and the lack of necessary data tend to reduce the effectiveness of the report. Also, it is felt that had the report been structured using a thematic approach, such as was used to guide the review of the literature, greater unity would have been achieved and the overall impact increased.

One major disappointment was the position of the Task Force in taking "no stand on whether public involvement is good, bad or irrelevant." (p. 46) While acknowledging the legitimacy of the contention that the goodness, badness or irrelevance of public involvement "is highly dependent on the local situation," (p. 46) this reader would have appreciated some definitive indication of the conclusions reached and the major concerns held by the members of the Task Force as a result of their participation in the study.

In spite of the concerns noted above, any individual interested in the study of public involvement in the governance of Canadian education would be well advised to examine this report. It is a reasonable starting point for any such inquiry.

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