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A vision for school business management: A reflective essay

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A vision for school business management: A reflective essay

Abstract

My decision to enter the Educational Administration program at this point in my life was influenced by a number of factors. Personal, professional and economic goals all played a role. The decision was not made under duress as there was no impending pressure from any other source to complete such a program. There were in fact a number of impediments to beginning an endeavor which required so large a commitment of time, energy and resources. In the final analysis the decision was made in the context of cost-benefit which all business administrators must utilize when making important decisions.

A VISION FOR SCHOOL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Reasearch Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in Education

by

Dennis E. Scudder

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My decision to enter the Educational Administration program at this point in my life was influenced by a number of factors. Personal, professional and economic goals all played a role. The decision was not made under duress as there was no impending pressure from any other source to complete such a program. There were in fact a number of impediments to beginning an endeavor which required so large a commitment of time, energy and resources. In the final analysis the decision was made in the context of cost-benefit which all business administrators must utilize when making important decisions.

Professionally I wanted to improve my skills, but as importantly I wanted to enhance my knowledge about the entire educational field. I agree that "School business administrators are in a pivotal position regarding the overall organization. They interact with every level of the organization. Because of this unique position it is imperative that the person holding this position know the total organization." (Wood, 1986, P. 72) . The exposure of school business officials to students may be minimal, however, their action or lack of action can effect every member of the organization. Obviously the relationship with staff will have significant consequences for the staff as a whole and

ultimately the programs provided for students.

Even though I have worked with educators for over seventeen years and have developed respect for them, there are times I have had difficulty understanding them. Most educational administrators have attained their position by coming through the ranks of the education system. Their background and educational experience was primarily involved in teacher preparation. That environment has prepared them to look and deal with issues quite differently than those of us trained in the area of business. I have had little experience in the education field academically or personally as my background has been business oriented. That orientation has caused me to look at issues and make decisions in a completely different context than most other educational administrators. It has been both a frustrating and positive process. On the positive side it has strengthened our agency by providing a balanced decision making approach. Both costs as well as benefits are considered. It has, however, provided for some frustration and ineffectiveness. At times it has been difficult to understand the thinking of those making decisions. Without the knowledge and experience of those trained as educators, I have had difficulty in viewing the problems from their

perspective. That is important even if you can not always agree. I expected and received tremendous benefit from the program in helping me to better understand and appreciate the other side of the issue.

Education has many advantages and benefits not the least being personal satisfaction. I have valued as a personal achievement every level of education previously attained. As a part of the educational system, you are constantly aware of the value and satisfaction which accompanies educational achievement. The completion of this program will fulfill a goal I set and started over fifteen years ago and while those fifteen years made it harder to begin again, I believe it will be more satisfying to complete. This was in no way a small part of my final decision.

It would be dishonest not to admit the influence of possible career and economic impact from the completion of the program. Part of the motivation to become an administrator stems from the economic benefits that accompany advancement, and while I will experience no economic change in my current position and realize the program offers no guarantees, I do believe it will open some opportunities to move beyond my current limitations. It hopefully will give me the

opportunity to further advance my career.

A final reason to become an administrator involves the leadership and responsibility that comes with the position. These positions create opportunities to have a greater influence on the outcome of many decisions. It puts one in a position to make a greater difference and at the same time magnifies the chances for errors and failures. Greater risks bring greater returns. It offers diversity and challenges different than those available in other educational positions. I believe any job can be interesting and challenging, but I believe administration can offer more than many others.

All of these are reasons I considered, however, I would not have entered just any program. It had to be meaningful and relevant. It had to have a mixture of educational philosophies and real world experiences reflected in the courses and the teaching staff. This program offered this opportunity and made it possible for me to make the commitment necessary to complete it.

My beliefs, values and philosophies have been developed over the past forty years in a positive but relatively sheltered environment associated with rural Iowa. As the case with many native Iowans, I grew up in a small homogeneous community of middle class people.

Family and school coupled with my experiences in a family owned small business have been most influential in the formulation of my values and beliefs. Work ethic, pride, respect, discipline, responsibility, and equality are all values which I deem important. I believe in the importance of the family. I believe that everything we do has an associated cost and we must weigh those costs against the benefits. Finally I believe in the importance and value of education. It is both impacted and in return impacts all of the values and beliefs I hold to be true.

The importance and influence of education to society and its citizens is immeasurable. Du Bridge said " Education does much to preserve a free, highly productive and democratic society " (Burrup, Brimley, and Garfield, 1988, p. 27). In their discussion of financing education Burrup, Brimley and Garfield agreed with that assessment. They reiterated that this country must protect the value of it's investment in the education of it's citizens which cannot be fully measured in standard dollars and cents (Burrup et al. 1988).

Education is a critical component of any civilized society. If one believes that as I do, it also highlights the necessity of equity in educational opportunity. Burrup et al. (1988) spoke to the issue of

equality as it relates to financing our educational programs and to the overall importance to our society. They said " Equality as it relates to educational opportunity is a fundamental principle in American education. Democracy is best served by extending to all children an equal opportunity to attend schools that are adequate for the achievement of self-realization, economic sufficiency, civic responsibility and satisfying human relationships " (Burrup et al. 1988, p. 79). Without equity in educational opportunities, our society will not be sustained. The opportunity to improve oneself is essential, and that opportunity comes primarily through education. Opportunity as Burrup et al. (1988) pointed out, does not mean equal resources for all but rather requires unequal resources for an equal chance. Burrup et al. (1988) said that equal dollars per student do not produce equal results. I have acknowledged the need and appropriateness of that philosophy. In my position I have been exposed to a variety of youngsters with special needs. These kids have varied abilities and varied levels of possible achievement, and all deserve the opportunity to reach their potential.

The concept of unequal effort for equal opportunities was reinforced throughout my experiences in the program. School

finance equity including weighting of students for resource distribution was shown to be a major component of most state funding formulas including the formula for the state of Iowa. A great deal of time was spent explaining the importance, value and logic of such an approach. " Public education systems are designed to produce equity (fairness) in the treatment of their students, but they do not, cannot and should not aspire to produce complete equality " (Burrup et al. 1988 p. 10). As Burrup et al implied equity and equality are not synonymous. It proved to be a strong affirmation of my previous beliefs. Equity of opportunity cannot be achieved through equality of effort.

The challenges that face education because of poverty, racial and ethnic discrimination, and other social problems were brought into a better focus. I became more sensitive to the huge roadblocks to educational opportunity facing many children. " Growing numbers of the school-age population are now of minority origin, and fall under the label of "at risk" students who need special supportive services " (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan, 1990 p. 22). This issue was spoken to in school finance. Burrup et al. (1988) stated that unequal educational opportunity was a certainty when funding did not

consider variables such as racial origin, socioeconomic background and other specific characteristics of students. I became more sensitive to the need for administrators as leaders to proactively work for solutions. More than an educational system is at stake. The statistics are staggering, but even more enlightening were the discussions of the changes that will occur in the near future. By 1990 30 percent of the school-age population will be minority, and that population will continue to grow (Campbell et al 1990). By 2020 almost one half of all American children will be from minority populations (Rubin and Borgers 1991). I must admit that I had not given serious consideration to the ethnic and racial changes occurring that will dramatically impact education and in turn, all of society. These discussions affirmed that equity in educational opportunity requires different levels of efforts and different strategies, and that we must be concerned with all of education not just our own. " Failure to apply the theory of equality of educational opportunity results in penalties to students and is a costly injustice to society " (Burrup et al. 1988, p. 63). Campbell et al echoed that sentiment by saying " Indeed a persuasive case can be made that the future of our democracy and economic system may be predicated

upon the ability to accommodate the special needs of an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous student population " (1990, p. 23). If we do not do the job of providing educational opportunity for children who at present don't have much of a chance, we will all suffer the consequences.

We must not forget the need to use resources wisely and to carefully analyze the costs and benefits of all decisions we make in education. We have been made increasingly aware that resources available to education are not unlimited. We must continue to pursue the goal of equal opportunity for all kids. To maximize those opportunities we must use our resources wisely. Dr. Lepley (Des Moines Register, Sept. 1, 1991) in his discussion of World Class Schools said one of two things Iowa must do is restructure to use resources more wisely - because the state simply cannot afford the waste. That is not an earth-shaking revelation, but does drive home the need to analyze the use of our resources. As administrators the use of cost-benefit analysis is vital. Administrators must be able to prioritize and direct resources to the areas of greatest need and benefit. They must be able to utilize input from others and build consensus to maximize the potential for good decisions which

provide for the efficient use of our limited resources.

The responsibility of providing excellence in education must be shared by many. Educators, parents, students, business, and government are all components necessary in a successful education equation. Unfortunately all have failed to some degree.

Obviously educators shoulder much of the responsibility for improving education yet change has been slow. I think Decker (Collective Bargaining, Nov. 1991) is correct when he said that restructuring will take fifty years and that we won't see the total change in our lifetime. Instead of meaningful change educators have spent much of their limited time and energy in an adversarial environment. The lack of cooperation which exists has been most evident in the collective bargaining arena, and it has slowed advancements in education. In an effort by both sides to gain in the collective bargaining process we have strayed from the cooperative efforts needed for positive change. Some good things have been achieved in the clarification and consistent interpretation of policies and procedures, however, few positive changes effecting children have been made. Administrators and teachers share the responsibility. The fears and egos which both possess have

prevented educators from making the cooperative effort needed for constructive change. These past couple of years have convinced me that we cannot continue on this course. Herrick (1990, p. 205) said that " Joint management espouses a change in values from competition and authoritarianism to cooperation and participation ". I believe we need to look at a more integrative system of bargaining talked about by Herrick but that component of joint management will not come easily. Herrick (1990) said that it requires active, open, informed, helpful, cooperative, responsible and thoughtful behavior by the members of the organization. Administrators will need to model this kind of change and lead the way. They are in a position to influence change, however, they will have to put fears and egos aside. Teachers will need to make this same effort. Campbell et al (1990) believes this will happen. The political climate is not positive toward unions (Beckham and Zirkel 1983). Teachers will moderate in their strident unionism in the pursuit of school improvement as well as good public relations. This will open the doors for greater cooperation. Greater participation by all members of the organization is vital. In the well designed parallel organization described by Herrick (1990) the amount of influence is great and the

quality high. That is the key to moving to the cooperative participative style which can move education forward.

Government also has a huge responsibility in our educational system. Obviously most of the funding for our public systems flow from local, state and federal government. These same forces exert control over our systems. The types and extent of the control are the issues we need be concerned with. The federal government by constitution has relinquished most of the responsibility to the states, but have not hesitated to use the power of the dollar to influence control. States have used their legislative authority and also the power of the dollar to impact education. Locally the same kind of influences exist. Economics and politics do have a huge impact on education as applied through our governments. Administrators must acknowledge the reality that not all decisions are made in the context of what is best for education. They must be ready to participate and influence decisions which are positive to education. Campbell et al said " Members of the school hierarchy will become more astute as political actors. In part this will be a matter of survival " (1990, p. 295).

Another segment of society who bears responsibility lies outside the educational community. Business is a major recipient of the

benefits of our educational programs and a major contributor of resources. Because of that, it has taken an increasingly prominent role in education. Along with business involvement comes the concept of choice in education. Taken together it appears that capitalism is moving into our educational system.

Being from a business background I approve of a free enterprise system, and I know the strengths of business decision making. I have heard the many supporters for education and business cooperation and I have agreed with them. Yet I remain cautious of the level of impact of business should have on education. I remain concerned about equity. I wonder if we are attempting to move a societal responsibility onto a willing taker. Administrators as educational leaders must be concerned with selling education to the highest bidder. It must never become dependent on sales and should never become totally responsive to the mandates of any particular segment of society. Campbell et al sums up by saying " In addition to the longstanding fear that business involvement could lead to control of our schools, more subtle dangers merit attention. New or rekindled business concern for schools may be viewed as evanescent, a public relations fad that will go the way of team teaching, programmed

instruction, educational television, and the ' quick fixes ' " (1990, p. 377). While Campbell et al are primarily concerned with the public perception of business involvement we need to continue to pay attention to the real impact of business.

Finally, I come to the component who has the most influence and in my opinion done the least to accept responsibility, parents. In his 1991 report card on education Governor Branstad (Speech on Education, Oct. 31, 1991) said " To improve education in Iowa we will need additional resources and a restructuring of schools to better use resources. We will also need a stronger commitment by parents and students. We must not underestimate the impact of the commitment of parents and students ". Dr. Lepley echoes this sentiment when he said " In short, parents have an immutable responsibility for ensuring their child's success in school " (Iowa Department of Education Dispatch, Sept. 1991). Many of the discussions that took place during my experience in the program centered on the frustrations felt by teachers and administrators regarding the change in their roles. They have been forced to go far beyond their primary responsibilities to serve the students. They have absorbed much of the responsibility which previously was the families, however, society changes and the

make-up of the family changes with it. Drug abuse, at risks, etc. are issues that must be dealt with by education. Much of the book by Campbell et al (1990) made a good case for the need for education to intervene and provide service. I however was equally impressed by the comments and feelings of educators in regard to this issue. I feel a strong case is also made for increasing parent involvement and parent responsibility in all areas of their children's development. We dare not accept as educators responsibility which belongs to the parents for which we have neither the ability or will to provide.

The management structure and decision making process in schools have been ineffective and inefficient. The hierarcial nature of schools have not been effective in dealing with the open system (Campbell 1990) we have in education. The influence and interests of staff, parents, students, business and government have made consensus building difficult. Add to the equation unbelievable quantities of paperwork, external requirements, shared schools and shared administrators, principals spread to thin, unsupportive publics, collective bargaining and unions and it becomes more understandable as to why our system has not achieved more success.

In the past I have attributed much of the responsibility for the ineffective management to unions. I have spent considerable time during the past ten years struggling to get collective bargaining agreements. It has been my perception that my struggle was due mostly to union resistance. The program has tempered my view in two ways. First I have become more aware of the concerns and attitudes of teachers as a result of spending time discussing various issues. It has helped to better understand their feelings in a more neutral setting like class. Second I have been introduced in detail to some new management styles.

I have been deluged with the concept of decentralized management in classes, meetings, journals and professional organizations. It is certainly one of the most discussed issues by teachers. They have placed shared decision making at the top of their reform list (Nardini and Antes 1991). It is a concept which will continue to impact education in the future. To paraphrase Dr. Decker (Collective Bargaining, Oct. 1991) " Shared management to some degree must be adopted in our restructuring of schools. " Herrick (1990) said that our systems should give worksite teams as much freedom as possible to devise their own arrangements for governing

tasks, assignments and rewards.

Whether it is described as decentralized, participatory or site-based, cooperation and participation must be improved. It has always been my feeling that the best decisions are decisions made by those affected. Decisions are more likely to be implemented if those effected have responsibility for the decision (Lebowitz 1992). This belief was reinforced by the educators sitting next to me in class. It has become more evident to me that many have a strong desire to participate, and that they would favor a more shared management style. It however must be recognized that these teachers are not necessarily representative of all teachers. Many clearly want to teach and not be bothered by outside influences.

I have seen the advantages and have been encouraged by the prospects of a shared management style. It has allowed a change from rigid procedures and promoted innovation (Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher, 1989). I remain, however, cautious of moving too quickly or too far. I am more inclined to believe that there needs to be a balanced approach (Mc Walters 1992) to management with the utilization of different management styles.

Boards and administrators remain as important policy and decision

makers. There remain too many influences to make all decisions in a shared cooperative venture. Responsibility and accountability continue to influence management and as of now I have not seen a good method for implanting these concepts into a participatory style. As a business official whose responsibility it is to provide information to the decision process I feel I have an opportunity to work successfully within both frameworks of management.

Administrators will face more complex situations in the future. The constantly changing nature of our open system of education will see to that. Additional demands and needs will be heaped on our educational system by various constituencies. Parents, business, government and students will all contribute. While there may be variations between rural and urban settings, I believe both will be dramatically impacted. How will administrators meet these new challenges?

Administrators must make a personal commitment to a leadership role. If we wait for change to be legislated or for huge infusions of resources, we will be left behind. Neither legislative wisdom or the extra dollars needed will likely ever exist, and even if they did, our problems would not be solved. Values can not be legislated and

commitment can not be purchased. Administrators need to serve as motivators for students, parents, teachers and others to drive home the **value** of education. They must resist special interests and focus more narrowly on the cognitive function of schools (Roeuche and Baker 1986), while at the same time understanding the need to stay involved in the political process which sets the direction of education. We must make every effort to make education a priority for every child. Administrators will have to model this behavior. As Campbell et al said " Be it music, art, science or social thought administrators should continue to be learners and to be excited about learning " (1990, p. 289).

Administrators will not be able to meet the challenges of tomorrow's schools alone. Johnson (1985) stated that we need to get everyone in the community directly involved. That may be an impossible task, but without the support and assistance of the entire school as well as the general public there can be little hope for substantive change. Administration, staff and community all need to work as a team to find ways to make schools work better. It must be done together to maximize both the decision making process and the effort and commitment to successfully implement those decisions.

Administrators will need to acquire new skills and attitudes to meet the challenges of the future. Skills particularly important to administrators will be those in the area of interpersonal and communication skills. These are the most important for a successful jointly managed workplace described by Herrick (1990). The task of the administrator will be to get the job done through the participation and efforts of others (Castetter 1986). That will require skill. As our constituencies continue to change, we will need to be ready to adapt with them. Expectations and requirements are likely to keep increasing. At the same time resources undoubtedly will not keep pace. It will take a great work ethic coupled with knowledge to produce the efficiencies necessary to be effective in the future.

Administrators will need to be ready to take risks and withstand pressures. In their leadership role they will be asked to move us forward and will be held accountable for progress. Burrup et al. (1988) points to the increased demand by the public for both efficiency and accountability. Those demands can only increase. I do not believe there will be more of administrators to do the job; the challenges will certainly not be reduced. They will need to enlist others to help. Administrators will have to relinquish control and authority to get the

job done and therein lies the risks. There, however, may lie the answer.

Administrators jobs will be difficult, and to survive they will need to change. Business administrators will face some of the most difficult challenges. As resources dwindle and demands increase it will take thoughtful innovation to keep our schools at the level needed.

Business administrators will need to take on increased responsibility in providing new and innovative ideas. Wood (1990) suggested that business administrators must come to view their roles as greater than the duties assigned to them as they must become leaders on a larger scale. They will need to take risks and they will need to continue to work hard. There will be many difficult decisions and choices that will need to be made by administrators at every level. Those decisions will weigh heavily in the future of our schools.

As part of my personal vision for administrators of the future, I will use a statement by Dr. Dowd as a guiding standard. He said, " It would be unethical to make decisions which are unfavorable to kids and to not make decisions which are " (Personal communication Introduction to Educational Administration, Feb. 1991). We need to always remember our purpose if we do we have taken a substantial

step in the right direction.

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