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A preferred vision for leadership in effective schools: A reflective essay

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Abstract

The focus of administrative coursework has been on the characteristics and skills needed to be an effective leader; the beliefs and values that govern leadership decisions; the organizational theories that effect leadership style; and the changing roles and responsibilities of a leader today. Historically, the organizational theories of structure and power in business have been imitated in educational institutions. Conditions in this decade continue to accelerate the world-wide influence of advancing technologies, changing demographics, and an unstable economy. Within this contextual framework, where then lies the individual's direction as a leader in educational administration?

A PREFERRED VISION FOR LEADERSHIP IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Juanita M. Suhr

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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".....Proposition: that the principal of the school is the most important administrator in the American educational system" (Kimbrough and Burkett, 1990, p. xi). Kimbrough and Burkett state the following:

> The need for leadership knows no boundaries. Depending on the quality of their leaders, entire communities progress toward the good life or lean toward mediocrity in daily living. The primary difference between these communities is the quality of their leaders. Moreover, the quality of leadership in the community effects the efforts of educators in achieving high quality education for students. (p.xi)

The focus of administrative coursework has been on the characteristics and skills needed to be an effective leader; the beliefs and values that govern leadership decisions; the organizational theories that effect leadership style; and the

changing roles and responsibilities of a leader today.

Historically, the organizational theories of structure and

power in business have been imitated in educational

institutions. Conditions in this decade continue to accelerate

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demographics, and an unstable economy. Within this

contextual framework, where then lies the individual's

direction as a leader in educational administration?

Considerable attention has been given to the reflection

and self-study necessary to identify an individual's values and

beliefs. It is essential to know oneself first, since that set of

values and beliefs will govern all forthcoming processes and

decisions. Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) discuss the work-

world reality of the constant decisions that are central to the

role of the principal. Decisions require assigning values to

facts and making judgements about courses of actions. It

becomes a moral dilemma when there is a necessity to make a

judgement that one set of valued alternatives is to be

preferred over another. Blumberg and Greenfield refer to

these as competing "standards of goodness" such as a standard

of efficiency, of good educational practice, of convenience, of

political expedience, of friendship, or of some other standard

of goodness. The value dilemma occurs in the problem of

competing values, and thus the problem of deciding on a course

of action; for example, the situation involving the support of a

faculty member (loyalty to the profession), or the support of a

student (good educational practices).

From values and beliefs, Blumberg and Greenfield further

expand to a "moral imagination" or "vision" as the capacity to

help us see the difference between how things are and how

they might be; to act on the imagined possibilities that could

move the present closer to the imagined future; that quality of

character that gives the individual the ability to see that the

world need not stay as it is, but possibly for it to be better.

Joel Barker (1991) in The Power of Vision discusses

vision as being the most forceful motivator for change. Values

are the way you measure the rightness of your vision. Dr. Else (personal communication, June 9, 1992) views leadership as a responsibility to bring people together; to give people the opportunity to explore there own values and beliefs first, then for their organization. By identifying the vision, then the reality, the exposed gap in between is the area of "creative tension". This can be resolved by action, or energy, in moving towards the vision. By providing a focus, or parameters of beliefs and values, people can enroll in their own shared vision resulting in a more solid and lasting commitment.

Sergiovanni (1991) also states "anyone who is aspiring to be a good principal needs to have some sense of what she or he values, something to be committed to, a compass to help navigate the way--a personal vision" (p. 334). Sergiovanni also refers to commitment to an organization's purposes and to the people who make those purposes happen as "servant leadership"; those leaders who are proven and trusted servants. Principals thus "minister" to the needs of the schools they

serve by furnishing help and being of service to parents, teachers, and students; by providing leadership in a way that encourages others to be leaders in their own right; and by highlighting and protecting the values of the school.

With such great emphasis on the role of vision in leadership today, there is also need for a word of caution in this area (Fullan, 1992). "The high-powered, charismatic principal who 'radically transforms the school' in four or five years can also be blinding and misleading as a role model. This principal's strategy is fragile because so much depends on his or her personal strength and presence, which is relatively short-lived" (Fullan, 1992, p. 19). This may come from too much emphasis placed on the leader as "solution" rather than the "enabler of solutions". Fullan suggests the alternative approach to vision-driven reform as one in which the principal pursues promising visions provisionally, learning as well as leading through collaboration.

There is a changing role for principals today. According to Sarason, in Fullan (1990), the "predictable failure of educational reform" rests with the existing power relationships in schools. The strategies used in restructuring for altering power relationships include: school-site management; increasing parents' and teachers' participation in decision-making; and enhancing opportunities for the exercise of teacher leadership (Leithwood, 1992). These descriptions translate into such current educational buzzwords as site-based management, participatory management, and empowerment.

According to Leithwood, Type Z organizations emphasize participatory decision-making based on power that is consensual and facilitative; or power manifested **through** other people, not **over** other people. Administrators use facilitative power through transformational leadership practices that build a shared vision, improve communication, and develop a collaborative decision-making process.

Transformational leadership is "value added" in that it

provides the incentive for people to attempt improvements in

their practices. It empowers people to redefine their purpose

and vision, to renew their commitment, and restructure their

own systems for goal accomplishment. Studies by Leithwood

(1992) "suggest that transformational school leaders are in

more or less continuous pursuit of three fundamental goals:

1) helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative,

professional school culture; 2) fostering teacher development;

and 3) helping them solve problems together more effectively"

(pp. 9-10). This is in contrast to "transactional leadership"

which is based on an exchange of services for various kinds of

rewards that the leader controls, at least in part. For

example, a teacher exchanges services for salary, recognition,

or other intrinsic rewards.

Sergiovanni (1991) encourages empowerment in

discussing the dual roles of management and leadership in

administration. Management and leadership are two

distinctive expressions of administrative practice.   Routine behaviors that are associated with one's job are classified as management behaviors; whereas, leadership connotes the initiation of new structures, procedures and goals (Kimbrough and Burkett, 1990).   Sergiovanni (1991) states that the two empheses should be in balance and complement each other. Successful leadership and management is directed toward the improvement of teaching and learning for students.   In assuming an active role in this improvement, the principal also needs to give attention to enabling others to function more effectively on behalf of the school, or empowerment.

The degree of empowerment being utilized can be measured by "leadership density".   Vaill, in Sergiovanni (1991), defines leadership density as "that continuous stream of actions by an organization's formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organizations basic purposes" (p.103).   This not only means the extent to which the leadership roles are

shared, but also how broadly leadership itself is exercised. This includes the leadership expressed on behalf of school quality by students, parents, and teachers as well as principals. The greater the leadership density, the more successful the school.

One area for teacher empowerment suggested by Poplin (1992) is that of instructional leadership. Poplin asserts that instructional leadership has outlived its usefulness in that it concentrated only on the growth of the students at the expense of the educator's own intellectual needs and interests. Promoting individual growth through self-evaluation empowers teachers to become their own instructional leaders. The new role of administrator then is to be their aides, locate resources, and organize opportunities to pursue instructional innovations of interest. Those leaders tolerating the role as administrator/servant, placing them at the top and bottom of the hierarchy, will be able to spark the change inside institutions that comes from everyone growing.

Decreased emphasis on management versus worker relationships and increased emphasis on colleague-professional roles for administrators and teachers would be a step towards facilitating this change. Criteria and methods of teacher and administrator evaluation will need to be adjusted to reflect the new roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. This may threaten the authority/power role of some administrators with decreased control of staff; and also threaten the status quo attitudes of some teachers with increased responsibilities and accountabilities. Given time for those involved to develop consensus beliefs and outcomes for this area would address that fear.

Restructuring initiatives such as site-based management, participatory decision-making, and empowerment are often begun, but without addressing the necessity and complexity of the skills of facilitating, collaborating, and consensus building. This is sometimes referred to as first and second stages of reform, when in actuality the first cannot be

successful without the second. Developing these skills to facilitate, collaborate, and build consensus is the challenge to effective schools today.

Evidence accumulated from the sciences and the humanities indicates that there is a transition taking place. P. Block, in Rogers (1988), states "Cooperation, intuitive wisdom, and collaboration are already being espoused by the most respected scholars on leadership, and by many organizations that are focusing on improving organizational culture as a means of improving productivity" (p. 7). Rogers suggests that the model of how the world operates is perhaps no longer adequate. Thus the old or "conventional" paradigm, established in the western world by Copernicus and Galileo, is shifting from the more mechanical control of cause and effect to a "network of relationships". Women are particularly well prepared for functioning and leading in the world of this new paradigm because of the quality referred to as "female ethos". The conclusion is that the heart of female ethos is the focus

on relationships and the resulting values of duty, love, and
care.

The mutual shaping/mutual causality of the new
paradigm means that the needs, values, and goals of leaders
and followers mesh to create a "community" in the
organization. This is an emphasis on relationships, process,
groups, networking, intuition, feelings, perceptions, and above
all, on collaboration. A model of feminine leadership focuses
on process, intuition and the importance of relationships; it
also emphasizes shared accountability and cooperation which
empowers the autonomy of staff. Rogers (1988) concludes
that:

> Feminine leaders must learn to trust their own style and
> to use it. During this phase of revaluation and rebirth,
> discord and disruption might easily take over. The
> challenge then, in keeping with the values espoused by
> the female ethos, is to approach the transition with an
> attitude of collaboration. Ultimately it is in the best

interest of both the male and female worlds to establish

a more cooperative, altruistic culture and along with it a

leadership style based in an ethos of duty, love,

and care. (p. 8)

The topics reflected on in this essay are my personal

choices of areas for growth in administrative practice. The

utilization of all the concepts and skills described would be

necessary to best initiate, develop, and implement the school

improvement plan model presented next. The effectiveness of

this model will rely heavily on the facilitation of the

organizational and leadership practices discussed in this

paper.

Dr. J. Doud and Dr. D. Else (personal communication, May,

1992) focus a school improvement plan on the desired learner

outcomes designed from an organization's values and beliefs.

The basic description of the model is in a sequence of steps:

a) the collection and analysis of information

b) formulation of belief statements and development

of the school's mission statement (both at district and building level)

c) identification of desired learner outcomes (both at district and building level)

d) student performance, instructional practices, and organizational practices analyzation; assessment of program areas for comparison in their alignment with the previously developed outcomes, belief, and mission statements

e) development of a school improvement plan in alignment with the previously developed outcomes, belief, and mission statements

f) implementation of the school improvement plan with documentation/evaluation of student growth in an ongoing circular model.

As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of this plan will depend on the sincerity of the leadership in the involvement of people, the commitment of time, and the facilitating skills to

bring about consensus. This is even more fundamentally driven by the belief or concept of consensual power being manifested through others, not over others. Without this commitment, it will remain "business as usual".

In my studies of the principalship, I have searched for the answers to my dissatisfactions as a teacher, as a parent, and as a human being. I have discovered most importantly, that what I value and believe personally and professionally is valid and is being addressed in the changing role of the administrator today; that the strengths and diversity I bring to the profession as a female are not only needed, but being sought; and that I can make a difference!

I began this journey due to the necessity of a career change; I continue this journey with a purpose and mission.

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