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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Christina M. Windsor
University of Northern Iowa

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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Abstract

The progress of Black women must clearly be stated in the context of value and images which are our own not in the mirror of the dominant culture's values. As we move to fill new roles, and to create new roles, we must bring with us our own values. The progress of Black women, as Black women, is the measure of how well or how poorly this nation has been able to accommodate the unique perspectives of those once defined as inferior because we are Black, and unstable because we are women (Washington, 1988) .

**A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education**

**by
Christina M. Windsor
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This Research Paper By: Christina M. Windsor

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY
SCHOOLS: A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for
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Robert H. Decker

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Date Approved

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Norman McCumsey

4-16-92
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

4/21/92
Date Received

⊂ Dale R. Jackson
Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

The progress of Black women must clearly be stated in the context of value and images which are our own not in the mirror of the dominant culture's values. As we move to fill new roles, and to create new roles, we must bring with us our own values. The progress of Black women, as Black women, is the measure of how well or how poorly this nation has been able to accommodate the unique perspectives of those once defined as inferior because we are Black, and unstable because we are women (Washington, 1988).

We have already demonstrated that we are competent. We are presidents and vice-presidents of major colleges and universities. We are teachers and researchers. We are contributors in virtually every field of human knowledge. We have excelled as scientist in explaining the world, and we have excelled as humanists in giving that world meaning. And the quality of our contributions have demonstrated neither inferiority of mind nor instability of purpose (Washington, 1988).

In writing my reflective paper, it is important that the reader understand that these are the views of an aspiring Black female administrator. I stress Black female because it is important for today's educational leaders to become aware of the true situation facing women and people of color in education. Having the opportunity to continue my educational career at the University of Northern Iowa has shown me that there is a

tremendous need for women and people of color in the educational system.

The University of Northern Iowa's (UNI), educational administration master's program has been a resourceful and enriching experience for me. I have had the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge I gained during the first year which included a graduate assistantship, to practical educational experiences during the second year of which included an extended practicum and internship experience.

During the first year of the program, I felt isolated, confused and misunderstood. The isolation was felt because I was one of two Black women in the administration program, and in my School Law class, I was not only the only Black in the class, but also the only female. I can remember the first night of the school law class when during the getting acquainted session, the question of job placement arose. One of the students who had never met me prior to this class had the audacity to say, "Well we know Tina won't have a problem finding a job, because she is a Black female." I responded, "If I am qualified what difference does it make?" I went on to say, "If an employer hires an employee because of race and gender and sacrifices quality, you cannot fault the employee." I could not understand how in 1990, educated people still had such narrow views. I thought to myself, "Don't these young white males know that affirmative action is not working?"

A commonly held assumption is that Black women are readily marketable because employers get two affirmative action "credits" when we are hired. Since affirmative action is largely viewed as an erosion of employment or academic standards, this "two for one" rhetoric also serves to give a cryptic view of how others really view our worth (Washington, 1988).

The ranks of school administration are filled mostly with white males, despite the fact that women and people of color fill a majority of the teaching slots. Among the reasons for the underrepresentation of women and people of color are: the "women's-place" theory; the obligations of family; the paucity of same gender, same race role models; and the lack of appropriate training. Increasingly there are women in graduate programs training to become school administrators (Shakeshaft, 1987) but who are not being hired for administrative positions. There is, however, a diminishing pool of blacks enrolled in graduate preparation programs (Middleton, 1988).

The situation in my school law class was just one of several experiences I had gone through during my two years of graduate study at UNI. These experiences helped me realize that educators have a lack of understanding of the unique problems people of color and women face as they seek and assume administrative roles.

I realize the job of an educational administrator is a difficult task and that there are a number of variables that effect ones success in this field. However, as I reflect on

things that I know, on the knowledge I have gained from the material that has been shared with me, both inside and outside of classroom (i.e. seminars, conferences, practicum experiences) and from personal experiences I have had with professors, colleagues, supervisors, area teachers and students, I realize that all of these situations have helped me shape my vision for the future in the field of administration.

VALUES AND ETHICS

I believe I must first have a philosophy that is rooted in a set of strong values and morals. Many administrators have philosophies about education and what should be done to make the educational system a better environment, but experience has taught me that there are many administrators in the field who do not "walk their talk". This is a phrase I was introduced to at the first administrative conference I ever attended (The School Administrators of Iowa Conference held in Ames, Iowa, 1990). The speaker at the conference made the point that if you really believe certain things need be accomplished in your building or district, you should take the necessary steps to get them done. How an individual accomplishes their goals or objectives shows others their true values and ethical beliefs. A Black motivational speaker (Jawanza Kunjufu, 1986) says it best. "I firmly believe that values and images don't lie. What a person says may be false, but what a person does and wears is consistent."

Educational administrators, now realizing that their decisions are being carefully scrutinized and increasingly challenged, must make their decisions not only upon the standards of the school and community, but also according to sound ethical judgment. They must have a clear understanding of such concepts as human justice, equality, and freedom; as these are basic to ethical decision making in a democratic society (Witmer, 1990).

In the class Elementary Administration, Dr. Doud shared with us a phrase that he felt many administrators should consider when making ethical decisions. That phrase was, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I completely agree with Dr. Doud because this is the philosophy I believe in and have lived the majority of my life. This is largely due to my parents who were once "slaves" as children, who not only grew up with a limited education, but also a strong value system.

Growing up in Sioux City, Iowa, living in a religious, parent-directed, multicultural and education valued environment, I learned the importance of having values and ethics. I learned the importance of believing in something so strong ("walking your talk"), that I would sacrifice myself to help family and friends. A commitment to God, having a respect for all people and having parents who consistently fed their children the idea of never thinking we were better than others, while letting no person make you feel they are better than you, are values I hold dear. In my quest to be an effective administrator how do I convey to teachers, students, parents and the community that I have sound

values and ethics? How do I make them realize that I understand the concept of human justice, equality and freedom? Simply by "walking my talk."

The representation of people of color in positions of school leadership has implications for stemming the dropout rate, which is highest among Black and Hispanic students. If the schools are to retain members of all cultural and racial groups, they must have leadership that is representative of all these groups. All races and cultures must feel that their concerns are sincerely being addressed by those with power or influence in the school. Otherwise, the alienation that begins in a discriminatory school system may accompany these students into adulthood in which they become a drain on an already badly depleted society (Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress & Hadderman, 1989). In the article Making Schools Work for All Children (Lincoln & Higgins, 1991), television journalist Bill Moyers says:

If I told you that tomorrow America intends deliberately to take from our classrooms every third child and bury them alive, you'd gasp in horror. But we're already doing that. Twelve million young people are...dropping out school or leaving school unprepared for future education, unprepared for work. With Black and Hispanics leading the pack. (p. 7)

The lack of proper education for people of color is an important issue to me. An example of what I mean is, having to wait until I was a sophomore in college before I was taught that people of African descent have a history that precedes slavery and civil rights. This is a case of improper education which is a sign of miseducation. In the book, From Miseducation to Education (Akbar, 1984) examines the heart of the problem.

Miseducation is the root of the problems for the masses of people. If the masses of people were given correct knowledge from the very beginning, we would not be in the condition we find ourselves today. I too share this belief. I believe that if major efforts are not made to correct the situation, our society will suffer dramatically. I realize the job of preparing these students to achieve in school and in life, is too big a task for families, schools, or community institutions to tackle alone. It will take effective leadership skills to fulfill such a task.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

In the course Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction, leadership behavior was defined as "having the ability to influence groups to achieve specific goals" (class notes, 1990). In the course Elementary Administration, a characteristic of an effective principal was "one who had the ability to provide leadership for the development and implementation of clear and precise instructional goals" (class notes, 1992). As I expressed earlier, the issue of educating people of color properly will be a specific goal I will want to address as a future administrative leader. I feel there is a strong need to build a sense of self-esteem in many of our children of color. One way I would attack this problem is to provide them with role models that reflect the student population.

Schools educate children not only by what is taught in the classroom, but also by what is shown about how the world operates. Bandura and Walters (1963) assert that role models for

children are essential in influencing their norms and values. Before children can envision the possibility that they can be successful, life experiences must provide them with examples of people very much like themselves being successful (Marshall 1989). When there is someone in authority who has characteristics in common with a child, that person may become a role model, a figure for the child to admire or emulate (Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress & Hadderman 1989).

Lomotey (1989) suggest that the effective communication and interaction that comes from cultural likeness should be a basis for assuming that black principals would be more attuned to the needs and possibilities of black students. He argues that the research showing that black teachers can positively affect the achievement of black students (Spady, 1973; Murnane, 1975; Greenleigh Associates, 1966) can be used to buttress the assumptions that black principals will have the same effect.

Monteiro (1977) reports that black principals place a higher priority on community involvement in schools, churches and viewing parent and community involvement as essential to school success. Most importantly, Lomotey (1989) found that a common characteristic among the three black principals in a case study was the demonstration of a clear "commitment to the education of African-American children, a compassion and understanding of their students and of the communities in which they work, and a confidence in the ability of all African-American children to learn" (p. 131).

Children may come to feel that it is normal to fill executive level positions based on the kinds of people they see running the schools. Black children who see only whites in authority may conclude that Blacks are excluded from power. Similarly, girls who see women only as teachers, taking orders from male principals, may become convinced that this is natural and inevitable, that the most they could hope for in life are positions subordinate to men. By teaching some children not to strive for their highest human potentials, schools are encouraging the waste of human resources. Surely this is a perverse and destructive form of "education" (Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress, & Hadderman, 1989).

I know the importance of having Black teachers and administrators in a building to help address the needs of Black children. That is one reason I purposely seeked a practicum position with the Waterloo Community School District. My experience at Central Intermediate School (Spring semester, 1991) found me confronted numerous times by teachers who seeked my opinion.

During the Spring semester 1992, having the opportunity to be a participant in the UNI and Waterloo Community School's Teachers, Administrators and Counselors (TAC) Project at Edison Elementary School, only reinforced my belief for the need of Black educational leadership. I do not advocate that white teachers cannot be positive role models in Black, Native American or Asian childrens lives, however, when these children see that

only white students succeed in larger proportions, it may lead them to believe education is of little value to them.

While participating in the TAC Project, I became involved in weekly counseling sessions with behavioral disordered Children and weekly tutoring sessions with 5th grade students. A few of the students in this group had learning disabilities. I understand that as a building principal, the chances of me having the opportunity to work with students in a direct instructional capacity will be limited, therefore, I recognize the importance and challenge of recruiting staff and volunteers from families and the community when providing the required resources to help meet instructional goals .

Building connections to and support from families and community agencies is an agenda that schools must strongly emphasize if they are to lead the nation toward the education goals for the year 2000 (Lincoln & Higgins, 1991). Establishing collaboration among administrators, teachers, counselors, students, parents and the community, that represent a diverse cultural population can dramatically increase the effectiveness of schools in the future.

FUTURE ADMINISTRATION

I feel the theoretical and practical experiences I have been exposed to throughout the past two years have prepared me for a successful career in Educational Administration. There are two aspects of the program that I have had the opportunity to

experience which I believe are the key factors to my success in the administrative program.

First, the opportunity to establish and maintain a positive mentor-mentee relationship with a Black professor has meant a great deal to me. Participating in a graduate program in a predominantly white school, being surrounded by white males with white values, became frustrating. There were times when I knew my colleagues and professors could not relate to certain values and ethical beliefs I held.

I realized it was because they lacked the understanding of the unique problems and situations people of color face.

Having a mentor who had gone through the same experiences I was going through allowed me share my feelings openly and freely without reservations. At one point in the program, I had made up my mind to only do and say what was necessary to "get by" in order to complete the program. Having a mentor helped me understand that to change human behavior, you must acknowledge and recognize its existence. I began to realize that as a Black leader, if I did not address the issues of diversity and reflect on some of the problems educators face in a multicultural environment, who would?

I would encourage every graduate student to seek and maintain a mentor. A good mentor reflects the characteristics of a good principal, one who will not tell you which system is best for you nor provide you with the ultimate answers. Instead, they will acquaint you with the various methods and guidelines for

deciding which techniques are best for you (Supervision and Evaluation class notes, 1990). Having a mentor who is concerned about you and your success, both personally and professionally, is a definite advantage.

Secondly, having the opportunity to be an Administrative Intern at Malcolm Price Laboratory School, Cedar Falls, Iowa, during the 1991-92 school year has been extremely beneficial. While at Price Lab I felt fortunate to have a female supervisor.

Internship programs are particularly useful for women and people of color aspiring to be administrators because they provide needed experience that is often denied these groups. The history of women and people of color suggest that both groups have often faced job rejection because of lack of appropriate experience, supporting the saying that: "You can't get the job without experiences and you can't get experience without the job (Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress, & Haddenman, 1989)."

Such experiences not only offer the participant useful job preparation, but also gives them a chance to measure their real desire for the job in light of the actual responsibilities and pressures involved. In addition, it gives evidence of practical ability rather than abstract potential and should promote better hiring decisions (Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress, & Haddenman, 1989).

The internship at Price Lab School, under the supervision of Dr. Linda Fernandez, offered me the opportunity to receive on the job training with guidance and direction. Instructional

leadership was one of many experiences I had the chance to practice and develop knowledge and skill through practical application.

One of the assignments during my internship was instructional supervision. I was asked to observe six specific teachers in one month. During this month, I was relieved of all other duties. I was instructed to go into the classrooms and make formal observations of these teachers as if I were the principal in the building. After the teacher observations, I was instructed to write summaries of the formal observations I had completed. During the same month, Dr. Fernandez was completing the "official" formative observations for the same group of teachers. At the end of the month, Dr. Fernandez and I would discuss what we observed during the evaluation period.

This was one of many valuable experiences I received during my internship. My supervisor was the type of individual who would give an assignment, guide and direct you through the assignment and then give positive and corrective feedback once the assignment was finished. I was given the opportunity to attend administrative meetings, seminars and national conferences. Having a supervisor who recognized the importance of professional growth, I was also provided financial assistance to attend an African-American Infusion Conference during the 1992 Spring semester. When I had questions about the administrative field, I always felt that I could get an open and honest response from Dr. Fernandez. Having the opportunity to be an

administrative intern, under the supervision of an individual you respect, trust and feel they have your best interest at heart, is an experience I would suggest to all aspiring educational administrators.

CONCLUSION

Upon entering the educational administration program at the University of Northern Iowa, I knew why I wanted to become an administrator, but did not completely understand what I would need to become an effective administrator. Now that I am about to complete the Masters program, I feel the university has done an excellent job in preparing me for the many tasks of administration and leadership.

There were times early in the program that I would get tired of hearing the word "vision." During the past two years, I have had the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge I have gained from the program, in a practical and clinical sense. These practical and clinical experiences have given me a respect for, and has shown me the importance of, having a "vision" to help me accomplish my administrative goals.

A major part of my vision is focused on the needs of women and people of color in the educational setting. I realize many individuals will view me as a black female administrator. This is a leadership role I will accept proudly. However, in accepting this role, I plan to stress the importance of others recognizing and making allowances for individual and cultural differences. My vision focuses on leadership that wants to

create a climate that enhances achievement for all students regardless of race, creed or socio-economic conditions. I want the students, teachers and parents of all races and cultures to feel that their concerns are sincerely being addressed.

As a future educational leader, I will have the opportunity to make major shifts toward equity and quality in school leadership. I have had the opportunity to experience the benefits of being guided and assisted through my administrative program by various instructors and numerous experiences. However, the additional grooming I received from my mentor and female supervisor while participating in the administrative program has been invaluable.

The University of Northern Iowa's Educational Administration program has not given me the ultimate answers to solve the countries educational problems, but the instructors and educational experiences have acquainted me with the necessary tools in search of the answers. As a future leader, I feel a major part of my success will depend on how well I use the tools that have been provided.

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