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ABSTRACT

Administrators spend most of their time on noninstructional matters. Because they excuse this by claiming that nothing is known of the learning process, they need a systematic ordering of the basic, verified knowledge on learning. For instance, findings in learning research show that the capacity to learn school subjects is far more widely distributed than was thought, that achievement is strongly interrelated with affective factors like self-esteem, and that testing can be used to improve teaching and learning processes as well as to classify students. Researchers have also gathered data on teaching activities and school structures and relationships that affect learning. Educational administrators can no longer maintain that we lack knowledge on learning processes, and they should take responsibility for using the knowledge gathered. However, most research and training in educational administration has focused on administrative behavior and matters unrelated to classroom learning rather than on school effects, student social patterns, and classroom-level variables. Among the implications of learning research findings are that administrators should reassert instructional leadership, foster staff development, and implement new school and classroom organizational patterns based on the research. (Author/RW)

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LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

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LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

In the 1980 Cocking Lecture at Old Dominion University, Luvern Cunningham spoke of some urgent needs in the area of educational policy. None struck me as more urgent than the need for school boards and school administrators to redirect their energies to matters that are visibly and fundamentally related to what is basic in education, student learning.[1]

This is not a startling revelation since most of us have observed or experienced this phenomenon in our own educational activities. One might carry the observation even further and note that much of what preoccupies building level administrators is also visibly and fundamentally unrelated to classroom effects.

In a recent study of how principals use their time, Peterson concluded that principals spent the greatest proportion of their time working with students who represented discipline problems and with teachers who had non-instructional needs.[2] Although this was a small sample, the findings seem to be supported by much that appears in the literature.

What is startling, however, is the relative complacence with which this definition of administrative role has been accepted by the profession. This role set has been fostered by a number of developments. The process of collective bargaining has resulted in some redefinition of administrative role. While teacher participation in decision-making has expanded, the principal's role has commensurately contracted. Perhaps this is an inalterable and desirable development. However, the exercise of administrative leadership in the instructional program has been blunted by other factors less desirable, and quite alterable. I would like to suggest that one of these factors has been referred to as the perceived state of innocence by

educators. Bloom notes that "after at least 5000 years of educating the young in the home, in schools, and in the work place, educators frequently complain that almost nothing is really known about the educative process."[3] This has become at once a rationalization for failure, and a justification for preoccupation with non learning related activities by educators.

Bloom concludes that a basic need in education today is a systematic ordering of our basic, verified knowledge in such a way that what is now known and true, can be acted on while what is superstition, fad, or myth can be recognized as such. He also asserts that a number of striking, causal links in the educative process have recently been established. These are areas in which educators can no longer convincingly claim innocence. He notes that administrators and teachers may persist in outdated practices, but they can no longer do so as innocents. I would like to discuss some of these findings, along with observations about appropriate administrative implications:

1. Until very recently most educators accepted the idea that human capacity for school learning differed greatly, from learner to learner, and that only a relatively small proportion of students could really master the materials that schools teach.

   More recently studies are demonstrating that as many as 90% of students, under appropriate learning conditions, can learn these school subjects up to the same standard that only the top 10% of students have been learning under usual conditions.[4] There is growing evidence that much of what we have termed individual differences in school learning is the effect of particular school conditions rather than basic differences in the capabilities of

our students.[5] Administrators and teachers are now being challenged to perceive themselves not as identifiers and sorters of talent, but as talent developers.

2. During the past two decades there has been much research focusing upon the relation between school conditions, school achievement, and effects on student personality. There is considerable evidence that repeated success in school, over a number of years, increases the probability of the student gaining a positive view of himself and high self-esteem. The opposite is equally true, so that a schedule of success and approval, or failure and disapproval over relatively long periods of time will lead to generalized attitudes toward school and school learning.[6] Because of the prevalence of deficiency models of learning in our schools, we have not fully attended to the affective prerequisites for new learning, but recent studies are demonstrating that achievement and subject affect are inter-related. Mastery learning groups tend to increase in interest in subject, while non-mastery groups remain the same or decline in interest.[7] Educational leadership has done little to translate this available knowledge into viable school practices.

3. In the past, we have permitted testing to dominate education and to serve as the primary basis for decisions about students, teachers and curricula. In the past decade we have discovered ways in which testing and evaluation can be helpful to teachers in improving the processes of teaching and learning rather than being used simply

for sorting, classifying and certifying students.[8] Yet, the use of formative evaluation in schools is virtually unknown outside of research and development projects.

Other areas in which our innocence is being challenged includes the research parodigms which shift attention from the teacher as a person to the teaching act iself. Joyce's research on models of teaching calls attention to the varieties of ways in which teaching-learning can take place, and stresses optimal fit between the goal(s) of instruction and the teaching model selected.[9]

In the past we have been innocent of the functioning, and of the effect of the latent curriculum upon the achievement of the school's stated purposes. During the past decade, sociologists, anthropologists and social psychologists have been studying the structure of the school and relationships among administrators, teachers and students.[10] They have discovered that children learn much in the way of attitudes, values, concepts of justice, etc. from the structures and relationships that they observe and experience in the school.

The evidence is accumulating and school administrators can no longer maintain that our failure to focus upon the fundamental issues in education - that is, those bearing directly upon teaching and learning - is due to "state of the art" conditions. Cunningham's recommendations on "policy about policy," if implemented, can serve to free up administrative energies, but educational leaders must also free themselves up from the sense of innocence about learning phenomena, and take on the new responsibilities that are implicit in that lost innocence.

In a recent review of research in educational administration, Erickson places some of the responsibility for misplaced emphasis in educational

leadership upon the training and research thrusts of the universities.[11] He notes the field's preoccupation with "administrator behavior" and "endless" addiction to administration of the LBDQ, and OCDQ despite massive evidence of little effect upon student outcomes.

Boyan notes that the dominant research paradigms which have guided inquiry into educational organizations typically treat administrators as non-technical specialists (Parson's model). This has perpetuated a research bias toward intervening variables, and away from end-result variables.[12]

Bloom supports Erickson's conclusion by noting that variables such as school organization and administration rarely yield correlations with student achievement which account for more than 5% of the variation.[13]

Erickson contends that the current leading edge in the research domain is the work on school effects, and classroom level variables, areas which he maintains are largely ignored by scholars in educational administration. Erickson also notes that certain organizational factors at the school and district level have been neglected in educational administration research. Curricular tracking, student social patterns, and discipline structures are among these.

What I have attempted to do here, in a very short paper, is to pick up on the cue that Cunningham gave us last Summer, namely that positional leadership in education today at all levels is preoccupied with matters largely unrelated to learning in the classroom. I have maintained that some of this bias is a kind of self imposed pre-occupation, stemming from widely held views that the state of the art does not permit us to exercise bold initiatives in the critical teaching-learning areas. I have also attempted to show that recent research and development are breaking down this professed innocence, thrusting

upon positional leaders the obligation to translate these research findings into operational programs.

If these findings are valid, the implications are broad and challenging. The implications for district level leaders are somewhat different from those of building level leaders, but they are parallel. Le me suggest some:

1. Administrators, particularly at the building level must re-assert their own leadership role in the area of instructional program. The ambivalence regarding instructional leadership needs to be resolved.
2. Administrators have an attendant responsibility to develop the necessary competencies in the technical area so as to establish leadership credibility. The so called technical skills are particularly crucial to building level administration. Administrative influence must be earned and based upon respect, not merely authority.
3. The universities have a responsibility to provide the necessary entry level skills and knowledge to trainees. The task facing the universities is to broaden research and practice in educational administration toward a primary, although not exclusive concern with pupil effects.
4. The administrative responsibility to foster staff development becomes crucial. Opportunities and incentives to acquire the new skills, must be made available through supportive networks.
5. What is even more important, leaders must effectively communicate the need for all of this development and growth. A difficult task will be to overcome some of the attitudinal impediments to more effective teaching and learning.

6. Administrators need to develop and implement organizational patterns at the school-wide, and classroom levels that are consistent with these research findings, and which promise to make a difference in classroom effects. This will require skill in flexible resource management, based upon instructional needs, as opposed to static resource allocation.
7. Administrator and teacher role perceptions need to change from that of labeling talent in the school to that of developing talent.
8. A final suggestion pertains to the need to exercise leadership in the design and utilization of teacher evaluation systems that will foster desirable behavioral change and growth. The concept of formative evaluation needs to be applied to teachers as well as students.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Cunningham, Luvern L., "Policy About Policy: Some Thoughts and Projections," The Walter D. Cocking Lecture, 1980. NCPEA, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

[2]Peterson, Kent D. "The Principals Tasks," Administrator's Notebook. Vol. XXVI, 1977-78, No. 8.

[3]Bloom, Benjamin S. "Innocence in Education," School Review, Vol. 80, No. 3, May, 1972, p. 333.

[4]Dolan, Lawrence. "The Status of Mastery Learning Research and Practice," Administrator's Notebook, Vol. XXVI, 1977-78, No. 3.

[5]Bloom, Benjamin S. Human Characteristics and School Learning. (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976, p. 57.) Bloom summarizes the findings of seven studies comparing school achievement of mastery and non-mastery learning environments.

[6]Ibid. p. 91. Bloom summarizes the results of a number of studies showing the relation between affect toward school, and academic self-concept on the one hand and school achievement on the other. He concludes that these variables account for about 25 percent of the variation in school achievement after the elementary school period.

[7]Ibid. p. 101.

[8]Bloom, B.S.; Hastings, J.T.; and Madaus, G. Handbook on Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971).

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[9]Joyce, Bruce and Weil, Marsha. Models of Teaching. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980).

[10]Dreeben, Robert. On What is Learned in School. (Reading, Mass., Addison Wesley Publishing Co., 1968).

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[11]Erickson, Donald A. "Research on Educational Administration: The State of the Art." Educational Researcher, Vol. 8, No. 3, March, 1979.

[12]Boyan, Norman J. "Follow the Leader: Commentary on Research in Educational Administration." Educational Researcher, Vol. 10, No. 2, February, 1981, p. 9.

[13]Bloom, Human Characteristics and School Learning. pp. 110-111.