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ABSTRACT

This paper, written as an expression of a school administrator's personal agenda, is intended as an illustration of issues in preparation program reform, as influenced by the administrator's own experience. Recommendations for educational administration program reform include integration of theory and practice, cognitive and affective skill development, clinical experience, university-school collaboration, and humanizing leadership. A major concern is collegiality between academia and practitioners. (8 references) (LMI)

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REFLECTIONS OF A PRACTITIONER IN ACADEMIA

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## PREFACE

The stated purpose of this symposium was "to discuss the contributions of prior administrative roles and experiences of professors of educational administration as valuable sources of knowledge for guiding reform in administrator preparation programs". I suppose that my own agenda was more personal --- to record my "practitioner voice" before it became muted with time and distance from the original administrative experience, and, to try to effectively articulate my own views on administrator preparation as influenced by my prior administrative experience.

I explain this personal agenda because I want the reader to understand the tone with which this paper is written. This paper is not intended to be scientific, or even particularly objective, but rather an illustration of some issues that I consider important in preparation program reform, as influenced by my past experience as a school administrator. Further, I believe it may be important to acknowledge overtly that many of our ideas and perceptions may make a contribution, simply because they are our own --- honest and borne of our personal experiential learning and growth. With this preface in mind, I share with you the following: reflections of a practitioner in academia.

## REFLECTIONS OF A PRACTITIONER IN ACADEMIA

### Introduction

When I was hired as a beginning Assistant Professor of Educational Administration, many friends and acquaintances jokingly referred to me as the "token female" in the department. Although I seldom felt like a token female, there were times that I wondered if I was, instead, the "token practitioner". I often felt that my perceptions of the world of education as well as my perceptions of the goals of administrative preparation programs were different than those of my former colleagues, perhaps because their experiences were so different from mine. (Most of my original colleagues had little, if any, professional experience in schools or in school administration.) These differences in experiences and perception often caused me to feel like "the odd person out" in the department. I sometimes felt that my colleagues must believe that I was born the day my Ph.D. was awarded, thus obliterating the contribution of all experiential learning from my "previous life" as a practicing administrator.

Although those initial years have increased my socialization to higher education, bringing my perceptions and priorities more in line with those of my former colleagues, I also occasionally feel a sense of loss --- the loss of certain values, priorities, and concerns which may add a needed dimension to the preparation of school administrators. I sometimes sense that my voice as a former administrator is becoming weaker with time, partially due to my perception that in higher education my experiential knowledge as an administrator is devalued or discounted to a certain degree, and partially due to my perception of the demands of professorial work in academia. Before that voice and practitioner knowledge are totally lost, I want to commit some of my

observations to paper. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to communicate my perceptions of certain dimensions of administrator preparation reform and the professorial role, as influenced by or played against memories from my prior administrative experience.

### Skill Development in Preparation Programs

Memory: My first day on the job as a middle school principal Mrs. Simmons asked me whether I wanted the students to enter the Southeast or the Southwest door upon returning from the playground after lunch. I can remember wondering what possible difference it could make, and what motivated her to be concerned about that seemingly 'inconsequential routine. As interactions of that nature occurred with other teachers over time, I realized that some of the faculty had dramatically different needs for structure and routinization of children than did I, and that these needs often reflected deeply held beliefs about children, authority, and appropriate school environments.

Although I dealt with the overtly expressed concerns and behaviors of these teachers, I seldom openly acknowledged or confronted the philosophical and values differences that I was sensing. In retrospect, I believe that had I been able to openly discuss our "belief system" differences with these faculty members, we would have each had a greater understanding and appreciation for one another's role and contribution to the school. Perhaps we could have come to appreciate the richness of that diversity. Further, such openness may have reduced the underlying emotional tension that I'm sure we all sensed. Instead, we tended to "dance around" the more substantive issues --- dealing only with concrete and sometimes superficial evidence of the underlying feelings, values, and philosophies we held.

I suspect that the reason I was uncomfortable with discussions of this sort was because I was uncomfortable expressing my own feelings and beliefs -- either because I feared making myself too vulnerable or because I felt I couldn't effectively articulate my own philosophical perspective. Or, perhaps I felt inadequate to resolve the conflicting values and philosophies of a divergent group. Whatever the reason, I failed to seize a valuable opportunity to deal directly and openly with some important values and philosophical issues which had significant implications for the school.

Many programs are designed to address the cognitive development of students in traditional educational administration content areas. The specific cognitive skills (see Bloom & others, 1956) that receive most attention are knowledge and comprehension, and less frequently, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Increasingly more attention is being paid to the development of higher order cognitive skills through simulations,

case studies, and other problem-solving and reflective learner activities. I endorse these efforts and hope that these types of learning experiences will become more prevalent in administrator preparation programs.

However, another type of skill development that I would like to see encouraged in administrative preparation programs is the affective development of prospective administrators. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) suggest that there are several levels of attitudes, interests, and/or personal involvement in the affective development of students. These include:

- 1) receiving - attracting the learner's attention;
- 2) responding - learner willing to reply or take action;
- 3) valuing - committing oneself to take an attitudinal position;
- 4) organization - making adjustment or decisions from among several alternatives;
- 5) characterization of a value complex - integrating one's beliefs, ideas, and attitudes into a total philosophy.

Again, it is the higher order skills that would seem to demand more attention. Many of these affective skills could be developed through learning activities mentioned above, such as simulations, case studies, or other problem-solving and reflective learner activities.

However, there may be some need for the addition of new course content as well, particularly course content not typically included in most educational administration programs. As many of the early leadership studies suggest, leader behavior may be viewed as two-dimensional --- task oriented behavior and relational oriented behavior (Hoy & Miskel, 1982, pp226-235). It is development of the latter dimension that seems to be neglected in many formal academic preparation programs.

The memory described above of my early principalship experience reminds me that I often found myself hesitant in a decision-making or problem situation due to the lack of clarification and expression of my own values,

personality dispositions, or individual philosophy with respect to those of others. Knowledge of self and others may be as important to the development of effective administrators as is knowledge of administrative and organizational functions --- especially in human service enterprises such as education. If that is the case, then courses which allow self-exploration and intra- and interpersonal skill development (e.g. counseling, communications, etc.) may be important additions to administrative preparation programs.

Further, the sequence of course content and learning activities should reflect the incremental development of students' cognitive and affective skills, as well as an integration of these skill areas. The total administrative preparation program should result in a gestalt learning experience for the student, as opposed to a disjointed or non-integrated preparation experience.

Programs Relevant to the Job Demands of Administrators ---  
Integrating Theory and Practice

Memory: I felt frustrated and inadequate every time I held a post-observation conference with Mr. Andrews. Although I felt fairly confident about my general appraisal of his classroom performance (which was relatively weak), I felt helpless to offer specific recommendations for how to improve that performance. What specific behaviors was he exhibiting or failing to exhibit that were causing the students' malaise or inattention in the classroom? Was it the lack of variety in his voice inflection? Was it too little use of appropriate visual aids or demonstrations? Was it his rather impersonal questioning strategy in the classroom, never calling the students by name? I could tell that there was a problem, but I had not learned any specific tools that could help me pinpoint the cause or the solution.

Most of us have heard practicing administrators complain that their graduate programs failed to prepare them for the demands of their roles in school administration. The theory vs. practice debate often emerges in the context of these complaints. I, like many of you, am unwilling to engage in an either/or debate, but rather prefer to endorse a stance of integration

between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. Having had one foot in each camp, I do not feel a competition between the two priorities, but rather a complementariness of the two priorities. However, I am not sure that our work as professors adequately reflects this balance, in spite of the fact that an appropriate linkage between theoretical and practical knowledge is through our roles as teachers and as researchers.

For instance, as teachers, professors have the opportunity and, I believe, the responsibility to apply theoretical knowledge to problems of practice. This is not simply a matter of relating administrative "war stories" to students, but rather the ability to apply relevant theories to typical school administration concerns. For example, it is not enough for students to understand the constructs of Vroom's Expectancy theory, but rather to see how school administrators can develop administrative policy and practice that will favorably influence expectancy and instrumentality to enhance the motivation of school personnel or students.

Some professors seem to demonstrate this concern and skill in their teaching, whereas others seem to minimize the importance of translating theory to practice, arguing that their course content (e.g. philosophy of education or economics of education) does not lend itself well to application or that applying theoretical knowledge to problems of practice is the work of the students when they return to the field. There may even be a type of academic elitism that surfaces, suggesting that courses with more applied emphasis (e.g. school business administration or personnel administration) are somehow less rigorous or less academically substantial. However, theoretical course content, void of practical application, does not necessarily reflect higher academic status of the course or its professor. I believe that being able to



apply theoretical knowledge to problems of practice is largely a technique of instruction rather than a course-specific limitation.

Obviously, professors cannot prepare students for every kind of administrative problem across all administrative roles or contexts, let alone prescribe an appropriate resolution for each case. That is neither possible nor desirable. However, the ability to teach students how to use theory and research to guide problem-solving in administrative circumstances enhances the job-relevancy of administrative course work.

Likewise, as researchers, professors have the flexibility and the responsibility to pursue lines of inquiry which have not only theoretical relevance, but also practical implications. If a researcher cannot explain how his or her research can contribute to the improvement of practice, in the short-run or the long-run, directly or indirectly, then I question its contribution to the field. Often I have heard academicians criticize the research of doctoral students or colleagues for its weakness in advancing theory. Unfortunately, seldom is the same concern or standard held regarding the contribution of research to the improvement of practice. Educational administration is, after all, a professional discipline with a responsibility to contribute to the knowledge base of professionals in the field.

#### Clinical Experiences and Collaboration Between Universities and Schools

Memory: When doing my administrative internship in a small school district's central office, I periodically received a visit from the university's supervising faculty member. I can remember dreading those visits because he seemed to show little attention to or understanding of the responsibilities I was assuming, but rather seemed inordinately concerned about the daily log of activities I was keeping and the format of my project documentation.

Many administrator preparation programs require or recommend that students have some type of clinical experience or internship. Unfortunately,

too few clinical experience programs are designed to contribute meaningfully to a student's preparation for administrative work. For instance, administrative interns in many preparation programs must choose their own administrative placement and corresponding field supervisor with little help from a university coordinator. Students may be influenced largely by convenience factors and may give little consideration to the quality of internship experience associated with the placement or supervisor choice. At least part of the problem stems from the fact that we, the professors in the department, hold the intern accountable for fulfilling "the letter of the law" regarding the internship experience, but give little attention to "the spirit of the law". Students may keep a log of activities or document a project they have completed, but many faculty spend little energy in assessing the worth or merit of those activities in terms of preparation experience. Further, little effort is made to reflect or relate those activities to prior academic or theoretical learning in the student's preparation program. The end result is often that the certification or degree requirement has been met, but the student is ill-prepared to confront the demands of administrative responsibilities, or, has little appreciation for the connection between their formal academic preparation and their "on-the-job" experience.

Perhaps both schools and universities need to recognize what they can and cannot do in terms of administrator preparation. Trite as the adage may be, "one cannot be all things to all people". A similar sentiment was expressed by March (1974) when he said, "The university does some things badly. Such things it clearly should not do. It does other things well, but not well enough....The university should attend primarily to activities where it has a distinctive competence" (p.26). Universities cannot provide the

richness and complexity of administrative experiences and responsibilities that are available in school settings. Neither can schools provide the opportunities for reflection and critical probing that are nurtured in an academic environment.

Maybe it is time for us to recognize the limitations that we have and work in a more coordinated fashion with schools to carve out our areas of strength and responsibility, and to work cooperatively to provide an integrated and complete internship experience for students. Ideas for such efforts have been posited (e.g. LaCost & Pounder, 1987), and include such things as clinical professorships, reflective seminars, and full-time administrative internships. Unfortunately, little experimentation in designing these programs in conjunction with schools has occurred. Until such collaborative efforts occur, it is unlikely that the needs of students, schools, or universities will be adequately met. I believe that the summative effect of school and university efforts is desirable, but the synergistic effect of coordinated school and university efforts seems optimal.

#### Humanizing Leadership

Memory: John Connors was a fellow principal with whom I worked. I never greeted John with a "Hi, how are you?" that he did not respond with a "Great -- right next to excellent --- it's almost scary!" I always admired his upbeat, good-humored response, but with time other behaviors made me wonder if he ever admitted to any vulnerabilities. Was he as "perfect" as he seemed --- always portraying the image of the "strong administrator" --- in charge, in control, and on top of everything. Sometimes he seemed more robot than human.

In spite of the fact that leadership has been described and defined in a variety of ways, there seems to be a mythology or folklore of leadership which persists. This mythology suggests a very narrow and inflexible definition of leadership to me. Words such as "strong", "rational", "powerful", and "in control" are often prevalent in discussions of leadership. Those who do not

fit this stereotypic representation risk being discounted as capable leaders. Further, when a leader "slips" by exposing a human "weakness" --- a display of emotion or some uncertainty in a problem situation ---many seem quick to condemn or question his or her leadership ability. There seems to be little tolerance for humanness in leaders ----little acceptance of leaders as beings with human vulnerabilities, sensitivities, insecurities, imperfections, or fallabilities.

To a certain degree I believe we invite that intolerance when we perpetuate the stereotypic definition of leaders as all-knowing, all-powerful, non-emotive individuals. If administrators adopt a demi-god veneer, small wonder that many teachers and community members are often anxious to uncover the substance beneath the facade of "perfection" --- to assess and criticize the flaws. Witness, for instance, the tendency of the news media to uncover fallabilities of presidential candidates or other public figures.

I must admit, I'm not sure how a myth is modified --- perhaps to a certain degree through research and publication efforts. However, somehow I suspect it has as much or more to do with how we talk about and envision leaders, and maybe even more, how we demonstrate our own humanness in our day-to-day interactions with students, educators, and with one another. In other words, we may be able to modify the myth and establish different normative models of leaders through the way we treat and display humanistic leadership in our preparation programs. As Bridge. (1976) observes,

A student works in a setting that stresses the virtue of rationality. When he enters the House of Intellect the student pays a hidden tuition; he renounces the right of emotional expression. Ideas, not feelings, are the currency of the realm. As a result, the student is unlikely to find himself in work situations which encourage him to express how he feels; his feelings are institutionally irrelevant as well as individually

bothersome. How he manages his emotions is a private rather than a public matter.

To the degree that we can reveal our own humanness, and in fact, to embrace our own humanness as an opportunity to be approachable and responsive to others, the image and definition of leadership may be broadened. Further, by our example and receptivity, our students may be granted the freedom to grow and express their own humanness. Perhaps these efforts may allow greater acceptance and tolerance for multi-dimensional, complex, and less than perfect leaders in the human development enterprise of education.

#### Summary

As stated earlier, this paper is not intended to be scientific or even objective in its approach. Further, many of the observations I have made are not unique, but are shared by many of you (see Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988). However, as a friend and colleague so descriptively expressed it, "I often feel like I am standing astride the backs of two diverging circus ponies --- ACADEMIA and PRACTICE" (Bredeson, 1988). Perhaps I have tried only to reveal and reduce my own discomfort by bringing these animals in closer alignment, harnessing memories of my administrative experience to my perceptions of administrator preparation programs. In any case, I hope there continues to be a place for "practitioners" in academia, and that their voices are heard and valued as legitimate contributions to preparation program reform.

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