
Educating the New Generation of Superintendents

The Institute for Executive Leadership at Lewis and Clark College prepares superintendents to become "managers of culture."

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Picture a dark, cold Friday evening in late February. It's Oregon, so of course it's raining. Twenty administrators straggle in one by one for their graduate class. Their assignment is to present content analyses of their district policies.

Instead, each person comes in with a story about the day's troubles (this group has been together for three terms, so members know each other well). One principal laments a child abuse case, another ends a report on a run-away child in tears, another complains that gang activities have forced her to spend the entire day with the police. More troublesome incidents are described: a broken furnace, a grievance filed by a custodian, a marginally performing teacher had to be put on a plan of assistance.

It is a depressing evening — not what one would consider a teachable moment. Class begins, teams make presentations on policy handbooks, and we plod through the assignment. At the break, as we gather round the coffee pot, I suggest we stop the class and go home early. We have a full-day class tomorrow and, although I feel empathy with their situations, I am frustrated by their lack of energy.

Their reactions take me by surprise. One person says, "My God, the *only* way I could deal with the child abuse case today was to have some confidence that our district policy could guide me through this." Another says "I'm not ready to go home. I was looking forward to coming here tonight to talk about this. I can't just focus on the individual case or I will lose my sanity." Another says, "My only consolation today was understanding the larger picture." So, we continue the class and things get a bit livelier. While it may not be one of our finest hours, it is a memorable one.

Another episode: It is a sunny Saturday in September. We are role-playing a school board meeting in which the board is faced with reducing a budget while implementing a new kindergarten program, a situation familiar in Oregon where kindergartens have been newly mandated. Teams of students have already observed several school board meetings and interviewed superintendents about their relationships with the boards. We assign roles for the superintendent, her staff, board members, and audience members with special interests.

The role play exercise becomes lively, with people taking their roles seriously but finding the problem

unsolvable. One board member says, "I think the only way to get out of this bind is to pass the hat." The others seem to ignore him. The intense meeting continues, but one person cleans out a used paper coffee cup, puts in some change, and passes it to the next person.

As the coffee cup continues to be passed, people receive the cup, look to see what is in it, drop in notes or change. The meeting continues. No one mentions the coffee cup. This all takes about 15 minutes. Finally, the full cup reaches the board chair, who is dumbfounded. She pours the cup's contents out on her desk while the meeting continues on at full steam, then threatens to ask the person who passed the cup to leave.

Then, the board chair changes her mind. "Our problem is solved," she announces. "The money has been raised, the commitment is here, the answer is found!" Pandemonium breaks loose, everyone applauds, and a few people exchange apologies about mean words said.

The discussion following this role play takes two hours. We had meant to use the exercise to illustrate rational problem solving among competing stakeholders. Instead, a miracle happened. *You* may say it is only pretend — it is only a group of already committed educators making a miracle. Perhaps. But such miracles happen in real districts. Chemistry, magic, serendipity also happen along with good planning.

What is the context for these two incidents? They are but two episodes out of 220 class hours for a group of



Challenge courses, held during weekend retreats at the start of each Institute for Executive Leadership, include team-building assignments like helping each other go through "a hole in space."

students in The Institute for Executive Leadership, a five-quarter program leading to the Basic Superintendent Certificate at Lewis and Clark College.

The Institute

Lewis and Clark is a small liberal arts college on the outskirts of Portland. It has an undergraduate school of arts and sciences for about 1,600 students, a law school serving about 1,000 students, and a graduate school of professional studies serving another 1,000 part-time students. The educational administration program is part of the graduate school of professional studies. Created in 1981, it offers only the administrative certificate. The focus is on practitioners, collaboration with school districts, and educating

professionals within the liberal arts context.

We created the Institute in 1984 because we were dissatisfied with traditional training programs for superintendents, as well as the limited imagination and scope of some practicing superintendents. Each Institute consists of a group of about 20 students, most of whom are principals or central office personnel and some of whom have doctorates. Approximately 40 hours per quarter include two weekend retreats, beginning with a challenge course, and monthly meetings of two evenings and a full day Saturday. The content and pedagogy of the Institute focus on clinical knowledge in educational administration.

What Is Clinical Knowledge?

There are three basic components to clinical knowledge. Clinical knowledge is: (1) holistic, (2) created from practice, and (3) a cycle of experience, feedback, reflection, and conceptualization.

Clinical Knowledge Is Holistic

An exciting event of recent years has been the transformation of thinking about administrator preparation. At last we are moving away from the theory-based, ostensibly value-free, objective movement of logical positivism as a model for preparing practitioners (Yeaky et al. 1986). We are transforming that older model of reductionist empiricism to one that views schools and leadership as a complex web of relationships and interdependence. We are transforming the image of the administrator as a technician who applies behavioral skills into a vision of the administrator as a "manager of culture" (Schein 1985, Bowman 1990) who understands such concepts as: "leading with vision" (Bennis and Nanus 1985), "reflective practice" (Schön 1983, 1990), "making meaning" (Louis 1980), the consciousness of educational reform as a failure (Sarason 1990), and even such returning age-old ideas as "climate" (Withall 1951, Fox 1973).

Preparing school leaders should not be a dispassionate, value-free, objective journey. One criticism of school administrators is that they are technocrats with neither objective curiosity nor passion (Wolcott 1973). I like Art Blumberg's way of thinking here. He comes down on the side of educational administration as a craft, not as a science. He says that those who exercise the craft have "exquisite timing, passion, humor, a sense of the absurd,

and a ready-made image of a world that doesn't exist but could" (Blumberg 1984, 1989).

How do we prepare superintendents to exercise such craft? How do we incorporate holistic thinking into a preparatory program for superintendents? Let me describe three components:

Administrative practice in context. Collective bargaining, strategic planning, policy development, community relations, and finance are among the necessary domains in which any superintendent must perform competently. Usually the skills for these domains are taught in separate courses. Although they are important skills, a superintendent's failure is not usually due to a lack of these technical skills; it is due more to a lack of understanding that all practices are played out in a body politic — people relating in a unique place, time, and context. In the Institute these practices are not studied in discrete courses; they are woven in the curriculum.

Educational foundations. Educators typically are not well schooled in educational history, philosophy, or ethics. Three questions guide our study through five consecutive terms: 1) Who should be educated? 2) Who should educate them? 3) What should they learn? We read such books as Tyack and Hansot's *Managers of Virtue* (1982), Ravitch's *The Troubled Crusade* (1983), Spring's *The Sorting Machine* (1989), and Aronowitz and Giroux's, *Education Under Siege* (1985).

A liberal arts focus. Most school administrators received their training in colleges of education, most of which convey a notoriously narrow world view. To broaden views, we read some classics: *Antigone* portrays the age-old dilemma of organizational

loyalty and individual conscience, *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985) provides questions about American individualism and the collective good, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and James McGregor Burns' *Leadership* broaden the view of leadership beyond mere management. Two excellent sources of liberal arts education in the professions are *The Classic Touch: Lessons in Leadership from Homer to Hemingway* (Clemans and Mayer 1987), and *Pathways to the Humanities in Educational Administration* (Popper 1987).

As this current fourth Institute group struggles through the alternatives to Measure Five (a property tax limit having dire consequences on Oregon schools), it will be through many leadership lenses: of moral leader, instructional leader, community leader.

Clinical Knowledge Is Created from Practice

The debate between the educational administration professorate and practitioners is time worn. I remember the poignant remarks Egon Guba made in Portland in 1967:

My colleague at the University of Chicago, Jack Getzels, and I strove mightily to put the terms *nomothetic* and *ideographic* into the vocabulary of every practicing administrator in the country . . . Almost inevitably this comment would come from someone in the audience: "What you say seems to make some sense, although I'm not sure I really know what you're talking about. Why don't you fellows come down out of your ivory tower and tell us about your ideas in language that we can understand? How about showing us how to apply those ideas on the firing line?"

"Well," we would say, "practice is hardly our concern. We don't know what the practical problems are. It's up to you administrators

who have to deal with these problems every day to make the application."

Thereupon the discussion would end in an impasse. The listeners would go away feeling that they had been led to the trough but kept from drinking, because the theoreticians had failed to say anything that made operational sense to them.

We, the speakers, would go away equally disillusioned, feeling that we had been pouring the water into their open mouths but that they had refused to drink. . . . "It is only because they are lazy and ignorant that they won't use what we have discovered."

And so, to point the moral, the uncooperative researcher-theoreticians and the lazy, ignorant practitioners would go their own self-satisfied ways, each convinced that the fault for any lack of communication lay with the other (Guba 1968).

Donald Schön (1983) talks about the "high ground" of theoretical knowledge and the "swampy low lands" of professional practice. The Institute takes journeys into the veritable swamp of alligators.

What I see happening today in the literature of the professorate is a growing respect for practitioner knowledge and the idea that programs should help students be the creators of knowledge, rather than the consumers of ideas from the academic world (see Murphy and Hallinger 1987, Hallinger and Murphy 1991, Sergiovanni 1991, Milstein et al. 1990). We are moving away from the deductive modes of scientism, into the inductive modes of phenomenology and grounded theory as a strategy for helping practitioners make sense of a complex and interwoven set of organizational relationships.

Too much of current administrative preparation continues to assume the "One Best Model"; that there is one



Challenge course tasks help participants learn risk-taking and collaboration. Here, Institute students help one another climb over a 10-foot wall without touching the sides.

way to solve problems or a way to lead and manage a district. Perhaps it is our insistence on the "one best model" that makes practitioners not only doubt our veracity, but our judgment. Practitioners, especially those who are thoughtful and competent, know that there is no "one best model." I prefer March's (1978) depiction of the school administrator as one who makes decisions in a diffuse system with an atmosphere of ambiguity and a panoply of hierarchical artifacts such as plans, memos, meetings, and rules. He describes the administrator's life as that of the "unexpected, the unanticipated, and the untoward." So how do we help practitioners create knowledge from practice?

Learning journals. E. M. Forster said, "how can I know what I think

until I see it?" The learning journal is one mode that can help students focus their thinking. This is a new mode of learning for most educators. While focused direction is necessary at the beginning, it is a particularly valuable reflective tool for students to "find their voices." Each class begins with readings from student journals; journals may incorporate reactions to readings, contain thoughtful deliberation about a real situation, or raise new issues for class consideration.

Practica. Each student works with a superintendent mentor or field supervisor in a self-tailored practicum for two quarters. In the current Institute we are placing students with mentors in agencies other than schools, such as children's services or city government, to give educators a different perspective on schooling. Students develop a

learning contract with times for feedback built in, and it is each student's responsibility to teach what they have learned to each other. While a practicum is not a new idea, too often it is a perfunctory "hoop" with too few opportunities for creating knowledge to teach others. It is the teaching of what is learned that puts the practicum in focus.

A student cohort. Administrators, especially superintendents, often identify isolation and a lack of social support as major problems. The student cohort can help them see themselves as creators rather than as consumers of knowledge. It sets the ground rules for peer consultation, networking, and independence. The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration advocates the supportive cohort idea: "The nature of professional work, complicated analyses, and problem solving requires that students learn to value their colleagues and become accustomed to seeking and giving advice and working with other professionals" (Griffiths et al. 1988, pp. 16-17). But merely bringing students together over time does not necessarily create the climate they need to seek and give advice to one another; there must be a conscientious effort toward team building.

The first meeting of the Institute is a weekend retreat on a challenge course (see Long 1987). In a recent Institute, we gathered for the first time on snow-covered Mount Hood. The challenge course included such team assignments as devising a way to get everyone over a 10-foot wall and climbing 30 feet into the tree tops (while attached to life-lines, of course). The challenge course is a rich metaphor for risk taking, for collaboration, for understanding one's own competencies and limits. One student said after the first retreat, "I know these people better in two days than I

knew people in courses over ten weeks.”

In the second retreat, students focus on organizational development by functioning as consultants to their own organizations (see Schmuck and Runkel 1985).

Clinical Knowledge Is a Cycle

Pedagogy, or androgogy — the teaching of adults — must change. Our pedagogy must respect students as mature adults and provide experiences in relatively controlled and safe settings. Larry Cuban (1987) chides us, the professorate, even those of us who teach pedagogy, as falling into the same trap as all teachers. We do most of the talking, control the subject matter, and use the whole group to convey information and skills. We either have a profound arrogance or a basic insecurity that we must control the subject matter so tightly.

We must escape this trap. Our students have a reservoir of experience, are talented and thoughtful individuals capable of taking charge of their learning. It is our responsibility as professors to provide the experience, to give feedback, to facilitate peer feedback, and to push for conceptualization (see Kolb 1984). But how do we build cycles of experience, feedback, reflection, and practice?

Simulations, exercises, and case studies. Organizational simulations and exercises provide rich opportunities to practice, get feedback, reflect, and practice again. Use of prepared case studies of ethical situations, or student produced studies (writing a case study is a useful learning experience) provide opportunities for role playing and good discussion.

Field observations. The world of schools should be material for class-

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room analysis and appraisal. Assignments in the field, such as interviews, data collection, and observation, provide grist for classroom discussion. Even though practitioners live in the real school world they don't have honed observational skills. We should help them to see the world they live in through different lenses.

Practitioner contacts. Practicing superintendents are invited to class regularly to discuss specific issues. In the current Institute, Bill Korach, the Superintendent of Lake Oswego Schools, is team-teaching with me. The Institute culminates with a superintendent seminar: 20 superintendents are invited to campus for a day of small-group discussions on topics such as the exercise of power and authority, coping with conflict, and balancing personal and professional life. Not only do students appreciate the opportunity for informal discussion, but the superintendents are pleased and honored to talk about their experiences. With confidentiality, we use such exchanges as opportunities to evaluate openly the practices of super-

intendents in the field.

Presentations and synthesis of theory and research. The traditional mode of inquiry through reading, presentation, and formal writing remains an integral part of the Institute. Student team presentations, didactic presentations from “experts,” and instructors’ presentations convey some information. Each quarter students write formal papers expounding on research, theory, and practice, and then share them in peer evaluation teams.

A Healthy Change

Preparatory programs for school administrators are changing. I see the transformation from a reductionist to a holistic view, from the concept of administrators as consumers of knowledge to being the creators of knowledge, from didactic frontal teaching to student-led groups. It is a healthy and needed change. We have seen the limits of administrators as managers of virtue, as science-based technocrats, or as accommodating politicians (Culbertson 1988, Cooper and Boyd 1987, Tyack and Hansot 1982).

Perhaps in the next phase of our work in preparing school administrators, we will see a joining together of the academic world and the world of practice. I hope the uncooperative know-it-all researcher-theoreticians and the lazy, naive, ignorant practitioners will, in fact, forge a new path for the rearing of the new generation of administrators. I, for one, like the direction we are headed in. □

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