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PREVIEW

FROM THE BLUEPRINTS OF STUDENT ARCHITECTS: SPECIFICATIONS FOR
BUILDING EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS

by

KAREN L. DUNLAP, B.S., M. Ed.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Educational Leadership and Foundations

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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PREVIEW

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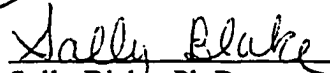
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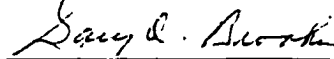
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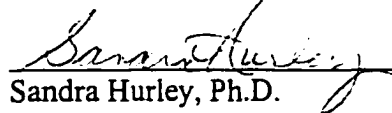
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DEDICATION

With a loving heart, I dedicate this work to my husband, Eddie; my daughter, Amanda; and my son, Brian. The realization of my dream would not have been possible without their continued understanding, patience, love, and support throughout the entire dissertation process.

PREVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to examine, through the eyes of high school students, attributes and characteristics of effective campus principals. Five broad research bands form the study's foundation: (1) writings recognizing the role of the student voice in decision making, (2) principal preparation program reviews, (3) writings on high school reform, (4) leadership theory, and (5) role theory.

Traditional methods of creating frameworks to guide leadership development are often derived from the focused input of recognized experts in the field—specifically practitioners, professors, members of professional organizations, and policy makers. While viewpoints and expertise of acknowledged craftsmen are certainly essential; certain stakeholder groups are typically absent from discussions concerning the ideal qualities and proficiencies of school leaders. Input from other constituents with vested interests in how principals approach their jobs is also warranted. This study examines the perceptions of effective campus leadership from the vantagepoint of students, one group whose opinions on the matter have not traditionally been sought.

As primary consumers in the educational system, students can provide insights into making schools more effective if their opinion is considered in the decision-making process. Students envision an effective school as one led by a principal who believes they are more than passive recipients of knowledge and potential disrupters needing to be controlled. Indeed, the support of the principal is seen as the pivotal factor in the

reconfiguration of schools with students involved in mainstream decision making.

Students state successful principals interact with students, build an optimal learning environment, foster meaningful relationships, communicate effectively and use input solicited from students. Therefore, students, as members of the high school community, enhance the effectiveness of principals who not only recognize their leadership potential, but nurture and support it as well.

Eleventh and twelfth grade students from three high school campuses in a large urban southwestern city provide the participant pool for both individual and focus group interview sessions. From coded transcriptions of the audiotaped interviews, critical themes and issues identified by study participants at each individual campus are presented in addition to a cross-case analysis of themes emerging from all high schools participating in the study.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Abstract.....	vii
List of Tables	xiv
List of Figures.....	xv
<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Background of the Study	4
A Time to Change	5
A Time to Learn.....	6
A Time to Build	7
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Significance of the Study	11
Overview of the Study	13
II. REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND LITERATURE	14
Student Decisions: The Student Voice	16
Impact of Theoretical Perspectives.....	17
Paradigm Modification	19
Students: The Forgotten Stakeholders	20
Seeking the Student Voice	21
Listening to Students	23
Student Decision-Making: A Developmental Sequence.....	26
Students as Research Informants	27
Role of the Researcher With Children	29

Interviewing Children	30
Advantages and Limitations of Interviewing Children.....	32
Students: Hearing the Silent Voice	33
Principal Preparation Program Reviews	33
Historical Perspectives.....	34
Current Views	35
The Changing Principalsip: Preparing an Innovative Leader	37
Suggestions for Improvement.....	39
Principal Preparation Programs: Guiding Frameworks	41
Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium	41
Learner-Centered Schools for Texas	42
Collaboration for Success	43
High School Reform Literature	44
High School Evolution: Early Historical Perspectives	47
The Committee of Ten.....	47
The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education	49
High School Evolution: Modern Times.....	50
A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform.....	51
The 1990's: A second wave of reform	52
Renewal and Improvement of America's Secondary Schools	54
The National Governors Association.....	56
The Carnegie Commission: <i>Breaking Ranks</i>	56
Obstacles.....	59
Leadership Theory	61
Psychological Approaches	62
Sociological Approaches	64
Behavioral Approaches.....	65
Transactional vs. Transformational Leaders.....	66
Servant Leadership.....	68

A Framework for Analysis	70
Role Theory	72
Role Commonalities	74
Role Complexity	75
The Principal's Role	76
Theoretical underpinnings	77
Attempts to define the principalship	78
Role Conflict	82
Chapter Summary	84

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
III. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	85
Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology	86
Constructivist Framework	87
The Researcher	88
Criteria for Choosing Schools	88
Gaining Access to Participants	89
Data Gathering	91
Phase I. Individual Interviews	91
Phase II: Focus Groups	93
Unstructured Interviews	95
Interviewing Children: Precautions	97
Data Management	98
Data Analysis	99
Limitations of the Study	102
Chapter Summary	103

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
IV. PRESENTATION OF DATA.....	104
Descriptions of Selected Schools and School Specific Findings.....	104
School A.....	107
Qualities of an effective principal as perceived by students.....	107
Communicates effectively	108
Interacts with students	109
Solicits student input.....	111
Fosters meaningful relationships	112
Builds an optimal learning environment.....	114
Summary	116
School B.....	118
Qualities of an effective principal as perceived by students.....	118
Communicates effectively	119
Interacts with students	120
Solicits student input.....	122
Fosters meaningful relationships	125
Builds an optimal learning environment.....	126
Summary	128
School C.....	130
Qualities of an effective principal as perceived by students.....	130
Communicates effectively	131
Interacts with students	133
Solicits student input.....	135
Fosters meaningful relationships	137
Builds an optimal learning environment.....	138
Manages competently	140
Summary	141

List of Tables

Table 1:	Researching With Children: Theoretical Perspectives	18
Table 2:	Student Viewpoints: A Paradigm Shift.....	19
Table 3:	Adult/Student Relationships in Qualitative Methods	28
Table 4:	Advantages and Limitations of Interviewing Children.....	32
Table 5:	Evolution of the American High School.....	46
Table 6:	Years of National Interest in High School Renewal.....	54
Table 7:	Role Characteristics	75
Table 8:	The Principalsip: A Set of Theoretical Lenses	78
Table 9:	Role Definition	79
Table 10:	Administrative Attributes	80
Table 11:	Data Collection Timeline.....	90
Table 12:	Selected High School Demographics.....	106

List of Figures

Figure 1:	School A: Effective Principal Characteristics.....	117
Figure 2:	School B: Effective Principal Characteristics.....	129
Figure 3:	School C: Effective Principal Characteristics.....	142
Figure 4:	Categorization of Study Participant Responses	155

PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Americans have long considered education a top priority. From the spread of the common school system in the 1830s to higher education's near universal access in the 1990s, the United States has continually been recognized as the nation possessing the most publicly accessible system of education in the world. Historically, education has represented the vehicle by which individuals pursue success and therefore equip themselves with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to be good citizens—"prepared for the duties of citizenship and prepared to lead a good life" (Soder, 1996, p. 96). As custodial institutions, schools are called upon to provide the students they serve:

1. Insurance that each one will be physically, mentally, and emotionally safe while in the school setting.
2. Access to knowledge unimpeded by ethnicity, race, color, religion, or financial state.
3. Status as a worthy person with rights and privileges no greater or less than those of any other. (Soder, 1996, p. 112)

Indeed, from the very beginning of mass education in the United States, schooling has been viewed as the common thread that binds the nation together for "without it,

democracy cannot be sustained” (Goodlad as cited in Soder, 1996, p. 98; Bellah, 1991, p. 146).

Today, however, Americans are questioning the purpose, value, and moral stance of our educational system. In her speech to the National Conference of State and District Coordinators (July, 1999), Margaret Branson cited the following statistics from the “New Millennium Project”, a nationwide study of 1,005 American youth aged 15-25 years old:

- Young people today lack interest, trust, and knowledge about America for in 1972, the voter turnout of 18-year-olds was 50%; in 1998 it was below 20%.
- Young people today appear apprehensive about the future and cautious in dealings with others. Sixty-five percent indicated most people should be approached with caution.
- Priorities of youth are personal and individualistic. The top three priorities stated in the study were having a close-knit family, gaining knowledge and skills, and becoming successful in a career. The lowest priorities were caring about the good of the country, being civic minded, and helping the community to be a better place.
- Young people are highly critical of how school government and civics classes are taught. Study participants did not feel high schools did a very good job of teaching about the democratic process, current events, or voting.

Therefore, activists from such diverse interest groups as political coalitions, parental rights advocacy groups, corporate business partnerships, and nondenominational religious

associations bend legislators' ears as they pursue new avenues for the restructuring of our schools and the educating of our youth. On one hand, voices cry for a return to the basics, to a prior time when students focused primarily on issues of "readin", "ritin" and "rithmetic." Levin (as cited in Bierlein, 1993) advises, "...schools must provide youths with the skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors essential for productivity..." (p. 124). On the other hand, pleas arise from factions of the population that insist the educational system adequately prepare students for productive citizenship. While democracy is a majority-ruled government, the majority must be educated if democracy, as the forefathers envisioned it, is to survive. As former Secretary of Education, William Bennett (as cited in Bierlein, 1993) explains in *Devaluing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children*, "There are values that all American citizens share that we should want all American students to know and make their own....The explicit teaching of these values is the legacy of the common school, and it is a legacy to which we must return..." (p.58).

This study, conducted at three public high schools, consisted of in-depth analyses of student perceptions regarding the nature of effective campus leadership. In addition, the study examined ways in which students were engaged in meaningful decision-making processes as prerequisites to becoming full participants in future democratic roles.

This chapter includes an introduction to the study, a description of the research background, the statement of the problem the significance of the study and an overview of the investigation.

Background of the Study

Part of the public's frustration perhaps stems from the fact that for more than a decade, schools have been perceived as institutions which water down curricula by allowing social promotions; by maintaining dysfunctional as well as top-heavy administrative and organizational structures; by lacking the courage to enforce high expectations and standards; by avoiding meaningful accountability systems; and, in general, by making excuses for inadequate campus leadership (Murphy, 1992).

The corrective measures of the early 1980s were not much different than those still in vogue at the conclusion of the century. Many focused on quick fix top-down state mandates, in the hope that successful schools could be legislated. However, mandated measures from such highly structured companies espousing clear-cut goals and objectives often failed miserably when applied to a loosely coupled school organization—an entity often characterized instead by messiness, complexity, and uncertainty.

Today, school leaders find themselves serving multiple constituencies, each of which holds a different perception as to what real schools should be like (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Gone are the days when school officials could relax—secure in the knowledge that they were the educational experts. Today, all constituents are becoming less and less content to let administrators run schools apart from stakeholder participation.

The study's setting, an urban southwestern educational community, shares with its national counterparts the determination to regain society's endorsement and support for

its endeavors. As public and legislative scrutiny mounts, campus administrators must be prepared to heed public demand for improved student achievement and clearly focused instructional efforts in the classroom. As the Texas Education Agency (TEA) mandates mastery of such proficiencies by administrators, those involved in the selection and training of educational leaders find themselves in a position to systematically identify candidates who possess qualities and characteristics associated with effective school leadership.

Perceptions of desirable leadership change with the whims of society. It has been said that the only constant in society is change. Change is inevitable; therefore, appropriate mechanisms which will integrate new paradigms in leadership are essential.

A Time to Change

Schools are multifaceted, socially integrated organizations which hold promise for defining our society's collective future. Achieving and sustaining a high quality institution within a complex environment demands that the principal, as school leader, possess a wide range of leadership capabilities. Historically, however, university preparation programs have consisted of a collection of courses students take at their convenience. Articulating the curriculum was unheard of, and planned, thoughtful course-taking rarely occurred (Achilles, 1987). Today, however, efforts are underway to improve the fragmented approach to principal preparation in an effort to insure that successful principals possessing effective leadership capabilities will no longer be a mere coincidence. Increasingly, professors of educational leadership are recognizing that if

educational leaders are better able to serve schools and students in our rapidly changing society; the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they possess must be different than those reflected in traditional education administration courses. An increased understanding of effective school leadership is imperative if successful school reform is to take place (Daresh & Barnett, 1993). Consequently, education administration preparation programs need to change—in order to become more reflective of the current roles campus leaders are called upon to play. As Milstein (1993) stated, “[This] challenge calls for strong and creative leadership...it calls for a reconceptualization of how educational leaders are prepared” (p. vii).

A Time to Learn

Diversity has been a critical nutrient that fertilizes the seeds of democracy. Emma Lazarus (1883) in her poem, *The New Colossus*, states: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...”. This inscription on the Statue of Liberty defines the desires and motivations essential to guarantee a successful government “of...by...and for the people.” Primary autocratic education is required to insure a commonality of understanding within the masses; however, education to serve democracy must be a walk before you run experience. If democracy is a form of political governance involving the consent of the governed and equality of opportunity, then is democracy a unique right of adults only...and not of young people? (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 6, 7).