Reflections on Educational Administration

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Reflection Paper
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I began my graduate studies in the spring, 2005 and finished in spring, 2007. Over those two and a half years, I have transformed my view of education. I have developed a vision and implemented changes in my own instruction. I learned what educators mean by change and have embraced its benefits. I realized that the school is not an isolated institution, but must seek outside support and enlist all members of the community. Most importantly, I learned that principals are not managers, but instructional leaders who lead by doing.

I began my vision of enlisting community support as early as in my first course, Personnel Administrations. Dr. Neff asked us to gather data on our district and to come up with recruitment and hiring policies. He asked us to formulate a recruitment plan. I envisioned actively recruiting members of the town yeshiva community. Presently, very few teachers live in Lakewood. The town is dominated by the yeshiva community that has its own school district and a much smaller minority of residents who send their children to the public schools. There is a gulf of culture separating the yeshiva community and the public schools. Although members of the yeshiva community now are in all political offices, including a large majority on the township school board, there is not one to that taught in the high school before I was hired. At the time I took Dr. Neff’s class, I actually formulated an Affirmative Action plan to recruit yeshiva community members, as I know of cases, including my own experience, of discrimination in hiring when members of the community applied. The situation has improved, but a policy of actively recruiting people who live in the town, can be legal
and have the effort of opening doors to members of the larger community. If that community has a stake in the public schools, then the gulf of culture will be narrowed.

I further developed in Dr. Blundell’s Curriculum design class my initial vision into a larger vision of enlisting community support. In that class, we were asked to develop a curriculum. I chose to develop a curriculum for the small schools project that our school was embarking upon. I thought that a Construction Academy would serve Lakewood students, since we are building close to a thousand new homes per year. Currently, the quality of workmanship in the industry is poor. Tradesmen hire people with little training and education. By turning out a student body with appropriate skills, the community will be served and students will want to stay in Lakewood. We currently have a 75% transient rate in the high school. Workers come to town for unskilled labor and live in boarding homes. If Lakewood High School can prepare students to run their own construction outlets and establish roots in the town, the transient rate can be lowered.

I have broadened that vision beyond the Small Schools Initiative. Not only will I enlist local businesses to form internship for our students, but I will actively inform the Yeshiva (majority) community of what is happening in the high school. I will make the high school theirs (although none will ever sent their children to it) by opening its doors with outreach programs, business partnerships, seminars, and by training workers for the local economy. I will take out ads in the yeshiva community magazines, which have readerships of 50,000 or more, informing the public of what is happening in the high school, of which they now have no idea, and to recruit teachers and other staff members. By enabling yeshiva community members to take an interest in Lakewood High School, public school students will feel a renewed sense of worth, and that the people who
surround their school and finance it have its interests in mind. Grades will improve, morale will improve (currently the faculty takes a cynical and even hostile attitude towards the Board and the community), and the general economic and social climate of the town will improve.

Lakewood Township has perhaps the most unusual district in our nation. The district is really two, one public district mandated by the State constitution and another independent yeshiva district created by the Lakewood Jewish community. Out of about 20,000 school age children, only about 5,000 attend public schools. The township population in 2000 was 60,352 of which 35.3% or 21,328 are children. For 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, the town had relatively fixed numbers of 5195, 5145, 5299, 5411, and 5381 children in the public schools. Thus, public school numbers are not increasing. By contrast, the township master plan estimates that the independent yeshiva district is growing at eighteen percent annually.

In 1997, Lakewood received State aid that accounted for 41% of the overall school budget. That figure went down to 22% in 2004. In terms of Core Curriculum Aid, the 1997 number of $8,137,008 went down to $4,358,760 in 2004. The State uses a district factor group (DFG) to determine socioeconomic status that includes percentage of population with high school diplomas and college, occupation, population density, income unemployment, and poverty. On a scale of A-E, “A” being the poorest level district, created by the New Jersey Supreme Court in the Abbot case, Lakewood is a “B”. Other towns in the county range from C to E. State aid in Ocean County averages $2,052 per student, behind the State average of $2241. The average “B” district receives $3350. Lakewood, a B district, receives only $840 per student. The town is considered an Urban
Enterprise Zone due to its low-income status. Sales tax is reduced from seven percent to three and one half percent, which goes to the township’s general fund rather than the State.

Over the course of my graduate studies, I learned what some speculate about the future of education. Students might not have to be in the physical school building but do course work at home or over a computer. If somehow, the children in the yeshiva district could be counted for the CEIFA formula, our state funding would skyrocket by tens of millions. One of my goals will be to work for a fairer way to finance education in Lakewood.

The culture of the school I want to lead will be one of learning, respect, morality, and intellectual exchange. In Dr. Gardener’s law class, I began to envision a school in which students lived the constitution. Cases of law and discussions of legal rights and obligations will be the topic on everyone’s lips. I even envisioned an adversarial relationship with students, in which they would be encouraged to challenge me under the law, even go to court for the purpose of perfecting out nation. Find a cause, and fight it to the Supreme Court. That is what I want my students to strive for, even if it means that they are challenging a position I am taking. I even want to go to law school so that I can push my vision for the students in my school and district which involves a return to traditional morality.

In the Principalship course at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, Dr. Benevides used to say, “If it is not monitored, it is not being done.” He brought home to us the importance of traditional management. Although he stressed educational leadership, he was realistic in teaching us how to manage a staff and faculty in a school.
His course consisted of not only time consuming projects, but he posted his lectures on the internet through Power Point. We had to post our comments on the lectures, and answer specific questions on the discussion board. I do not think I learned much by the shadow project in which I covered a student for several hours, other than that he had a good class, nor did I learn by making the master schedule, other than what a tedious task it was. The lectures, the reflection project on ethics, and the case study were the most important. The case study from the text (Ubben) was the same type of exercise that I would have to go through on the School Leadership Licensure Assessment. It prepared me for the test and ultimately for the kinds of decisions that a principal has to make.

The Introduction to Educational Administration course introduced me to the institution and demands of administration. I had to interview a principal, superintendent, business manger, and a parent. I found the judicious discipline project interesting. Although it failed when I tried to implement it, it helped me develop my goal of forming a culture in school where the Supreme Court decisions and case law will be on everyone’s mind, as mentioned. The discourse of my school will be the law and our constitution, which really is that which Gathercoal had in mind with Judicious Discipline.

The Educational Philosophy class was one of my favorites. Dr. Blundell taught me a new meaning of the word “liberal,” one who cares about process over results. I can be characterized as one who puts primacy in process. My fellow students probably thought that I was a reactionary conservative. We studied some of the radical theories, such as Friere’s, and my discussion board posting indicated my disagreement with them. I always knew that I was an Essentialist or a Perennialist. I never appreciated Dewey, probably because I do not like his philosophy. I also do not see the place of
Existentialism in education. I think that whole Standards movement reflects my attitude on education. There is definite, set knowledge that students have to master, not something they have to invent.

I found the Educational Research class too basic. The textbook was not rigorous and the math was elementary. However, I learned how to cite references and write papers in a professional manner and I formulated my area of research. I designed an experimental method of testing whether remediation helps students pass the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment. Although my method was tedious, I change it during my practicum to use existing data. I was able to modify my design for a test of correlation using data gathered during the previous summer. I found the correlation of mathematics class achievement with numeric HSPA score to be stronger in academic classed than remedial classes, verifying the null hypothesis in my original design.

Remedial
MAP II had a correlation of 0.64
Integrated Math I -0.29
Algebra II Track II 0.58
Informal Geometry 0.36
RPO Math -0.134

Academic
Algebra II Track I 0.554
Trigonometry 0.577
Pre-Calculus 0.827

Overall, there was a 0.53 correlation between mathematics achievement and HSPA score, which is quite surprising, considering that Haney found only a .32 correlation in the work he did in Texas.

My first class, one that I took in 2003, Math Standards, introduced me to the current trend in mathematics education. At first, I disagreed with the National Council of
Teachers of Mathematics. Their standards were based on inquiry and problem solving. I preferred the traditional method of teaching, memorization and drill. Today, I teach closer to the NCTM model than the traditional lecture and drill model. I often present problems to my class for students to devise strategies. During my transition in approach, I reported on some articles in Dr. Blundell’s curriculum class that furthered my knowledge of the problem-based approach. Also, in my Supervision class, I designed a professional development plan for project-based learning, which is related to the problem solving approach, in that instruction is student centered. Next year, I want to keep a portfolio for all my students in which they will keep journals and problem solving approaches with completed answers to various problems that I will assign them based in the NCTM method.

The Math Curriculum class followed that theme. That class required the least amount of work of any CSC class. We had to respond to discussion boards as teams and read some chapters, but the only major assignment was to design lessons. Since the course concentrated on an interdisciplinary approach to math, and on connections, it furthered my understanding of the change I was to make in my approach to instruction. I am good at connections since I teach history, math and science. The different forms of assessment the Dr. Wentworth explored in the course, such as formative and summative, are valuable.

Ethics is one of the six ISLLC standards. I came across Kohlberg's psychological theory of morality in Dr. Blundell’s Curriculum course in the Armstrong text. That led me to further research on Kohlberg. Kohlberg said that a person cannot relate to ethics that are two moral levels higher, For instance, someone who is motivated
just by fear of punishment cannot even understand why someone would do something for the sake of the law. Someone who follows the letter of the culture’s law cannot even understand someone who does something for universal moral principals.

I have found countless themes over my graduate studies that connect to some of my fundamental ideas about the American way. Business and organization theory in twenty-first century is confirming our Founding Fathers’ ideas of the polity (Nonetheless, even if organizations operated differently, the framers of our government would still be right. “Government does not have to be efficient, it has to be fair!” M. Cuomo). Since my Principalship course was based in Texas, we had a supplemental textbook (Vornberg) that dealt with the Texas system. The book wrote about the higher image of school leaders outside of politics is not correct, but is not to be viewed cynically. The reality is that leaders must be involved in politics. In fact, politics is the sixth ISLLC standard. The best thing I saw, the best thing I saw anywhere in many years, was the book’s comment: “Many Americans have come to accept and believe that politics cannot be ethical because of is very nature. The public may have even come to seek out the artful and dishonest person as their political representative on the premise that such a person can be more successful in pursing their personal interest in policy making actually because they are not encumbered with personal or public ethics…All of our citizens can and should expect better! We the People are the government, not the representatives that we elect…This is what the American Democracy is about and public education and its governance is one of the essential elements of that dream. When other nations and their people fail to understand why Americans get upset about graft, they are leaving ethics and the concept of the common good out of the definition of democracy, as intended by the founding
fathers. .. Is ethical behavior possible in politics? Not only is it possible, it is essential if the American Democracy is to live and prosper.”

My studies of educational administration focusing on organizational structure confirmed my ideas about democracy. The modern organization is more and more empowering of its members, making them buy into the goals of the organization as if they were their own. It is like what Mill said about democratic government in “On Liberty,” that more an individual is free to participate in his government, the more it will be his government.

A leader must anticipate where a conflict will emerge with any change, to be proactive rather than reactive. A leader that insists on a change without anticipating possible questions and solutions, or at least being open to solutions, is looking for difficulties. Momentum slows down and the whole process can come to a halt. Resistance will be less common if people are treated with respect, meaning that their concerns have been thought through either in advance. Conflict that has not been previously addressed should be dealt with in a deliberate and meaningful manner.

With that said, schools are not corporations with a bottom line. They are microcosm of America.

In my Fundamentals of Educational Administration class, a section heading “Educational Administration as (not a) applied science,” the authors write, “Schools are human organizations in the sense that their products are human and their processes require the socializing of humans.” Broudy ends all comparison with business organization saying, “The educator, however, deals with nothing but values…For to the statesmen and soldiers men entrust their lives and fortune, but to the school they entrust
their precarious hold on humanity itself.” Our text (Sergiovanni) writes (1)“The school is a learning community” concerned with “doing right things” not “doing things right,” (2) by “building character and instilling virtue.” Thus (3) questions “must be treated as normative assertions.” (4) Good leadership enhances the follower’s competence, well-being and independence.

Thus, many of the courses focused on leadership. The principal is the instructional leader, not just the organizational manager. Great leaders are those who can make their followers into leaders. When a person takes part in a system, when an individual makes something happen, that person acquires that result. Again, there is a parallel to our republic. Our country is the most patriotic because we all participate in one way or another. This is a great source of strength. A leader that makes all the decision and does not hear the grievances and advice of others undermines love of country. George Washington was a great leader, not only because he was the Great Cincinnatus who would return to his farm, but because he allowed his subordinates in the army and his cabinet, and his colleagues in the Congress, to take credit and build this nation.

The values that are essential to school leadership are fairness, moral character, and patience and fortitude. The school leader stands for traditional American values and attitudes. He or she has a crucial role in the transmitting of values from one generation to the next. Additionally, a leader articulates the mission of the organization. My school mission is to provide a diverse student body with academic excellence. We have been very successful in creating a student body where bigotry and race relations are not problems. However, we do not define excellence in our mission statement. It seems that it has come to mean scoring high on the State test, and so we teach to the test.
My two and one half years at Chadron State led me to formulate a new mission, in which the core curriculum of history, mathematics, science, and literature will cultivate reason and knowledge, developing in the student an ability to make practical choices, the virtue of citizenship and to seek justice in the community. Education is a moral endeavor. If the school is a positive environment that reinforces each child’s worth based on the content of his or her moral character, students will gain self-esteem and respect, attitudes necessary for success. That success is my goal as an educational leader.
References


