

Reflections on the Basic Theories of Educational
Administration and Shared Governance

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When thinking like a leader, it is important for one to understand their values and beliefs about the concept of leadership. When I began this course, I knew I wanted to be a leader but the true definition of leadership had not completely formed in my mind. After taking part in readings, case studies, and coursework, I still feel that my concept of leadership requires additional development. In thinking about leadership I realize that each time I experience a new element of leading others, my thoughts change, as does my definition. I believe that leadership is process, not just a series of events as some would like to believe. It requires decision making and interaction; its purpose is to influence the behavior of others (Owens, 2004). It's an evolutionary process for those willing to partake that requires learning to communicate, motivate, build trusting relationships and share responsibility. The list of these evolving abilities is exhaustive and, I think, rarely complete. Leadership improves with experience and observation of other leaders. This aside, I must say that I feel that leadership is not entirely learned, it appears that some are born with the internal "light" needed to guide others. A sort of charisma is possessed by a leader, which encourages people to take part in an endeavor and find value in its cause, despite its level of difficulty. The power possessed by a leader is given by their followers and can easily be informally taken away. There is not just one thing that makes a leader; a combination of many attributes including self-confidence and determination, coupled with experience seems to be the way to arrive at the process we refer to as leadership. Below is a compilation of reflections on topics discussed in this course, understanding each is a requirement for successful leadership.

On Communication:

I've always thought of myself as a good communicator. My level of success was based upon my ability to accurately execute a writing assignment or explain a task to another individual. Prior to the readings in this course, I really felt that I had no "flaws" when it comes to communicating with others. I feel differently now; I realize I was merely communicating to others, not with them. Communication requires that the individuals communicating understand each others' point of vies and I don't think I've always stopped to consider the point of view of others. I tend to be quite regimented in my beliefs and values and I'm guilty of assuming them to be the truths by which all others live and work as well. I now consider the countless times that I raked another person over the coals for acting different than I would have liked and assumed that my point of view was the only point of view. I didn't take the time to stop and listen to why they made choices as they did; I didn't attempt to understand their point of view. I realize that issues of diversity may also have played a role in my ability to communicate with others: I am a white female in a predominately African American school system; I am female whereas several of the teachers I work with are male. In remembering a situation with a school administrator where we didn't agree on the way information was presented to one of his teachers, I realize that gender and age could have played a role in our lack of communication. Issues of diversity didn't cross my mind because I pride myself on being someone who fails to notice the difference in color among myself and my colleagues. As a leader in training, I've failed to realize that diversity goes beyond skin color and culture varies between individuals based on a number of factors that may or may not be obvious to the naked eye. Diversity has a major impact on communication.

To improve my communication skills, I am learning to engage in active listening as others are speaking to me instead of assuming myself to be the authority and simply hearing what the speaker has to say. I am learning to ask probing questions to gather information about the feelings of those that I work with. I've consulted several books on how to communicate effectively with others and I'm finding that communication between me and my colleagues is beginning to show improvement. I know that communication is an important part, perhaps the block, on which all other characteristics are built, of becoming a leader and fulfilling a position of leadership. Without communication, building trust is difficult and rare. Without building the trust of my colleagues, my ability to lead becomes an inability.

On Motivation:

I was sitting in my daughter's doctor office recently and while I waited for the doctor to enter the room, I hesitantly took out a scarf I've been knitting for my husband for Christmas; I'd made a few mistakes and the process of straightening them out had slowed my progress and enthusiasm. I was purling my way across a row when the doctor entered exclaimed in delight that my project was beautiful! We spoke for a moment or two about my determination to finish this particular piece of knitting and her attempts to learn to knit over the past few years; she praised my work and then went about the task of examining my daughter. During the examination, I continued to knit, often wondering if she had enough knowledge to understand the complexity of this pattern I'd chosen. I felt a sense of pride that day and I was full of motivation to complete my project. As if the experience of being praised wasn't thrilling enough, a few days later I received a noted in

my mailbox from the doctor's office. Expecting to see results of my daughter's lab work, I opened the card to find a note from the doctor who was writing to let me know that observing my patience and perseverance with my knitting project had motivated her to pick up her needles and knit a gift for a friend who was about to have another baby. She wished me luck with my project and signed the card. I was quite surprised but again inspired to continue the difficult task of completing the scarf.

As I sat down to decide what to focus on when writing this reflection, I began to remember that day and realized that our readings on motivation stressed the importance of praise, recognition, and taking pride in what we do. I realized that not only had I motivated someone else through my diligence, she had motivated me through praise. I recognize that this isn't the only components to motivation; other necessities include holding high expectations, involvement, granting autonomy, and other communication techniques such as suggesting instead of directing and knowing when to say nothing at all, however I was amazed by the real life example of how praise, modeling, and recognition all worked together to motivate two individuals. I acknowledge that if I could harness that type of interaction in my day to day experiences with teachers, I'd be effective at motivating them to partake in the tasks that we might otherwise cast aside as too difficult or too monotonous.

I want to motivate others by what I do (and what I don't do). I want to exhibit the qualities of a leader so that others are inspired to lead and be led. I am fortunate enough to have several "unofficial" mentors who are successful at this and as part of my desire to hone my leadership skills; I plan to continue to observe their expertise and actions. I also feel that I need to have more self-confidence in my ability to lead but I feel that much of

this self-confidence comes with experience and a sense of knowing what to do or expect through experience in your field. I have experience as an educator and as a leader of educators but I feel I need a great deal more of experience before I am a motivator of others. I need to experience more of the world of education and further develop my own concept of leadership.

I still find myself questioning how I will know if I've been effective at motivating my colleagues. The most obvious answer to this is that I will see that they are driven to act according to the needs of their students but that still doesn't guarantee that they were motivated by me. I've come to the conclusion that the only fail-proof way to motivate is to ensure that I am providing for their needs, both stated and unstated. I will be conscious of my actions at all times and be sure that I am acting according to the needs of my faculty, staff and students and I will open the lines of communication so that they are able to communicate those needs to me. I will provide opportunities for professional development in order to feed their interest in their career. I want to provide models for them to observe and opportunities for them to ask questions. I will leave my door and my mind open to their ideas. Above all, I will praise their accomplishments; tread delicately on their difficulties and work to be an example of positive change in our school system.

On Conflict:

When I began working in education, I worked for a large non-profit medical school with a lab school used to conduct research on the effectiveness of different reading strategies used in instructing students with autism and several other theories of educating students with autism. There always seemed to be conflict among members of the

organization; there was always politics and arguments and obstacle courses we had to endure before getting permission to do what we thought was needed to better educate the population of students we targeted in our research. I thought this conflict was particular to the institution I worked for and I often thought of what it'd be like to work somewhere without conflict. A few years later, I decided to accept a position with a local school system as their autism specialist. This job would be so much easier I thought, because I would supervise the program instead of being one of the underdogs. There'd be no conflict because I'd be organized and structured and methodical in my expectations and communication with those teachers who were part of the program. After about three months of employment, I woke up to find that the first statement in Schmuck and Runkel's (1995) article was true, "Conflicts are ubiquitous within educational organizations; they occur continually, arise for many reasons, appear in a variety of forms, and affect the educational process both favorably and unfavorably" (p.327). I was amidst my first conflict between the teachers working in the program and the district level administration in my county. I realized that the important part of conflict had nothing to do with its existence, but with how it's handled. As the "middleman" between the district administration and the classroom teachers, I arranged for a discussion of the issues by two members of the administration and two teacher representatives from the program. In the end, the conflict was resolved and I found that all parties had a greater understanding of the point of view of all parties involved. Looking back, I realize that the discussion was a solution to the problem because the issue at hand came from the lack of communication between the upper and the lower members of the team we were supposed to be as special educators who wanted to provide the best for our students.

My viewpoint on conflict has changed since that time. I no longer see it as a source of negativity but more so an opportunity for growth and change. The differences of opinion that we exhibit are a good place to start when attempting to improve relationships, not to mention the quality of education we are providing for our students. I believe that in order to promote positive change, we have to tackle our differences and use them to facilitate the desired outcome of a particular situation. Isn't that what effective administrators do? They accept that there's going to be a battle and then encourage compromise amidst the disagreement? Isn't compromise what leads us to finding a way to blend the ideas of different groups in hopes of producing a better system than the one we have?

The readings for this course, especially the question and answer format of *Conflict!* By Robert Maitment (1987) enlightened me to the importance of self-reflection and knowing oneself as part of becoming skillful in managing conflict. According to Maitment (1987), leaders “quickly recognize those behaviors that trigger defensiveness, anger, evasiveness, resentment, and other counterproductive reactions. They also know how to control, counter, and channel these emotions productively” (p.123). Thus, being aware of oneself is the key that allows us to make choices during conflict that lead to successful outcomes. And as I previously mentioned, successful outcomes is really goal of conflict if you're a successful leader. If there isn't a successful solution then good leaders learn to live conflict. I've yet to know a marriage, friendship, and certainly not a school that functions with zero conflict yet the presence of conflict certainly doesn't qualify the relationship as being negative or unproductive. So long as conflict is handled, and handled without aggression, I now see absolutely no harm in its presence.

On Formal Authority and it's effective use:

The use of formal authority is probably my greatest area of weakness. For starters, I have little formal authority in my position but what I do possess, is the ability to influence those who possess formal authority. The idea of formal authority is somewhat scary for me as I am noticeably younger than many of my colleagues so having to be part of any sort of reprimand is typically uncomfortable for either me or my colleagues. Over the four years that I've been in this position, several individuals have commented on my age and the level of position that I in which I'm employed. In any situation where a teacher is in need of reprimand, I typically ask that another member of administration be present for the purpose of documentation and communication. I don't ever want teachers to feel "ganged up on" but I've experienced difficulty in the past with the teachers that I supervise refusing to take me seriously and making disrespectful comments about my age and years of experience.

When engaging in the readings of this assigned topic, I found that the "rules" for the use of formal authority are quite simple and straightforward. Not having been in the position to "hand-down" punishment or reprimand, it seems easy enough but I'm still uneasy at the prospect. I feel that the teachers I supervise have respect for my knowledge and many of them come to me with concerns about more than just their classrooms, but I don't know how a reprimand from me would be received. I have been involved in situations where teachers are reprimanded, many times because of concerns I've expressed to an administrator about a classroom that's in their school, but in most situations I am involved only as a source of information so that I am able to answer

questions that are unanswerable by the administrator. Because I work with the teachers of students with autism, I have a better working knowledge than many of our district's administrators about the instructional practices that are most effective for these students. With autism being a low-incidence disability, the average teacher's experience level with the population is usually very little or completely non-existent. There are situations where I've made suggestions that are not acted upon by the teachers of these students and administration chooses to step in because they feel that the teacher is behaving in a way that is insubordinate. Currently I am working with a teacher who has very poor organizational skills and needs assistance learning how to effectively direct the paraprofessional support within her classroom. To assist the teacher, I've recommended on several occasions the use of a zone plan for instructional purposes so that anyone visiting her classroom knows what each adult in the room should be doing at the time, and to limit the verbal direction the teacher has to give to her paraprofessionals throughout the day. Consistently, the teacher has refused to engage in writing such a plan and has recently been reprimanded because one of her paraprofessionals was allowed to take an unscheduled break during the day and was found making a personal phone call in the teacher's lounge. During this time there was an instance of aggressive behavior in the classroom and the additional set of hands would have been of assistance in removing other children from the potentially dangerous situation. Because of this, the administrator has now scheduled a meeting with me and the teacher in her presence to discuss why she has not implemented the strategy recommended by me both verbally and in writing on more than one occasion. I look forward to this meeting as an opportunity for growth as I work towards my goal of becoming an administrator because despite our readings, I still

feel uncomfortable with the use of formal authority. What I have learned from our readings is that formal authority is to be carried out in a private location, to be used in a manner that is positive or in support of the needs of our students and should never be used to demand a position of power within the school. I feel that formal authority should only be used in situations to encourage compliance with the rules and regulations of the district and to respond immediately and without favoritism to situations where the rules have been broken. I recognize that formal authority is given by the position you occupy but that the power given by your followers is in many ways stronger than formal authority and comes with trust and being focused on your followers and their needs.

On Shared Governance:

I firmly believe that a school's faculty and staff are in the best position to make decisions about the implementation of curriculum and allocation of resources available within a school. Allowing the faculty and staff of a school participate in decision making would only serve to improve their commitment and increase their interest in the schools at which they work. So many times, shared governance is not the chosen method of decision-making and educators are left feeling as though they are simply following through with the everyday assignments given by a body of individuals who don't come into contact with the students on a regular basis and who are unaware of the particular needs of the student body. The school system that I work in does not exhibit the characteristics of a shared-governance model. There are individual schools that use the model for decision making to the extent allowed by the district and many individuals whose actions support the philosophy of shared governance but are stifled by the

decision-making of those higher up. I believe in a democratic system of running schools but I still feel as though my system has a long way to go before being anywhere near the level of shared governance described in our course materials.

I believe in shared governance because I believe it upholds the academic integrity of our school system. Clayton County Public Schools is the only public district in which I've been employed so I cannot speak for others, but it appears that administrative turnover is high. This indicates to me that the teachers actually working in the classrooms, those that have been around for a number of years, are the best equipped to make decisions because they are the most familiar with the history of the school system and how to avoid its past mistakes. Shared Governance ensures that everyone involved has a voice and that all voices are taken into consideration when decisions are made that affect the quality of instruction we provide for our students.

I still have several unanswered questions about the Shared Governance model that I intend to continue to research as part of my own development and growth as a leader in training. The model is beautiful and ideal but how do you get a model of shared governance started? Is there a body of representatives that are elected to make decisions on behalf of the school or school system? How do you ensure that all individuals are equally represented in a Shared Governance model? How do you encourage interest in Shared Governance by those who are "jaded" and of the mindset that schools are bureaucracies that are corrupt and unchangeable? Shared Governance seems plausible in a small school system but very difficult to encourage among one that is large. For my school system to evolve to one of shared governance I feel that there would need to be a sweep of our current leadership and an entirely new style of management put into place. It's

frustrating to feel like you have no voice; it's frustrating to feel like you're one person who cannot jumpstart the necessary changes that will improve your system by improving the overall moral and quality of instruction being provided to your students. I'm still left wondering where I begin. How can I encourage my school system to make the change? I believe the answer is that I must begin with myself and work on making the changes that are necessary for any individual who wishes to be a leader.

As an educational leader in the making, I desire to see the changes made within my school district that embrace the values and beliefs of all of the stakeholders, not just those who've made their way to the top or of those who feel they have the newest solution to improvement in an urban school district. To accomplish this, I recognize that there are many aspects of leadership that I must embrace and embody in order to be successful. I cannot become a leader by declaring myself as such, I must exhibit characteristics that encourage, empower, motivate and illicit trust from those teachers and other staff members that work with me as we strive to make our school system one that is successful and productive.

As a teacher, I know that I feel powerless without the support of my administrators. My job becomes frustrating and complicated and I feel as though I have no where to turn. Building relationships is the responsibility of all leaders; relationships are the cornerstone of trust and without trust there is no teamwork or collaborative effort to produce positive change. I want to build trust amongst my fellow colleagues; I am committed to involving everyone who wants to be involved and encouraging those who at first seem sluggish. This will be my first step in creating a trusting environment. As stated by Blasé and Blasé (2001), "The reward of a trusting environment is

immeasurable, yet the price of a lack of trust is dear” (p.23). I believe that communication is at the heart of creating trust and communication is an area in which I’m committed to self-improvement. I intend to practice active-listening and paraphrasing, both of which are stated to be characteristics of effective communication (Blasé & Blasé, 2001). I hope to learn to improve my understanding and level of comfort with formal authority; I will model all of the characteristics of a good educator and an effective leader. I intend to continue to learn to think as a leader.

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