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Evolution of the School District Superintendent Position

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Normative role expectations for local school district superintendents have evolved over the past 150 years, incrementally becoming more extensive, complex, and demanding. By the 1980s, 82% of the states had promulgated laws or policies that required officeholders to complete a prescribed program of graduate study and subsequently obtain a state-issued license (or certificate) to practice. All but three of these states specified courses that had to be completed, and somewhat surprisingly, only 25 states identified "classroom teaching experience" as a license requirement (Baptist, 1989). More recently, Feistritzer (2003) reported that although 41 states continue to require preparation and licensing for superintendents, more than half of these states (54%) issue either waivers or emergency certificates to individuals who do not meet the prescribed qualifications. In addition, 15 of the 41 states (37%) allow or sanction alternative routes to licensure. Overall, the trend has been toward rescinding requirements for this key position, as evidenced by radical policy decisions such as in Tennessee, in which the only remaining requirement for being a superintendent is a bachelor's degree (Kowalski & Glass, 2002).

In truth, superintendent preparation and licensing have been contentious issues since the position's inception. Latent concerns were rekindled during the 1980s as issues of governance emerged in relation to the national school reform movement. Critics of the status quo, however, continue to vehemently disagree over needed policy revisions. In one camp are those advocating strengthening requirements; virtually all these individuals come from within the profession. Their recommendations have ranged from eliminating weak programs (e.g., Clark, 1989) to establishing a national preparation curriculum (e.g., Kowalski, 1999) to placing greater emphasis on instructional leadership (e.g., Murphy, 1994). In the other camp are those advocating the deregulation of preparation and licensing; virtually all these individuals come from outside the profession. Their most recent attack is found in the publication *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto,* published by the Broad Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2003). The document, which mainly presents opinions and anecdotal evidence, refers to university-based preparation programs and state licensing standards as meaningless hoops, hurdles, and regulatory hassles. The authors declare, "For aspiring superintendents, we believe that the states should require only a college education and a careful background check" (p. 31).

Clearly, no issue is currently more crucial to the future of the position of school district superintendent than the battle being fought over professional preparation and state licensing. The intent of licensing professionals is to protect society and not the licensee. Consequently, a decision to deregulate a profession should not be made solely in political arenas in which self- and group interests are more likely to outweigh societal interests. This chapter is grounded in the belief that persons within a profession, regardless of their personal views, have a responsibility to ensure that policy debates of this magnitude will be objective and empirically based. As a first step toward meeting this obligation, the content of this chapter traces the evolution of the superintendency in the context of five role conceptualizations. The intent is to demonstrate the depth and complexity of the position's knowledge base. In addition, the argument is made that future policy decisions will be enlightened if role conceptualizations are considered and critiqued in relation to the nature of local school districts, minority practitioner perspectives (both gender and race), and traditional approaches to professional preparation.

EVOLUTION OF SUPERINTENDENT ROLES

The position of school district superintendent was created during the late 1830s; by 1850, 13 large city school systems already employed an administrator in this capacity. By most accounts, the very first district superintendents were appointed in Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky

(Grieder, Pierce, & Jordan, 1969). By 1900, most city school districts had established this position. The need for school systems to have a top executive stemmed from a myriad of conditions including the development of larger city school districts, the consolidation of rural school districts, an expanded state curriculum, the passage of compulsory attendance laws, demands for increased accountability, and efficiency expectations (Kowalski, 2003a).

Petersen and Barnett (2003) note that there are some discrepancies in historical, accounts, and they attribute this variance to three conditions: the use of different literature sources, differing interpretations of historical accounts, and the analytical approaches used. Although some scholars (e.g., Tyack & Hansot, 1982) relied on a developmental approach (based on the premise that the superintendent's role matured over time), others (Callahan, 1966) employed a discursive analysis (relying on rhetoric and writings to determine role expectations). Noting the use of these two distinctively different approaches, Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2002) concluded that the discursive approach resulted in a greater number of developmental stages.

There is some dispute over the earliest role conceptualization of the district superintendent. Carter and Cunningham (1997) and Petersen and Barnett (2003), for example, identify it as being a school board's clerk. This role, thought to exist for several decades prior to 1850, was predicated on the belief that big-city school boards were reluctant to relinquish power, so they relegated their superintendents to performing simple clerical and practical tasks. This role proved to be temporary, a condition that might explain why some historians (e.g., Callahan, 1966) did not view it as relevant to modern practice.

Five role conceptualizations are addressed in this chapter to demonstrate how the position of district superintendent evolved and to show why none has become irrelevant to modern practice. The first four—teacher-scholar, manager, democratic leader, and applied social scientist—were described by Callahan (1966); the fifth, communicator, was depicted by Kowalski (2001, 2003b). In practice, neatly separating them is virtually impossible because they often overlap. Nevertheless, they provide an essential framework for understanding the complexity of the position and the knowledge and skills required for effective practice.

Superintendent as Teacher-Scholar

From the time when the position was created until the first decade of the twentieth century, the primary foci of district superintendents were implementing a state curriculum and supervising teachers. The *common school movement* was intended to assimilate students into American culture by having public schools deliver a set of uniform subjects and courses—a strategy that required centralized control and standardization. State, county,

and district superintendents were assigned to oversee the process (Kowalski, 1999).

After the Civil War, rapidly developing urban school systems established normative standards for public elementary and secondary education, and their superintendents were viewed as master teachers (Callahan, 1962). They devoted much of their time to supervising instruction and ensuring curricular uniformity (Spring, 1994). They frequently authored professional journal articles about philosophy, history, and pedagogy (Cuban, 1988), and some subsequently became state superintendents, professors, and college presidents (Petersen & Barnett, 2003). The characterization of superintendent as teacher-scholar was summarized in an 1890 report on urban superintendents:

> It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils. (Cuban, 1976, p. 16)

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, superintendents were the most influential members of the National Education Association. They never viewed themselves as being separated from the teaching profession. Management functions were often assumed by school board members or relegated to subordinates because the superintendents did not want to be viewed publicly as either managers or politicians. They often hid behind a cloak of professionalism, especially when they encountered ambitious mayors and city council members who wanted to usurp their authority (Callahan, 1966).

The conceptualization of the district superintendent as teacher-scholar began to wane circa 1910, but it never became irrelevant; emphasis on instructional leadership fluctuated throughout the past century. Summarizing the literature on this topic, Petersen and Barnett (2003) pointed out that the concept of superintendent as instructional leader has been challenged for various reasons that range from politics to position instability to school board member expectations. Research findings on the superintendent's influence over educational outcomes have been mixed. For instance, Zigarelli (1996) used data from the National Education Longitude Study for 1988, 1990, and 1992 to conclude that the evidence did not support a claim that the relationships between district administrators and schools improved instruction. Studies having a broader perspective of superintendent influence usually paint a different picture. After examining seven of them (Bredesen, 1996; Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Herman, 1990; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen, 2002; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987), Petersen and Barnett (2003) concluded that superintendents "can influence the views of school board members and

others by articulating and demonstrating involvement, a sincere interest in the technical core of curriculum and instruction and viewing it as their primary responsibility" (p. 15).

Today, differences of opinion about superintendents being instructional leaders are evident in inconsistent state policies for professional preparation and licensure. Nearly one-third of the states have either eliminated the superintendent's license or allow alternative routes to obtaining it. Deregulation of licensing and preparation is grounded in the belief that being a professional educator is an inconsequential criterion that discourages highly effective business, political, and military leaders from becoming superintendents (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003). Ironically, this myopic policy position comes at a time when national and state reform initiatives are increasing accountability standards for student performance. Björk (1993) noted that superintendents indirectly influence instruction through functions such as staff selection, principal supervision, and budgeting—decisions that often are undervalued with respect to overall effectiveness. Currently, state deregulation and district decentralization continue to heighten expectations that superintendents can recommend policy and develop rules that will increase educational productivity (Kowalski, 2001).

Superintendent as Manager

As early as 1890, reservations were being expressed about the ability of traditional superintendents to administer large city districts. These concerns focused primarily on a perceived lack of managerial knowledge and skills. As Cuban (1976) noted, heated debates were waged on this topic and "the lines of argument crystallized over whether the functions of a big-city superintendent should be separated into two distinct jobs, i.e., business manager and superintendent of instruction" (p. 17). Qualms about managerial competencies intensified as America began its transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. New factories sparked a demographic chain reaction, first producing urbanization and then large school systems. In this context, school board members focused more directly and intensely on resource management. They and other political elites began demanding that superintendents infuse the tenets of classical theory and scientific management, perceived then to be the successful underpinnings of the Industrial Revolution, into school administration (Callahan, 1962). By 1920, the role transformation had been officially completed; superintendents were expected to be scientific managers—individuals who could improve operations by concentrating on time and efficiency (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

From approximately 1900 to 1920, leading education scholars, including Ellwood Cubberly, George Strayer, and Franklin Bobbitt, joined political elites in demanding that school administrators learn and apply

the principles of scientific management (Cronin, 1973). The mounting pressures for this role transformation prompted officials at several leading universities to offer courses and subsequently graduate degrees in school management. Simultaneously, prominent superintendents were reevaluating the merits of protecting their public image as professional educators. Many decided that relinquishing this persona was necessary if policymakers and the general public were to accept the contention that administrative work had become separate from and more important than teaching (Thomas & Moran, 1992).

Opposition to the refashioning of superintendents into industrial managers came from two opposing groups. On the one hand, many mayors, city council members, and other political bosses feared that casting superintendents as managers would increase the stature, influence, and power of this position (Callahan, 1962).[1] On the other hand, some leading education scholars opposed the management conceptualization because they thought it was counterproductive to the principle of local control. More precisely, they feared that business and government power elites would act in concert with superintendent-managers to seize control of public education, thus diminishing participatory democracy (Glass, 2003).

In his book *Education and Cult of Efficiency,* historian Raymond Callahan (1962) chronicled how and why the infusion of business values into educational philosophy and the role transformation of superintendents became inextricably intertwined. Judging these conditions to be detrimental to the nation, he concluded that both contemporary social forces and the collusion of leading big-city superintendents were responsible for them. He was especially harsh in his assessment of the superintendents, concluding that they lacked conviction and courage. He then labeled them *dupes:* powerless and vulnerable pawns who were unwilling to defend their profession or their organizations. His analysis, referred to as the *Thesis of Vulnerability,* has been widely accepted by many but not all education scholars (Eaton, 1990). Burroughs (1974) and Tyack (1974), for example, disagreed with Callahan. They characterized the same superintendents as cunning, intelligent, political pragmatists who merely responded to the societal realities imbued in their work context. Thomas and Moran (1992) offered a third point of view: They posited that these administrators were opportunists who had embraced classical theory and scientific management because it expanded their legitimate power base.

Although historians have disagreed about motives, they concur that management became the dominant role expectation for school superintendents in the early 1900s. Budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility management were the first tasks they assumed (Callahan, 1962). By 1930, however, the still relatively new business manager conceptualization was being subjected to intense criticism. The great economic stock market crash and subsequent depression tarnished much of the glitter that the captains of

industry had acquired during the Industrial Revolution. Some prominent superintendents who were previously praised for emulating industrial managers were now being disparaged. In addition, many local school district patrons were overtly protesting the level of power that administrators had acquired; most felt disenfranchised by the bureaucratic structure that had been imposed on their local districts (Kowalski, 2003a). In the midst of this dissatisfaction, leading progressive educators, such as George Sylvester Counts, intensified their criticisms, arguing that business values imposed on public education were incongruous with the core political values of a democratic society (Van Til, 1971).[2]

Studying the evolution of the managerial role, Thomas Glass (2003) observed that both context and district size have been critical issues. He noted that the work of a superintendent in a small-enrollment rural district was quite dissimilar from the work of a superintendent in a large-enrollment urban district. Consequently, he cautioned that generalizations about managerial responsibilities are typically precarious. Management, and especially fiscal management, has been stressed heavily in small districts in which superintendents often have little or no support staff. In these settings, a superintendent manages the largest transportation program and food service program in the community.

Even though the degree of emphasis placed on management has fluctuated, the importance of the role is rarely questioned. Experienced practitioners recognize that many of their leadership attributes become insignificant when budgets are not balanced, school facilities are deemed not to be safe, and personnel problems routinely result in litigation. Superintendents in larger-enrollment and more affluent districts often can relegate managerial responsibilities to their staff, but even those able to do so are held accountable for efficient and productive operations (Kowalski, 1999). Commenting about contemporary school administration, John Kotter, Harvard Business School Professor, noted that superintendents must be both effective leaders and effective managers. As all organizations move toward decentralization and democratization, the demands placed on chief executives, including district superintendents, increase. Correspondingly, the minimum levels of knowledge and skills escalate (Bencivenga, 2002). Professor Kotter's observations illuminate the reality that the challenge facing today's superintendent is not choosing between leadership and management; it is establishing equilibrium between these two essential roles.

Superintendent as Democratic Leader

The role of democratic leader is often equated with *statesmanship.* Björk and Gurley (2003) traced the origins of statesmanship from Plato to Alexander Hamilton. Plato believed that a statesman acted unilaterally and paternalistically to control and direct critical societal functions.

Hamilton viewed a statesman as a true politician who juggled the interests of the common people and the interests of the economic elite while remaining an aristocrat. Callahan's (1966) conception of the superintendent as statesman was probably not in total agreement with either of these perspectives. His historical analysis of the period between 1930 and the mid-1950s is centered primarily on political leadership in a democratic context. After studying these perspectives, Björk and Gurley (2003) concluded that the term *statesman* "is not and may never have been an appropriate role conceptualization for the American superintendency, inasmuch as the role has never been about a stately, patriarch ubiquitously and benevolently guiding school systems single-handedly" (p. 35). Instead of statesman, they viewed this superintendent role as one of an astute political strategist.

The democratic leader characterization is anchored in both philosophical and political realities. In the 1930s, scarce fiscal resources forced school officials to engage more directly in political activity, especially in relation to lobbying state legislatures. Previously, the behavior of highly political superintendents was regarded as unprofessional (Björk & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995). But such convictions faded when it became apparent that public schools had to compete with other governmental services to acquire state funding. At approximately the same time, a cadre of prominent education professors was continuing its efforts to restore participatory democracy in local districts. One of the most vocal members in this group was Ernest Melby, a former dean of education at Northwestern University and New York University (Callahan, 1966). Melby (1955) believed that the infusion of business values had led superintendents to become less reliant on their greatest resource: the community. He warned administrators about the dangers of insulating themselves from the public and urged superintendents instead to "release the creative capacities of individuals" and "mobilize the educational resources of communities" (p. 250). In essence, democratic leaders were expected to galvanize policymakers, employees, and other taxpayers to support the district's initiatives (Howlett, 1993).

By the mid-1950s, the idea of having superintendents engage in democratic administration also met with disfavor. Detractors argued that the concept was overly idealistic and insufficiently attentive to realities of practice. They believed that democratic administration as it had been characterized produced problems for organizations and those who embraced it. In their eyes, everyday problems of superintendents were economic, social, and political; and knowledge and skills, not philosophy, were necessary to solve them (Kowalski, 1999). Although the ideal of democratic administration became less prominent after the 1950s, it never died. Over the past 20 years, it has reemerged, not only in public education but also in all types of organizations, largely because of a mix of changing values and economic realities. In the case of public education, scholars (e.g., Hanson, 2003; Wirt & Kirst, 2001) recognize that even the best education

policies usually prove to be ineffective when they are unacceptable to the public. Policy and politics are inextricably joined in a democracy, a reality that promotes democratic administration. Perhaps more so now than in the past, ideological and moral differences among community factions require facilitation and conflict management (Keedy & Björk, 2002).

Superintendent as Applied Social Scientist

As with earlier role conceptualizations, the view of superintendent as applied social scientist was forged by a mix of societal and professional forces. Callahan (1966) identified the following four as the most influential:

- *Growing dissatisfaction with democratic leadership after World War II.* As previously noted, the concept of democratic leadership came under attack by those who perceived it to be overly idealistic. These detractors thought that shared authority and decision making exacerbated political, social, and economic problems rather than solving them.
- *Rapid development of the social sciences in the late 1940s and early 1950s.* The social sciences were being developed rapidly during this era. The seminal book *Toward a Theory of Action* (Parsons & Shils, 1951) exemplified this fact. Many scholars concluded that the social sciences were at the core of administrative work, including practice in districts and schools.
- *Support from the Kellogg Foundation.* During the 1950s, the Foundation provided more than $7 million in grants, primarily to eight major universities to support the research of school administration professors in the area of the social sciences.
- *A resurgence of criticisms of public education in the 1950s.* Changes in role conceptualizations were fueled by public dissatisfaction, and the image of superintendent as applied social scientist was no exception. During this era, however, the displeasure related to emerging social and political concerns. The end of school desegregation seemed apparent, families were leaving cities to move to new suburbs, the first wave of post-World War II baby boomers was entering public education, and the escalating cold war with the Soviet Union intensified national defense concerns. Such issues presented unique challenges to public elementary and secondary education, and many policymakers and public opinion shapers concluded that local district superintendents were not prepared to deal with them.

At least two other factors now appear to have been equally influential. Circa 1955, efforts to make school administration an established academic discipline equal to business management and public administration were intensifying (Culbertson, 1981). Redefining administrators as applied social scientists and infusing the social sciences into the curriculum for preparing

school administrators were viewed as positive steps toward that goal (Crowson & McPherson, 1987). Second, prior to the 1950s, the practice of administration focused largely on internal operations, but systems theory was gradually employed to demonstrate how external legal, political, social, and economic systems affected organizations (Getzels, 1977). School administration professors concluded that such theoretical constructs were equally essential for their students.

The model of superintendent as social scientist encouraged professors and practitioners to emphasize empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty in their research and practice (Cooper & Boyd, 1987). The intent was to rewrite the normative standards for practice; superintendents in the future were expected to apply scientific inquiry to the problems and decisions that permeated their practice. The study of theory was at the core of this normative transition, as evidenced by the changes in school administration textbooks. Those written prior to 1950 never mentioned theory, but virtually none written after 1950 omitted theory (Getzels, 1977). By the 1970s, the behavioral sciences became thoroughly integrated into school administration literature, including primary textbooks (Johnson & Fusarelli, 2003).

Similarities between the onset of the management role and the onset of the applied social scientist role are striking. In both instances, public dissatisfaction was atypically high, school administration professors were seeking to elevate their profession's status, and administration was described as being distinctively different from and more demanding than teaching (Kowalski, 2003a). Consequently, it is not surprising that both roles were subjected to similar criticisms. Depicting superintendents as experts unavoidably resurrects fundamental questions about the incompatibility of professionalism and democracy. How much power should superintendents possess? Can professionalism and democracy coexist in the administration of a public agency? In truth, public administration differs from other forms of administration in that professional knowledge is applied in highly political contexts and is subject to political scrutiny (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). Clearly, then, vulnerability to public contempt increases when superintendents act unilaterally or devalue public opinion (Kowalski, 1999).

Although emphasis on the behavioral sciences lessened after 1980, research and theories from constituent disciplines had already become embedded in school administration's knowledge base. Addressing the role in more recent times, Fusarelli and Fusarelli (2003) identified school reform and the quest for social justice as relevant issues. In the former, superintendents are expected to have the expertise necessary to research deficiencies and to recommend policy to ameliorate them. This expertise includes the ability to reshape institutional cultures that deter positive change. In the latter, superintendents are expected to have the expertise necessary to deal with social and institutional ills such as poverty, racism,

gender discrimination, crime, and violence. Both expectations require knowledge and skills from various social science disciplines. Examples include psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and criminology. Moreover, superintendents are expected to conduct and utilize research in dealing with these issues.

Superintendent as Communicator

The ever-prescient Peter Drucker (1999) labeled the new era of organizations the Information Age: What matters in times of unremitting global competition and availability of huge amounts of information are the skills of accessing and processing information and making decisions based on that information. As early as the late 1970s, Lipinski (1978) and other scholars predicted that technology would move society away from a manufacturing base to an information base. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) sounded an alarm that public schools were not sufficiently performance-driven with respect to preparing students to be competitive in a global economy. America's public schools have always been expected to be efficient institutions, and computers exacerbated that anticipation (Kearsley, 1990). Dyrli and Kinnaman (1994), for instance, argued that technology could increase productivity through increased processing speed, greater memory capacity, miniaturization, decreased cost, and increased ease of use. Media reports on international comparisons, however, suggested that American public schools had become neither more efficient nor more productive (Bracey, 2003).

Historically, communication in school administration has been treated as a skill—that is, something one does well when assuming a role. Consequently, skills tend to be role-specific; the nature of the skill is shaped by the role characterization. As an example, appropriate managerial behavior and appropriate political behavior have been dissimilar. Today, however, such variations are no longer encouraged. Normative communicative behavior specifies two-way, symmetrical interactions for all school administrators. As a result, communication should no longer be viewed as a variable skill but rather as a pervasive role characterization (Kowalski, 2005).

The view of superintendent as communicator emerged in conjunction with America's transition from a manufacturing society (Kowalski, 2001). Communicative expectations for administrators reflect a confluence of reform initiatives and the social environment in which they are being pursued. Virtually every major school improvement concept and strategy encourages superintendents to work collaboratively with principals, teachers, parents, and other taxpayers to build and pursue collective visions. Yet many districts and schools retain cultures that promote work isolation (teachers and administrators working individually and in seclusion) (Gideon, 2002) and closed organizational climates (administrators attempting to avoid community interventions) (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

Since the early 1990s, policy analysts (e.g., Bauman, 1996; Fullan, 1996; Hess, 1998) have concluded that meaningful school reform requires revising institutional climates, including organizational structure and culture. In addition, current reform efforts are largely predicated on the conviction that restructuring complex institutions necessitates a social systems perspective (Chance & Björk, 2004; Murphy, 1991; Schein, 1996). "Systemic thinking requires us to accept that the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn" (Schlechty, 1997, p. 134). In this vein, the nature of public schools is influenced by human transactions occurring within and outside the formal organization—exchanges often conducted in the midst of fundamental philosophical differences (Keedy & Björk, 2002). Restructuring proposals that ignore the ubiquitous nature of political disagreements almost always fail, either because key implementers and stakeholders are excluded from visioning and planning or because the values and beliefs expressed in the reforms are incongruous with prevailing institutional culture (Kowalski, 1997; Schlechty, 1997).

Many scholars (e.g., Henkin, 1993; Murphy, 1994) believe that school improvement needs to be pursued locally and that superintendents must be key figures in the process. This assignment, though, is highly intimidating for many superintendents for one or more of the following reasons:

- Topics that inevitably produce substantial conflict must be discussed openly and candidly with groups inside and outside the organization (Carlson, 1996).
- Often administrators either have been socialized to believe that conflict is counterproductive or they feel insecure managing it (Kowalski, 2003b).
- Many educators are dubious about reform, having experienced a myriad of change failures during their careers (Sarason, 1996). Even new teachers and administrators often come to accept things as they are (Streitmatter, 1994).

Despite these obstacles, superintendents must realize that they are unlikely to achieve true school restructuring unless they identify and challenge what individuals and groups truly believe and value about education (Trimble, 1996) and how they promote and accept change (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, 1994). Increasingly, scholars are concluding that communication and culture are inextricably linked. For example, Conrad (1994) wrote, "Cultures are communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all employees, not just the conscious persuasive strategies of upper management. Cultures do not exist separately from people communicating with one another" (p. 27). Although organizational research typically has categorized culture as a causal variable and communication as an intervening variable (Wert-Gray, Center, Brashers, & Meyers, 1991), the relationship between the two is more likely

reciprocal (Kowalski, 1998). Axley (1996), for instance, wrote the following about interdependence: "Communication gives rise to culture, which gives rise to communication, which perpetuates culture" (p. 153). In this vein, communication is a process through which organizational members express their collective inclination to coordinate beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. In schools, communication gives meaning to work and forges perceptions of reality. As such, culture influences communicative behavior, and communicative behavior is instrumental to building, maintaining, and changing culture (Kowalski, 1998).

In the case of local school districts, normative communicative behavior is shaped largely by two realities: the need for superintendents to assume leadership in the process of school restructuring (Björk, 2001; Murphy, 1994) and the need for them to change school culture as part of the restructuring process (Heckman, 1993; Kowalski, 2000).

A nexus between effective practice and communication skills is not unique to education; recent studies of business executives revealed that most who found themselves under attack were ineffective communicators (Perina, 2002). In the case of district superintendents, the role of effective communicator is framed by relatively new expectations that have become apparent since the early 1980s. Examples include engaging others in open political dialogue, facilitating the creation of shared visions, building a positive school district image, gaining community support for change, providing an essential framework for information management, providing marketing programs, and keeping the public informed about education (Kowalski, 2004). As communities become increasingly diverse, superintendents also have the responsibility of building more inclusive cultures (Riehl, 2000).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

One overarching objective of this book is to enlighten decisions that affect the preparation and licensing of school superintendents. Although historical accounts of the five role conceptualizations provide a framework for this objective, they do not speak to current and future relevancy. These perspectives and implications for required knowledge and skills are examined in Chapters 5–9 of this book. The authors of these chapters also consider organizational context using the following typology of local school districts:

- *Urban.* Districts located in major cities with populations of at least 100,000
- *County.* Districts serving an entire county that include heterogeneous geographic areas (e.g., a mix of small cities and rural areas or a large city and suburbs)
- *Suburban.* Districts surrounding major urban areas

- *Cities and towns.* Districts located in cities and towns with populations of fewer than 100,000
- *Rural.* Districts comprised primarily of nonresidential areas

The purpose of addressing context is to make distinctions in role expectations based on the nature of a superintendent's workplace. Management responsibilities in rural and urban districts, for example, are almost always dissimilar.

Chapters 10 and 11 of this book provide critiques of the five role characterizations. The first explores female perspectives and the second explores the perspectives of people of color. Since its inception, the district superintendency has been overwhelmingly occupied by white males (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). The research agenda has also had a decidedly male perspective (Björk, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989). The writings of scholars who have studied the experiences of women and racial minorities in the superintendency (e.g., Brunner, 1998; Grogan, 1999) at the very least raise the possibility that historical accounts of role expectations have not addressed diversity. Therefore, the intent of these two chapters is to determine the extent to which each characterization has been, is, and will be gender- and race-neutral. In addition, the authors offer perspectives about how gender and race could or should influence professional preparation.

NOTES

1.   By exhibiting management competency, the superintendents could argue that their organizations should be free of political interference from other government agencies. If successful, their added power could be expressed through activities such as employment decisions, awarding contracts, and doling out favors to segments of the community.

2.   To this day, many individuals confuse criticisms of the core values of classical theory with the function of management. Counts (1952), for example, viewed management as essential in all large organizations. His criticisms circa 1930 did not focus on superintendents performing management functions; instead, they pertained to the concentration of power in the hands of superintendents and political elites. He believed that the application of classical theory in public organizations was detrimental because it eradicated or diminished public participation. Consequently, it is important to distinguish between management as a function and scientific management as a philosophy.

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