

# 4

## Preparing Educational Leaders: A Basis for Partnership

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Whether one works in schools or schools of education, change has become a constant element in the lives of American educators. As illustrated in Chapters 1 through 3, the pressure for change has been persistent across various sectors of education for well over a decade. In most cases, the impetus for change has come from outside, but through a chain of events the need for change begins to be recognized, or is simply mandated, within schools themselves. In Helfrich's school district, for example, changing demographics caused by factory closings and an aging population led to a sharp decline in student enrollment, which, in turn, required that some schools in the district be closed. The recognition that the district would have to get by with less, but would be expected to achieve no less (or perhaps produce even more), caused school officials to revisit the central mission and operations of the district. Fear of job loss and "threats to traditional norms and ways of doing things" (Senge, 1994, p. 88) created insecurity, mistrust, and a resistance to change on the part of many teachers and administrators.

Similarly, Chapters 2 and 3 related a chain of events that moved from outside to within the university, specifically the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB). Whether or not it was "manufactured" by partisan politics (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), the national debate over educational reform that began with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and continued in The Holmes Group trilogy (*Tomorrow's Teachers*, 1986; *Tomorrow's Schools*, 1990; and *Tomorrow's Schools of Education*, 1995), raised concern

over the quality of education provided in our nation's public schools. These concerns led to focused criticism of the quality of preservice preparation received by teachers and administrators in institutions of higher education.

Challenges to traditional notions of scholarship were at the very heart of this criticism. Should college faculty, especially those at research universities where scholarship is prized, maintain a safe, antiseptic distance from the field for the sake of objectivity? Or should they immerse themselves in the hands-on, "rolled-up-sleeves work" of school improvement (Darling-Hammond, 1996)? When challenged, as Petrie notes, to change "my work" to "our work," the faculty of the UB's GSE were no less immune to insecurity, mistrust, and resistance to change than their public school counterparts. Quite simply, the press for change at all levels of public education has been matched by a persistent resistance to it.

This chapter continues the discussion about change and resistance to it. I argue that "we" (the university and the field) need to rethink the role of school leaders (whether administrator or teacher) and how they are prepared. To this end, there need to be changes in traditional power relationships that define schools; changes in commonly held, but potentially dysfunctional, conceptions of leadership; and changes in levels of collaboration between the university and the field. By working together on these issues, schools and schools of education have a unique opportunity for simultaneous improvement, and to build a profession "that is less balkanized" (Darling-Hammond, 1996). But make no mistake about it, these represent significant changes in well-entrenched ways of doing things at schools and schools of education. As Senge (1994) points out, resistance to change "is neither capricious nor mysterious" (p. 88). If attempted, the changes recommended will undoubtedly produce resistance because they will be viewed as threatening by some faculty members and administrators at both schools and schools of education.

I begin the chapter by examining three concepts I believe are fundamental to rethinking the role of school leaders and how they should be prepared: community, leadership, and shared vision. First, I describe and endorse Sergiovanni's (1994) conception of schools as communities, contrasting it with the more traditional model of schools as hierarchical organizations. With this communitarian model in mind, I propose that leadership in education be treated as a collective rather than an individual construct, with all educators prepared to assume leadership tasks when needed. Finally, I discuss vision building as also being a collective, rather than an individual, activity, with shared vision being the articulation of the unrealized, but collectively acknowledged, potential of a work group. One thing a "leader"

does is to help a group articulate its collective potential. This section borrows extensively from Senge's (1994) work, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.

In the last section of the chapter, I describe and analyze a collaborative endeavor on the part of UB and several area school districts to rethink the role of school leaders and how they are prepared. Called the Leadership Initiative for Tomorrow's Schools (LIFTS), this program, now in its third year of operation, can also be traced to a national report on educational reform, *Leaders for America's Schools*, a report of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (University Council for Educational Administration, 1987). As Helfrich and Petrie describe in earlier chapters, the LIFTS initiative was spurred by a recognized need from school leaders in the field to redesign, improve, and participate in the preparation of future educational leaders in western New York. In this firsthand account of the development of LIFTS, I focus on several key design features of the program intended to foster the type of community building, collective leadership, and shared vision recommended in the paper.

Examining the LIFTS program provides a way to highlight the necessary changes that schools and schools of education ought to consider as they attempt to develop collaborative partnerships for leadership preparation. Although the terms *leadership* and *administration* are often used interchangeably in education, anyone who has spent any time in schools knows that not all school administrators are leaders and not all school leaders are administrators. I argue in this chapter that effective school change depends upon our ability to nurture the leadership potential of all educators, administrators, and teachers. Attempts to disentangle leadership from administration will be resisted because it represents an important shift in traditional power relationships in schools. Examining LIFTS provides an opportunity to review potential obstacles to implementation, and areas of confrontation, contestation, and resistance on the part of university faculty, students of administration, and the field.

### Schools as Organizations or Communities?

In his classic study, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tonnies (1887/1957) notes that a social relationship implies interdependence and that the will of one person influences that of others. The "collective will" can be either rational or natural; it can remain the same or undergo change. Tonnies used the term *gesellschaft* to describe societal types that operate through intention, in which dominant social relationships are characterized by rational

calculation and exchange. In contrast, the term *gemeinschaft* describes more natural societal types that operate through sentiment, with social relationships characterized by fellowship, kinship, and neighborliness.

In an invited address to the American Educational Research Association, Sergiovanni (1994) aligned current definitions of organization and community with Tonnies's conceptions of *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft*, respectively. Organizations (*gesellschaft*), for example, are defined by explicit management structures and procedures, codified roles and role expectations, and the assumption that hierarchy equals expertise. "Those higher in the hierarchy are presumed to know more about teaching, learning, and other matters of schooling than those lower, and thus each person in a school is evaluated by the person at the next higher level" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 216).

Communities (*gemeinschaft*), on the other hand, emphasize informal relationships that rely on interdependence, with communities of "mind" emerging from "the binding of people to common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing." (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 219). Relationships in communities are intrinsically rewarding, and people are committed to one another through mutual agreement and sentiment. In contrast, organizations often require suppressing individual needs for the sake of achieving organizational goals; therefore, commitments are specified through formal contracts and policies—"rational calculation and exchange"—as members try to negotiate the best package of extrinsic rewards possible.

It should be obvious to even a casual observer that schools nowadays resemble organizations, not communities. Noting that "life in organizations and life in communities are different in both quality and kind," Sergiovanni (1994, p. 217) proposed that if the field of educational administration hopes to effect meaningful change in schools, it must replace the dominant organizational model with a "school as community" model. Whereas collegiality in organizations is fostered through structural arrangements (such as team teaching), and encouraged by appealing to personal self-interest (including monetary incentives), collegiality in communities "comes from within."

If we were to change the metaphor for schools from organizations to community, and if we were to begin the process of community building in schools, then we would have to invent our own practice of community. This would require that we create a new theory of educational administration and a new practice of educational administration . . . more in tune with meaning and significance, and the shared values and ideas that connect people differently. And these new connections would require that we invent new sources of authority for what we do, a new basis for leadership. (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 218)

Before considering the implications of a communitarian model as "a new basis for leadership," it is important to first understand why the organizational model came to be the dominant metaphor in public education.

### *From Communities to Organizations*

During the 19th century, the common school sat at the center of the community. The school provided a place to congregate for social as well as educational events. It was a place in which community members took pride, and in many ways, the school was the community. During the 1890s, the needs and ethos of industry began to strongly influence the purpose and structure of American schools. It was a time of development and rapid industrialization. There was a pressing need for a large, but cheap, labor force that had a common language and work ethic, factors that would make supervision easier and less costly. Schools would serve as the cauldron for America's "melting pot." Rising immigration and birth rates resulted in more schools being built to accommodate the nation's growing school-age population. According to U.S. census data, there were just over 4 million youngsters between the ages of 5 and 17 years attending school in 1850—a figure that grew to almost 9 million in 1875, and 17 million in 1900, more than a fourfold increase in 50 years (Bureau of the Census, 1976).

This rapid growth created the need to adapt the types of specialized, hierarchical roles and explicit, standardized operating procedures that seemed to work so well in America's industrial sector. The mental model of the factory assembly line—each worker charged with a highly specific and carefully time-managed task, turning out products in an efficient, "scientifically" determined fashion—was extremely attractive to the American public. Therefore, principles of industrial scientific management were introduced to education early in the century (Taylor, 1911); with it came concerns for greater efficiency (Callahan, 1962). To create economies of scale, schools were centralized and consolidated. The total number of public school districts in the United States declined from approximately 130,000 in 1930 to 18,000 in 1970, whereas enrollments grew from 29 million to 51 million during the same time period (Bureau of the Census, 1976). In other words, fewer districts were serving many more youngsters and, over a 40-year period of consolidation, the average school district saw its student enrollment grow from a little more than 200 to just under 3000!

As districts grew larger, they became more hierarchically structured, and central office administrators expanded their role in the daily affairs of individual schools. Decision making over critical educational issues such

as curriculum design and textbook purchases moved further from the classroom, teachers, and principals. As noted earlier, positioning on the governance hierarchy was assumed to reflect expertise. But when it came to issues of instruction and the needs of students in *their* schools, teachers and building-level administrators felt that they were the "experts." As a result, teachers and building-level administrators found themselves engaged in increasingly confrontational relationships with both the central office and each other. Because they are expected to execute district policies, including policies they may have had no say in developing and/or policies they know their faculties (and perhaps they, themselves) find objectionable, principals, as "middle managers," are in an especially vulnerable position in the organizational model.

### *From Organizations to Learning Communities*

Imagine, instead, a less "Taylorized" school system with a relatively flat governance structure that recognizes expertise wherever it exists. Helfrich's effort to develop common goals and shared values (described in Chapter 1) was an attempt to foster mutual interdependence through the recognition of teacher expertise. Allowing teachers greater involvement in decisions that directly affected them provided them access to more information and a chance to better understand key issues under consideration. Moreover, it offered them the opportunity to exercise leadership and the possibility of reaching consensual agreement, which reduced the need for principals to enforce unpopular rules. Firmly entrenched power relationships that undergird "traditional norms and ways of doing things" can be altered by reallocating authority and control in this manner. But no less important than the redistribution of power is the fact that a more generalized appreciation of individual and collective expertise is likely to make work more intrinsically rewarding for employees whose knowledge is given voice.

Material affluence for the majority has gradually shifted people's orientation toward work—from what Daniel Yankelovich called an "instrumental" view of work, where work was a means to an end, to a more "sacred" view, where people seek the "intrinsic" benefits of work. (Senge, 1994, p. 5)

One can see in Helfrich's discussion that, for some, the school had become a more "communitarian" organization. When Helfrich states that "pride was back," the implication is that a very powerful intrinsic reward was once

again available to the members of that educational community. But this change in orientation depended upon two other key elements: (1) a different conception of school leadership and (2) the development of a shared vision.

### Collective School Leadership

In his influential work, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Senge (1994) argues that although individual learning is necessary, the team is the basic unit in organizational learning, and organizational learning is critical for continued success. Teams must be encouraged to share and test new ideas and insights, so that they may become part of a common knowledge base. BRIET's work with preservice and experienced teachers and the Goals 2000 Project reported by Emihovich suggest that action research is an approach that is especially appropriate for encouraging collective inquiry in schools. Collective inquiry such as this can produce generative learning that has the potential to outlive the contributions of any one individual, no matter how outstanding the person. For example, the use of planning and design teams and the quest for collective improvement continue in Helfrich's district well after his retirement.<sup>1</sup>

Facilitating the transition of individuals into teams of learners requires a new type of leadership, leadership that encourages a free flow of ideas and information as no one individual can be expected to be "all-knowing." To capitalize on the collective strengths of a team, a leader must be willing to forgo some measure of control. Relinquishing control is an act that engenders mutual trust—trust of the team and trust by the team. Leadership no longer resides solely with a single individual, but instead becomes a collective construct with different individuals and/or teams assuming leadership responsibility as needed. Contrast this notion of collective leadership with Senge's (1994) description of the more prevalent conception of "successful managers" in most organizations today:

Being a successful manager means being decisive, being "in control," knowing what is going on, having answers, and forcefully advocating *your views* [emphasis added]. (p. xvi)

This conception of leadership stresses the will of one person over that of the collective, and Senge (1994) contends that this approach persists because "most managers find collective inquiry inherently threatening" (p. 25). But think of the burden, and ultimately the stress, created by having to feel that as the designated "leader," you have all the answers and are always in

control. Principals are especially vulnerable to this type of pressure, feeling that they have to convince parents, teachers, and their supervisors in central office that they are decisive and in charge. Such self-inflicted stress can be exhausting. Leaders who feel they always fly at the front of the flock would be wise to study a formation of migrating geese. To avoid exhausting any one member of the flock, birds rotate continuously through the lead position on the vee. Every member of the flock has the potential to lead, and so this moment's follower becomes the next moment's leader.

The organizations that truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels in an organization. (Senge, 1994, p. 4)

Imagine a school characterized by teachers assuming leadership roles that capitalize on their particular areas of expertise when the need arises. The exertion required to lead a school, or school district, through the stiff winds of change would no longer rest solely on the shoulders of a single person. Instead, leadership would be shared collectively by a significant number of faculty, parents, support staff, and other members of the larger school community. Rather than reinforcing traditional power relationships by forcefully advocating a *personal vision* and requiring others to "buy in," Helfrich opted instead to tap the leadership potential of individuals throughout the district, recognizing that "effective progress can start in the middle as well as at the top of organizations" (Senge, 1994, p. xix). By encouraging people to participate and assume leadership in the change process, Helfrich's approach gradually reduced resistance. Change was now viewed as the way to create new opportunities, forge new relationships, and hopefully, realize a *shared vision*.

When there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-too-familiar 'vision statement'), people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to. (Senge, 1994, p. 9)

### **Building a Shared Vision**

The final ingredient needed to change schools from hierarchically run organizations to collectively led communities is the development of a shared vision.

The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared "pictures of the future" that foster genuine commitment and enrollment

rather than compliance. In mastering this discipline [building shared vision], leaders learn the counterproductiveness of trying to dictate a vision, no matter how heartfelt. (Senge, 1994, p. 9)

In addition to “unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future,’ ” a shared vision provides an articulation of a collective potential. We have within us all both idealized pictures of the future, and those we believe are truly within our grasp. The same tension can exist for a school. There are ideal, but probably unrealistic, images of the future, and there are also scenarios that most would agree are possible. If there is general agreement about the desirability of an idealized future, the disparity between the ideal and the real can be the creative tension that focuses commitment. For example, an often-repeated objective of Goals 2000 is that all American students will meet world-class standards in math and science. This is a laudable goal—certainly one worth striving toward. Yet many seriously question whether this goal is really attainable for all students any time soon. Nevertheless, it presents a desirable goal against which to measure progress. Fostering genuine commitment, therefore, requires the articulation of both an idealized and realistic future, with the emphasis on the latter. As noted previously, this perspective contrasts sharply with the more common notion that vision is something a “leader” espouses, and others are encouraged, persuaded, coerced, or otherwise compelled to follow.

Helfrich’s experiences provide insight into building a shared vision. But Helfrich’s reminiscences (see Chapter 1) also indicate that the vision that emerged in his district was not a vision shared by the university. In fact, the opportunity to develop a realistic picture of the future that could have been shared by the district and the university never materialized because repeated attempts to align activities across institutions proved unsuccessful. The inability to bring these parties together is symptomatic of a rift in the perspectives of the university and that of the field. Petrie’s distinction between perceptions of “my work” versus “our work” can be applied to faculty in public schools as well as the university. These differing perceptions explain some, but not all, of the impediments to university-district collaboration and partnership, particularly with regard to the preparation of school leaders.

### ***Impediments to University-District Collaboration***

A fundamental problem with the formal preparation of school leaders is that institutions of higher education often view their educational administration programs as little more than revenue generators. With more than 500 institutions offering coursework in school administration across the

United States, these programs are producing an oversupply of aspiring administrators, which appears to be insensitive to the actual demand for administrators in many parts of the country (Bliss, 1988; Jacobson, 1990). For more than two decades, western New York has had seven certification programs (three private institutions and four associated with the State University system). Bliss's (1988) data indicated that in New York there were five certified individuals for every administrative position, not counting the incumbent. No less troublesome than this "certification mill" mentality is the fact that course offerings in many programs often reflect the research and entrepreneurial interests of individual faculty members, rather than "real" issues and problems of school practice. As a result, we are preparing far too many people poorly, and significant pre- and inservice needs of school leaders are being neglected.

Preparing educational leaders is simply too important an activity to leave to the university. It is a task that must be shared by the university and the field, because if schools and schools of education are to change to meet the pressing challenges of the next century, then so too must the way we prepare those who will lead them. Preparing educational leaders can provide a meaningful basis for university-school district partnerships.

### **A Collaborative Approach to the Preparation of School Leaders**

What I have tried to develop to this point is that meaningful school change depends upon changing current conceptions of schools as organizations, school leadership, and vision. But where to start? I suggest we start with the preparation of school leaders because it is the quickest way to infuse these new conceptions into our educational system. If future school leaders (i.e., those individuals who have been identified by their colleagues as having leadership potential) come to share these new perspectives, they will become the agents of change in their own workplaces.

Before considering what a new, collaborative approach to leadership preparation might look like, we need to first examine the current state of administrator preparation. According to the *Leaders for America's Schools* report (University Council for Educational Administration, 1987), university preparation programs had a number of serious problems as they entered the 1990s. Heading a list of major deficiencies were a lack of collaboration with school districts; a lack of sequence, modern content, and clinical experiences; a lack of relevance to the demands of the job; a lack of systematic profes-

sional development for experienced administrators; a lack of leader recruitment in schools; and a lack of minorities and women in the field. A nationwide survey of administrators conducted by *Executive Educator* provided empirical support for many of these perceived deficiencies (Heller, Conway, & Jacobson, 1988). The survey revealed that half (51%) of administrators rated their training as either fair or poor, and 46% stated that program requirements were not sufficiently rigorous to meet the demands of the job. For 61% of the respondents, their on-the-job training was the most beneficial element of preparation, while only 7% viewed their university studies as most significant. It appears that it isn't until they are in the field that most administrators feel they get the training they need.

In 1989, UB's educational administration faculty began to consider program revisions. Having been named the nation's outstanding certification program in 1981 by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), UB's program had remained relatively unchanged for over a decade. Although concern about program quality provided the initial impetus for redesigning the program, the real issue confronting the faculty at UB was declining student enrollments. An analysis of enrollment trends and program requirements of the seven preparation programs that serve the region revealed that the main obstacle to study at UB was the requirement of a full-year, full-time clinical internship. During the 1960s, the Ford Foundation had sponsored an experiment that provided stipends for students who participated in an administrative position for an academic year. Although paid internships had become increasingly rare, UB's requirement remained because the value of an in-depth clinical experience seemed like sound practice. Students, on the other hand, increasingly selected those programs whose internship requirements were less rigorous than UB's. For example, one SUNY program in the region requires a one-semester, part-time internship of 20 hours per week, 5 hours of which are credited for work done at home. Only half of the remaining 15 hours per week must be spent in administrative activities while students are in session. In other words, their internship requirement was less than one fourth as time intensive as UB's. For students, a part-time internship allowed them to retain their regular teaching positions (and with it their regular salaries), while taking on administrative tasks before and after school, during lunch, and during preparation periods. It is perhaps not surprising that the number of students applying to UB's program fluctuated, but remained relatively low during the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1984, enrollments dropped from 8 to 2 students per year; increased for the next 3 years, averaging almost 11 admissions per year; but once again declined to only 2 in 1989.

After several meetings and a 2-day retreat, the faculty decided to modify the internship requirement by halving it from 1 year full-time to either one semester full-time or 1 year part-time. By making this requirement less rigorous, UB became more competitive within a very short time. Enrollments grew rapidly, increasing to 14 in 1990, and averaging more than 10 students per year through 1996.

Besides loosening the internship requirement, there were other program changes, but these were minor adjustments in course titles and sequencing—modifications that can best be described as tinkering. It is important to note that these efforts at program redesign were conducted with relatively little input from colleagues in the field. In light of the NCEEA's expressed concern about the lack of collaboration with school districts, this insular effort might be interpreted as academic arrogance. Our faculty was charged with preparing school administrators, and we had been recognized for superior performance in the past. If there was a problem, it was not our problem. The problem was with the other programs, and with the fact that districts were not willing to pay for administrative interns. For Senge, the faculty's behavior reflected an all-too-common organizational learning disability: the tendency to see a problem as being "out there," as being someone else's problem. The faculty decided to accommodate these problems by making a few changes—changes with which we were comfortable. If the changes attracted more students, the central criteria by which success would be measured, everything would be fine. As it turned out, the changes did produce an upturn in enrollments, yet everything was not fine. While we were unilaterally easing clinical requirements to make the program more marketable, there was a growing perception among local practitioners that aspiring administrators needed more, not less, hands-on experience if they were to be adequately prepared to cope with the changing realities of public education. Our lack of communication with the field was soon to be redressed.

### **The Impetus for LIFTS**

As described in Chapters 1 and 2, the impetus for LIFTS began in 1991, just 2 years after the educational administration faculty redesigned the certification program. There was concern by local school officials that the quality of applicants being considered for administrative positions did not match the demands of the job, especially for the principalship. When positions opened, districts had no problem recruiting an adequate supply of candidates, because area preparation programs continued to graduate a surplus of certi-

fied administrators. The problem that schools were experiencing was a lack of "quality" candidates. Simply put, while the *Leaders for America's Schools* report was recommending that preparation programs prepare "fewer, better," in western New York, we were preparing "a lot, poorly."

A task force composed of superintendents, their representatives, and UB faculty met regularly for more than 2 years. These meetings produced a new approach to preparation that would focus more on developing leadership and leadership skills than on training managerial techniques. The terms *leader* and *administrator* would not be used interchangeably in this new program. It was the task force's intention to treat leadership as a collective characteristic, so that the "leaders" we prepared, whether administrators or teachers, would

- Focus on the teaching-learning process
- Encourage and demonstrate risk taking and flexibility
- Encourage and demonstrate an appreciation for diversity and a commitment to equity
- Employ reflection and inquiry as constant components of practice
- Act in ways that are informed by the outcomes of systematic inquiry and moral deliberation

After reaching consensus about these guiding beliefs in May 1992, the task force moved quickly to translate them into a set of practices that would guide the development of the LIFTS curriculum. It was clear to all involved that school districts could no longer allow institutions of higher education to be the sole arbiters of best practice in leadership preparation. The members of the task force agreed that the traditional approach of discrete, university-based, discipline-based, and role-based courses was not sufficient for preparing future school leaders. Over the next 2 years, the task force developed an alternative program built around the following innovative design features:

- District participation in candidate recruitment and selection
- Candidates studying in cohort groups
- An integrated curriculum organized around problems of practice
- A full-time paid administrative internship served in two different districts during the second year of the program
- The assignment of an experienced school leader to serve as a mentor for each LIFTS cohort member

The first LIFTS cohort of nine members began in the summer of 1994, seven of whom completed the program in May 1996. The two individuals who dropped out did so early in the program when they realized that the rigors of this new form of preparation were more than they had anticipated. The second and third cohorts of seven and eight members, respectively, were admitted in 1995 and 1996.

### **Key Design Features**

After almost 3 years of working with LIFTS, I feel that only now can I begin to explain how key design features help promote community, collective leadership, and shared vision building among cohort members. I have also begun to understand the resistance that these changes have produced. Next, I describe briefly the benefits and problems created by each design feature.

#### ***District Participation in Candidate Recruitment and Selection***

Recall that communities rely on interdependence that develops from common goals and shared values, with parties committed to one another through mutual agreement and sentiment (Sergiovanni, 1994). Having worked long and hard for 3 years to articulate a set of shared beliefs about leadership, and to design a program that would foster those beliefs, a sense of community had arisen among members of the task force. We furthered this sense of community by sharing the responsibility of identifying, developing, and supporting future educational leaders. Unlike most programs, where candidate self-nomination is the norm and selection is based almost exclusively on academic credentials, LIFTS candidates are recruited and nominated by colleagues and/or supervisors who recognize their leadership potential, insightful understanding of teaching and learning, effective communication skills, and ability to work in collegial groups, in addition to their academic ability.

By the spring of 1993, the task force felt the program was ready to begin operation, and applicants were recruited for the first cohort to start that summer. Unfortunately, although the participating districts were eager to start the program, an adequate pool of candidates could not be found. Our unsuccessful attempt at recruitment surfaced a number of problems. First, it became clear that selection by district nomination was viewed with suspicion by some potential candidates who felt that this would simply replicate the

current style of administrative leadership, and thus favor those candidates who had displayed fealty to central office administration. Individuals who exhibited leadership by challenging current practices might stand less of a chance of being nominated, particularly those with close ties to the union. Before this problem surfaced, we had created a category of "at-large" candidates who would not be supported financially by their home districts, but instead by the pooled resources of districts seeking the services of administrative interns. Although we had instituted this designation to increase the number of districts and students participating in the program, it was our hope that potential candidates might view at-large support as helping to remove the onus of "favoritism" from their LIFTS involvement. At-large candidates still have to come highly recommended, but the recommendations can come from outside their own district. During the first 3 years of the program, there have been two such at-large candidates.

A more general problem was the fact that many prospective administrators are not risk takers; therefore, they were reluctant to enter a new program until they knew more about it. We realized that although we had solicited representation from district administrators and university faculty, we had not included teachers in any of our planning sessions. Although it had been our desire to broaden the participant base in our program redesign, we had not really changed traditional power relationships, so it should not have been surprising when some aspiring administrators responded to the program with mistrust. This seemed to be especially the case for men, who were looking for some assurance that LIFTS was more likely to enhance their future position in the job market than traditional programs. The overrepresentation of men in administrative positions reported in *Leaders for America's Schools* (University Council for Educational Administration, 1987) suggests that the existing system was working quite nicely for them. Only a few men applied for district support, and those who did were markedly less qualified than their female counterparts. As a result, our first cohort was entirely women, and of the first 22 participants in LIFTS, only 5 have been men.

After our initial false start, we tried once again to recruit candidates in the spring of 1994. If we were to get the program off the ground, mutual commitment would be essential. Four school districts agreed to sponsor candidates and we ran a series of informational meetings for potential cohort members. Helfrich's district was one of the first to commit to the program, but it was unable to find a candidate because many of those teachers with the most potential were already exercising leadership on school planning and design teams. At least for some teachers, it appeared that the district's success at broadening participation in decision making had reduced their interest in

assuming traditional administrative positions. The district decided instead to sponsor an African American teacher from the Buffalo City School District, recognizing that although the racial demographics of the student body were changing, the demographics of the teacher and administrator workforce were not. This decision aligned with one of the principal missions of LIFTS, which is to promote greater diversity in educational leadership through the identification and recruitment of outstanding women and minorities. Of the first 22 participants in LIFTS, 17 (77%) were women, and 7 were (32%) minority (6 African Americans, and 1 Hispanic).

### *Candidates Studying in Cohort Groups and Having Mentors*

Incoming LIFTS candidates work as a cohort group for the entire 2-year program, which includes two 3-week summer sessions. The cohort model was selected explicitly to build a sense of community and to foster an understanding of collective leadership among members of the group. A cohort's work begins the first summer by focusing on team building. With the first group, we thought we could build team morale through an intensive program of shared experiences. But over the course of the first year, we found that although shared experiences do build familiarity amongst a group of individuals, team building and the development of community are not assured without a process around which to focus these activities. The first cohort often struggled at reaching consensus, particularly over contentious issues that emerged from their year-long problem-based study (a charter school proposal to be discussed in the next section). When conflict arose, usually the only voices heard were those that were the loudest.

By the summer of the second year, we realized the need to integrate facilitator training into LIFTS preparation. The /I/D/E/A/ model had proven successful for team building in Helfrich's district (see Chapter 1), so on the basis of his recommendation, the second cohort began the program with a weeklong training session, where they were joined by the first cohort, then entering its second year. The cohorts used the next 2 weeks of the summer session to practice their group processing skills. Using the /I/D/E/A/ model, cohort members shared the responsibility of facilitating classes, making sure that all members were actively involved and that all their voices were heard. Asked during the program's ongoing assessment interviews to articulate the factors that most influenced their preparation, responses included:

The people within the cohort. Going through it with them and watching us grow and change and interact with each other and challenging

different beliefs and statements and making you articulate what it is you really believe.

The cohort has, I think, really helped me to grow in terms of leadership. There's been a support system, but a tough support system. (Doolittle, 1996)

In fact, the influence of the cohort model has had such a strong effect on this first group that they continue to meet regularly, seeking ways to serve subsequent cohort groups and sharing insights gained about leadership upon their return to the field (four were appointed to administrative positions upon completion of the program).

One other LIFTS design feature is that each cohort member is paired with an experienced school leader who serves as a mentor. Mentors make themselves available to guide and support their protégés. Cohort members are encouraged to seek out their mentors for advice and to explore alternatives should questions or problems arise. Because LIFTS students work as a cohort, their mentors have opportunities to meet and interact with other cohort members, thus creating a network of experienced practitioners available to all in the group. This network proved to be especially useful during their internships, when cohort members were struggling with new roles and responsibilities. Although it is not prohibited, cohort members and their mentors generally do not come from the same district. We believe that a freer flow of ideas can take place when the parties have no fear of retribution for things said about their own district. We also see this interdistrict exchange as a broadening experience for both parties.

### ***Integrated Curriculum Organized Around Problems of Practice***

Rather than having students take a collection of discrete, discipline-based courses (e.g., philosophy or economics of education) or role-based courses (e.g., the principalship or school business administration), the task force decided that LIFTS cohort members would focus on contextualized problems of practice. The first cohort, for example, spent two semesters developing a proposal to redesign an urban elementary school. In April 1994, the board of education in Wilkensburg, Pennsylvania, had issued a request for proposal to redesign and run one of its schools, Turner Elementary School. Wilkensburg is a small urban district bordering Pittsburgh. It is a district experiencing the ravages of urban decay such as the loss of local business, dropping real property values, and crack dealing. Parents were pulling their

children out of the district's schools and sending them to private schools or using relatives' addresses to get them into Pittsburgh's public schools. With the district's permission, LIFTS was allowed to submit a noncompetitive proposal well after the closing date, and the Turner School was free to use any innovative ideas they found in the proposal. The contract to run Turner Elementary was eventually awarded to Alternative Public Schools [APS] of Nashville, Tennessee, but many elements of the LIFTS proposal mirrored those in the winning proposal.

Although we knew the cohort could not actually run the school, we undertook this school redesign to better understand educational reform in light of real constraints. As the proposal developed, various issues became the focus of group discussions, including multicultural infusion in the curriculum, authentic forms of assessment, teacher empowerment, restructuring the school day and year, action-oriented reflective practice, children at risk, nonadversarial collective negotiations, the changing role of the principal, school-community-business collaborations, teacher recruitment, selection and socialization, staff development, and facilitating change. Working closely with the instructors, one from the university and one from the field, the group decided how best to examine each issue. Would the most meaningful approach be readings, lectures, visitations, videos, simulations, case studies, or some combination of the aforementioned? The cohort also visited the district and met with the acting superintendent, school board members, parents, union officials, the principal, and a teacher from Turner, in order to understand its social, economic, and educational context.

One of the most contentious issues for the cohort was the personnel option made available in the request for proposal. Specifically, the grantee could use Turner's existing faculty or bring in a new principal and an entirely new teacher workforce. Discussions about this provision were among the group's most heated and transformative of the entire experience. Being teachers themselves, cohort members were sympathetic to the plight of the teachers at Turner. Their first reaction was to recommend rehiring the existing staff. But because the school's student population was overwhelmingly African American, and the teacher force predominantly White, some questioned whether they needed to create a better racial balance, even if it meant replacing highly competent White teachers. The ensuing debate began to split the group along racial lines, with the four White cohort members arguing that competence, not race, should determine who would work at Turner. They wanted a selection policy that would be "color-blind." The three African American cohort members countered that a lack of educator role models of African descent perpetuated a racial imbalance between students and

teachers that is all too common in urban schools. They offered reflections from their own educational experiences to make their point. As a result, the group crafted a selection policy based primarily on competence, but one which treated race as a relevant factor.

Transformation occurs as the reformer feels the pain of the people oppressed. He [or she] is open to examining different standards of justice, thus understanding why certain development projects were rejected by the oppressed group. (Welch, 1991, p. 97)

Through shared experiences and meaningful interactions, cohort members began to confront their own racism as they worked to create a school that would serve the needs of the children, the community, and the teachers of Turner. Together, they began to understand how certain policies and practices that seem fair and eminently just to one group can be viewed as oppressive by another. "Emancipatory conversations are the fruit of work together; the result of alterations in relationships between groups" (Welch, 1991, p. 98). Subsequent interviews revealed the profound effect these "emancipatory conversations" had had on cohort members:

It made me look at myself. I had to become introspective about what my belief system really was, what my practices really are, so I can back up what I say I believe. That was so wonderful! It was tough.

I find myself challenging my own assumptions and my own beliefs, what I used to think were my own beliefs, as I talk to other people. (Doolittle, 1996)

These experiences helped cohort members develop and shape their personal educational platforms. Senge (1994) notes that "Leadership springs from deep personal conviction" (p. xvii). Yet how many educators have taken the time to carefully consider the values and beliefs they hold dear with regard to the role and purpose of education in a democratic society? We asked cohort members to do just that in developing their educational platform statements. Because the Turner proposal required the articulation of a vision statement for the redesigned school, preparing individual platform statements represented an important first step in attempting to build a shared vision.

As useful as this exercise proved to be, there were some drawbacks. First, the 10-hour round-trip drive between Buffalo and Wilkensburg made

subsequent visits to the district unfeasible. We originally thought that distance would provide the advantage of objectivity, that is, we could look at the Turner school with clarity and no preconceptions. Instead, we felt far removed from the context that we had tried so hard to understand. Upon reflection, the group felt that this field-based exercise could have been more meaningful had it been conducted closer to home. As a result, the cohort I'm currently working with will be immersed in local school activities. It is this type of learning from one cohort to another that we feel is necessary to sustain the continued success of the program.

A second issue raised by the change from a traditional model of preparation to an integrated curriculum was a concern among members of the first cohort that they might not be adequately prepared. Toward the end of the first year, they wondered aloud whether their not having taken semester-long courses in school law or personnel, for example, put them at a disadvantage relative to students who had. Assurances from the clinical faculty and their mentors—that the trade-off between the type of decontextualized subject matter that characterizes traditional coursework and the model of learning to learn within the reality of the school workplace that they had practiced for over a year would ultimately prove beneficial—did little to allay their fears. In fact, it wasn't until cohort members were involved in their year-long clinical internships that they began to recognize the advantages of this holistic approach to instruction. Having focused from the very beginning of the program on the systemic nature of schools and schooling, rather than on its discrete parts, cohort members felt that they had a sense of the "big picture." In contrast, the interconnectedness of coursework is rarely made explicit in most administrator preparation programs; therefore, students are left on their own to try and put the pieces together during a short, fragmented clinical experience. Although they still had some reservations, the confidence of cohort members in their ability to lead grew markedly during their internships.

Another change of note is that the LIFTS program is nongraded. We assume that when we select an individual into the program, we have a collective responsibility to see that the person has a successful experience. Rather than nurture competition through the traditional grade-point system, we believe that cooperation is more likely to flourish in an environment where high quality is an expectation, but grades are taken out of consideration. Students revise papers until they and the faculty are satisfied with the product. An individual's strengths are recognized and weaknesses addressed, but not in relation to the relative strengths and weaknesses of other cohort members, a natural by-product of grades. Even if an individual chooses to leave the

program, which has occurred twice, an important learning experience has still occurred, because the person has come to realize that the rigors of leadership development are more than he or she is willing to undertake.

Finally, the use of an integrated, "emerging" curriculum represents a fundamental change in the role of the professor. Toward the end of the first year, I began to realize the arrogance implicit in a typical course syllabus. Experienced educators are told what to do and when to do it, as if their own prior knowledge and wealth of experience is irrelevant. The first cohort and I found ourselves struggling to overcome deeply embedded expectations and power relationships of the classroom. During discussions the group looked toward me for direction. Much like principals who feel the need to "lead" even when they know they're not the most appropriate person at the moment, I initially felt compelled to respond. But realizing that I had to model collective leadership, and not just talk about it, I began to defer to the expertise of others in the room. I had never thought to regularly ask a group of students about what they thought needed to be done within the context of their own learning. I must admit to some resistance at first. I had a vague sense that I was giving away some of my "authority." But ultimately, the experience has been liberating for me and I hope for the cohort members as well. I have no doubt that we accomplished more that first year—and that the course material was more personally meaningful, when we undertook curriculum development collectively—than if I had simply done it alone.

### *Paid, Full-Time Internships in Multiple Sites*

During the second year of preparation, each member of the cohort is placed in two different field sites as part of a 180-day clinical internship. The first placement is at the building level for 120 days, whereas the second 60-day experience can be either at the building level or central office, depending on the student's career aspirations. These placements involve activities in urban, suburban, and/or rural schools. The purpose of a full-year, full-time experience is to expose LIFTS interns to the daily realities of school administration and leadership, whereas the multisite approach is intended to expose them to different people, environments, policies, practices, and possibly, different styles of leadership.

To sponsor a candidate, a district takes on a financial obligation of approximately \$20,000, with the bulk of this investment coming during the internship year.<sup>2</sup> The willingness of districts to assume an additional expense of this magnitude is where the "rubber hits the road" in terms of maintaining an ongoing university-school district partnership. Although they recognize

the value of developing the leadership skills of their most talented individuals, and of having them experience full-time administrative internships, districts are hesitant to sponsor candidates because of the cost. With an abundance of preparation programs in the region, many school districts in western New York view leadership preparation as a no-cost item, as long as the programs continue to produce a steady supply of certified administrators, regardless of their quality. In fact, many districts actually capitalize on the rather lax internship standards described earlier by allowing teachers to satisfy their clinical requirements by taking on administrative tasks, such as summer school assistant principal, at no pay.

Assuming that a district is willing to sponsor a candidate, what guarantee does it have that the candidate won't take a position elsewhere? In other words, how can districts protect their investment? We've heard these questions often, and the only answer we can offer is that there are no guarantees. A district could obligate a sponsored candidate to 1 or 2 years of service in the district upon completion of the program, but a better approach is to provide candidates opportunities to maximize their newly honed talents. We also like to point out that the multisite requirement of a LIFTS internship means that a district has the opportunity to work with one or two talented candidates from other districts. Although we do not encourage districts to lure candidates away from one another, especially the wealthier suburban districts hiring candidates from the urban districts, one goal of the program is to improve the quality of the overall pool of future school leaders, wherever they ultimately practice.

Needless to say, having to pay for interns has produced considerable resistance to this new model of leadership preparation. Yet it is the interns themselves who actually subsidize much of a district's expense by taking a 1-year reduction in salary. Instead of their regular pay, cohort members receive a \$30,000 stipend during their internship, which, for the first two groups, produced an average district savings of \$14,900. The cost of providing a classroom replacement usually outstrips these savings, but because the substitute teacher is typically on a much lower salary step than the LIFTS candidate, the additional payroll cost has averaged only \$16,700, for which the district gets a full year of administrative support from LIFTS interns. As with traditional programs, LIFTS candidates bear the full cost of tuition for this 36-credit program. If they move quickly onto the higher salary schedule of administrators, over time LIFTS graduates should be able to recover most of these expenses.

One last point about the cost of administrator preparation. Most districts in western New York currently have contractual provisions that pay

teachers salary increments for graduate credit accumulation. For example, one local district pays \$55 per credit. The completion of a 36-credit certification program would thus yield a \$1,980 pay increase. Over the course of a career, a teacher who completed such a program would cost the district a substantial amount in additional salary, even if the district deemed them unqualified for an administrative position. Because most certification programs focus on managerial rather than leadership skills, if the person never leaves the classroom, the return to the district on this investment is minimal. As noted previously, school districts in New York have an abundance of these "papered people." In contrast, it is our hope that the focus on collective leadership that exemplifies LIFTS will have a genuine payoff to participating districts whether their candidates remain in the classroom, attain an administrative position, or create new types of leadership roles.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

It is still too early to determine how successful LIFTS has been, but a preliminary assessment by Hickcox (1995) of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education had the following words of praise and caution:

One of the more interesting aspects of the program, from an outsider's point of view, has been the effort to specifically tailor the program according to state-of-the-art thinking about what administrator and leadership training programs should be about. Lots of programs pay lip service to this, but LIFTS has actually made a serious effort to have its program reflect what both practitioners and serious scholars have been saying should be considered in training. (p. 3)

Throughout the report, we have alluded to issues related to finances for the program . . . the financial structure is quite fragile. The area of financing that I think should receive the most attention is support for the candidates. They do receive considerable support already for their internship year, but in most cases the program results in a decrease in resources for the individual on top of an increase in responsibility. One might argue that candidates should shoulder a good portion of the cost because they will be in line for higher paying jobs later in their careers. I don't think this is enough of an argument in today's world to convince many qualified candidates to make the commitment. (p. 11)

Clearly, the long-term success of LIFTS depends upon the extent to which participating districts and potential candidates view the program as a superior approach to leadership preparation.

The first cohort completed their internships in June 1996, and their supervisors' evaluations were outstanding. Four have already received administrative appointments—two in their own districts and two in other participating districts. The feedback from employing districts is that these LIFTS graduates are demonstrating mature, confident leadership that belies the fact that they are so new to their roles. Districts that have not participated are now requesting information and soliciting advice from participating districts about the costs and benefits of sponsoring a LIFTS candidate. In addition, we have experienced a steady increase in the number of inquiries from teachers interested in becoming cohort members. Prospective administrators are now less reluctant to enter the program because it appears that LIFTS participation may enhance an individual's position in the local job market. We have seen an increase in both the number and quality of men interested in LIFTS, and the participation of men has grown from 0 to 2 to 3 over the first 3 years.

It appears that the field is beginning to realize benefits from this collaborative program, but perceptions at the UB are less clear. There has been support from the dean, who has been willing to expend time and money to support LIFTS from planning to implementation. But not all GSE faculty are as supportive of making school improvement the central focus of "our" work. Changes such as an integrated curriculum, ungraded coursework, and coteaching with clinical faculty have met with some resistance. As Darling-Hammond (1996) notes, working with the field can be messy. Some academics feel a threat to their authority when working with people who have more practical experience. Simply arranging meetings and activities that involve people from the university and the field can be such a daunting task as to eat away at the time needed to accomplish "my" work—the research and publication that the university rewards. There are just a few of us at UB currently willing to take on this task. We need to find ways to invite more participation. As Emihovich suggests in Chapter 3, there exists the potential for greater coordination between LIFTS and BRIET, as leadership comes to be seen as a central element in the preparation of all educators. That said, one can also envision interactions with other educational professionals being prepared at UB including school psychologists, counselors, therapists, and so on. But each of these interactions will require changes in long-held policies and practices, changes that will in turn engender resistance.

As noted at the start of the chapter, demographic, economic, and societal changes challenge educational leaders to rethink schools and schooling, and to create learning communities that are more meaningful to the lives of students, teachers, and the larger public they serve. The challenge of creating communitarian organizations capable of building a shared vision and nurturing collective leadership requires a level of cooperation that does not exist at present. The university and the field can no longer operate within separate spheres, addressing goals that are often at cross purposes. Quite simply, the problems are too complex and important to leave to either one.

Organizations work the way they work, ultimately, because of *how we think and how we interact*. Only by changing how we think can we change deeply embedded policies and practices. Only by changing how we interact can shared visions, shared understandings, and new capacities for coordinated action be established. (Senge, 1994, p. xiv, emphasis in original)

### Notes

1. See Shipengrover and Conway (1996) for a detailed examination of 13 years of change in the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda (Ken-Ton) Union Free School District, including the years subsequent to Helfrich's retirement.
2. During the first year of the program, districts pay an \$1,800 fee per candidate plus replacement costs of approximately \$1,500 for 20 released days (at \$75 per day). Data from the first two cohorts revealed that excluding fringe benefits, the internship year was costing districts an additional \$16,700 in payroll (\$30,000 LIFTS intern stipend + \$31,600 average teacher replacement salary - \$44,900 average LIFTS candidate salary). In the case of two districts that did not replace their interns, they saved the difference between their candidate's regular salary and the \$30,000 stipend. See Jacobson (1996) for more details about LIFTS financing.

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