Perspectives In Learning

Volume 11 | Number 1   Article 5

Considerations Regarding leadership Training in a Tofflerian Era of Change

Thomas McCormack
McCormack_Thomas@columbusstate.edu

Paul Hackett
hackett_paul@columbusstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Online and Distance Education Commons, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Considerations Regarding leadership Training in a Tofflerian Era of Change

Thomas J. McCormack and Paul T. Hackett
Columbus State University

Abstract

In 1970, sociologist and futurist Alvin Toffler predicted a future characterized by experience and information overload. This overload, said Toffler, would be caused by an exponential increase in the amount of knowledge being produced and our inability to cope with both the volume of information and the rate at which knowledge was being produced. In this article, the authors make the case that we are presently living in a Tofflerian Era that includes constant change in terms of amount of knowledge and the rate at which it is transmitted and collected due to the proliferation of new technologies. In this article, the authors outline the aspects of this era and what those aspects may require of leaders in education and the trainers of those leaders.

During the past forty years we have witnessed social change, economic swings, shifting demographics, and technological advances especially in the communications fields, with the result being the production of new knowledge. With this in mind we asked ourselves two questions. First, "What effects have the changes had on school leaders?" Secondly, "How have educational leadership preparation programs changed to meet the current and future needs of school leaders?"

In 1970, sociologist and futurist Alvin Toffler accurately predicted that in the future we were going to experience information overload. The information overload would be caused by an exponential increase in the amount of knowledge being produced and our inability to cope with both the volume of information and the rate at which knowledge was being produced (Toffler, 1970). Between the dawn of the Tofflerian Era and the dawn of the New Millennium, we have seen a change from information overload to the doubling of information every two months. The speed of that change is increasing. Below, Elaine Biech (2007) traces the history of information load and overload:

> How quickly does current world knowledge change? In the past knowledge doubled from 1 AD to 1500, or in 1500 years. It doubled again from 1500 to 1800, in 300 hundred years. It doubled again from 1800 to 1900, in 100 years. By 1940 the doubling rate was every 20 years; by 1970, it was every seven years. Today it is estimated that knowledge doubles every 1-2 years. It is predicted that by 2020 our collective body of knowledge will double every 72 days. (p. 2)

The ever increasing volume of new knowledge and technologies being produced is directly related to the accelerating rate at which change is occurring. A collateral issue associated with rapid change has been an exponential increase in the number of decisions individuals are now being asked to make. A perfect example is what happened in the telephone industry. In the late 1950s

and early 1960s, telephones were black rotary dial machines. There was one telephone company providing both local and long distance telephone service. You had one telephone bill. The only choices relative to telephone style were between a desk and a wall mounted model, and in some areas, there was a choice between single service and a party line. Elaine Biech (2007) offers the following list of choices faced by individuals purchasing telephones today:

> Land line or cell? Caller ID? Digital answering? Speaker phone? Voice-activated dialing? Camera phone? Internet capable? Bluetooth capable? Video and music capable? GPS? PDA combination? Text messaging? Picture messaging? Which carrier? What plan? How many minutes? Free minutes? Carrier-to-carrier plan? Family plan? Replacement phones? Warranties? Insurance? Ringer choices? Battery life? Headset? Hands-free? Car charger? Other accessories? And most important, what color? (p.2)

Consumer choices have expanded similarly in other technological areas. In television, choices have expanded from three networks to over 200 broadcast channels excluding pay per view and music channels. New broadcast capabilities include inexpensive high quality, high definition video to an international audience through the Internet. Home photography enthusiasts have an array of choices in terms of digital photography, editing capabilities, and publication in the same venue. These changes in communication through high quality media venues have ramifications for the increase of information overload. The future that Toffler predicted has become our present reality.

Educational leadership preparation programs have not been immune to the effects implied by Toffler's change theories.

From the early 1970s to the present, educational leadership preparation programs have gone through a multitude of reform efforts, and as Toffler Predicted, those changes are becoming more frequent with each passing year. Some of the major factors driving those reforms in educational leadership preparation programs were effective schools studies (Purkey and Smith, 1983), the warnings of school failure published in *A Nation at Risk* (Bell,1983), the performance standards built into the No Child Left Behind Act (Mazzeo, 2003), the pervasive standards-based reform movement (Usdan, 2005), and most recently, the findings regarding the quality of educational leadership preparation programs published in the Levine Report (Levine, 2005). In a paper prepared for the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, Murphy (2003) stated, "Over the last quarter century, the field of school administration has experienced considerable turmoil as it struggled to grow out of its adolescence. During the last half of that time period, in ways that (were) rarely seen earlier in our profession, a good deal of energy has been invested in coming to grips with the question of what ideas should shape school administration …" (p. 1). The metamorphosis of educational leadership programs has gone from preparing school leaders to be merely managers dealing with what Usdan (2005) called, "the 4 B's (bonds, budgets, buses, and buildings)" (p. 2), to preparing school leaders to be able to lead change initiatives to improve student achievement (Hord, 1992).

The vast majority of the current research on comprehensive school reform indicates that the local school leader, the principal, is very important to any change and/or school improvement endeavor (Copland, 2003; Smylie, Wenzel, & Fendt, 2003). Some researchers are more specific and emphatic in stating that the single most

influential change agent (for both positive and/or negative change) in any school is the principal (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985).

The concentration of research on school leaders as change agents has given rise to a proliferation of new leadership models. Some of those leadership models are the transformational leader (Tichy & Devanna 1986); the facilitative leader (Hord 1992); the side by side leader (Romig 2006); the collaborative leader (Glaser, 2005); the value-added leader (Sergiovanni, 1990); and the distributive leader (Usdan, 2005). The one constant theme in all the models is that, if school improvement is going to be successful, school leaders must understand and embrace the dynamics of the change process, become comfortable in leading groups through change efforts, and equip themselves to evaluate the effects of change and adjust accordingly.

With the new vision of a school leader as a change agent, leadership preparation programs have had to reevaluate their curriculums and redesign their preparation programs. Lashway, (2003) states that,

> "(f)acing new roles and heightened expectations, principals require new forms of training, and university preparation programs are coming under increased scrutiny. In particular, the demand that principals have a positive impact on student achievement challenges traditional assumptions, practices, and structures in leadership preparation programs". (p.1)

In 2007, educational leadership programs in the state of Georgia were required by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission to submit redesigned programs for approval under new state standards. The redesigned programs are to be standards and performance based.

The irony is, while educational leadership preparation programs have undergone radical redesigns in an effort to prepare future school leaders to be successful change agents in Toffler's world of constant and relentless change, we have failed to come to grips with the effects of the rapid rates at which change is occurring and the adaptability of school leaders to deal with the stress it brings. In 1970, Toffler expressed his concerns in a newly coined phrase and phenomenon he called, "future shock." He defined his newly coined phrase by stating that, "(w)e define future shock as the distress, both physical and psychological, that arises from an overload of the human organism's physical adaptive systems and its decision-making processes. Put more simply, future shock is the human response to overstimulation" (p. 290). It is the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time. It is our contention that we are living in Toffler's future and that school leaders are suffering from the stresses and anxieties brought on by the rapid rate of changes which they are being asked to lead and implement. We are not heeding Toffler's warning that too much change in too short a period of time can be detrimental. Our newly redesigned leadership preparation programs are not equipping school leaders with the necessary skills needed to cope or deal with Toffler's concept of future shock.

In training leaders for a future rife with constant and rapid change, practices that may hold promise include realistic simulations based in strategic planning and implementation exercises. These exercises can include situations where there is shifting topography in terms of demographics, emerging legal and legislative decisions, policy changes, and moving stakeholder

alliances based on changing needs. Other promising practices include those explored in foundations classes at Columbus State University that emphasize the importance of active and empathic listening as critical skills for leaders and their colleagues (Hackett, Ross, & Asuncion, 2008). Flexibility, empathy, and awareness may become the new critical skills for leaders in education.

References

Bell, T.H. (1983, April). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform.*The National Commission on Excellence in Education. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html

Biech, E. (2007). 10 tips, tools, and tactics for successful change management. Retrieved from http://astd2007.astd.org/PDFs/Handouts%20for%20Web/SU402.pdf

Copland, M.A. (2003). Building the capacity to lead: Promoting and sustaining change in an inquiry-based model of school reform. In J. Murphy & A. Datnow (Eds.), *Leadership for school reform: Lessons from comprehensive school reform designs* (pp. 159-183). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Edmonds, R.R. (1979, October). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership, 37*(2), 15-24.

Glaser, J. (2005). *Leading through collaboration: Guiding groups to productive solutions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Hackett, T., Ross, L., & Asuncion, I. (2008). Teaching basic counseling skills to school leaders. *Perspectives in Learning: A Journal of the College of Education, Columbus State University. 9*(1), 12-20.

Hord, S. (1992). Facilitative leadership: The imperative for change. *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory*. Retrieved from http://www.sedl.org/change/facilitate

Lashway, Larry. (2003). *Transforming Principal Preparation*, ERIC Digest 165. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED473360&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED473360

Levine, A. (2005). *Educating school leaders*. National Association of State Boards of Education. Retrieved from http://www.edschools.org/pdf/Final313.pdf

Lezotte, L.W. & Bancroft, B.A. (1985, March). Growing use of effective schools model for school improvement. *Educational Leadership, 42*(6), 23-27.

Mazzeo, C. (2003). *Improving teaching and learning by improving school leadership.* Educational Policy Division. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Retrieved from http://www.nga.org/cda/files/091203LEADERSHIP.pdf

Murphy, J. (2003, September). Reculturing educational leadership: The ISLLC standards ten years out. National Policy Board for Educational Administration. Retrieved from http://www.npbea.org/Resources/ISLLC_10_years_9-03.pdf

Purkey, S.D., & Smith, M.S. (1983). Effective schools: A review. *Elementary School Journal, 83*(4), 427-452.

Romig, D.A. (2006). *Side by side leadership: Achieving outstanding results together.* Atlanta: Bard Press.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (1990). Adding value to leadership gets extraordinary results. *Educational Leadership, 47*(8), 23-27.

Smylie, C.E., Wenzel, S.A., & Fendt, C.R. (2003). The Chicago Annenberg challenge: Lessons on leadership for school development. In J. Murphy & A. Datnow (Eds.), *Leadership for school reform: Lessons from comprehensive school reform*, 135-158. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Tichy, N.M. & Devanna, M.A. (1986). The transformational leader. *Training and Development Journal, 41*(7), 27-32.

Toffler, A. (1970). *Future Shock*. New York: Random House.

Usdan, M.D. (2005, June). Educational Leadership: Is it déjà vu all over again? *The Institute for Educational Leadership*. Retrieved from http://www.elead.org/resources/usdan_deja_vu.pdf

Paul T. Hackett is Professor of Educational Leadership in the Department of Counseling, Foundations, and Leadership in the College of Education and Health Professions at Columbus State University. He currently serves as department chair, Director of COEHP Graduate Studies and Interim Director of the Columbus State University Graduate School.

Dr. Thomas J. McCormack is Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Columbus State University. He earned his doctoral degree in 1980 from Auburn University while serving as the Truman Pierce Fellow.