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Maxims for the Principals Institute

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Excerpts from Comments by Donald Cowan
1990 Principals' Institute

SUMMARY LIST OF CONCERNS:

Non-competitive learning
The school as community with an *ethos*
The new kind of equality
The fostering of nobility and dignity in each
 human being
The imagination as the true path to learning
The principal's authority and responsibility,
 rather than power and accountability
The teacher's authority in the classroom
The diverse cultural strains that must be
 incorporated into the curriculum
The intangible, universal ideals that lie
 behind all learning
The essential ongoing renewal of teachers
The conviction that all students can learn and
 that all should study the best curriculum.

EXCERPTS:

We believe there is a genius in each of you. If
it has not yet attained its freedom, we want to
release it; if it has, we want to augment it.

You principals will make a more powerful
difference to our future than any other group
we could name. It was for this reason that
this institute was undertaken.

Deep structures and practices cannot be
reformed; they must be transformed. (T.Deal)

We are not proposing plans. You have to
develop your own plan. Your school must be a
creation that you and your faculty fashion out
of the particular situation you confront.

What we are fashioning here is not a new
system--not method or process--but something in
a quite different realm--a new attitude.

Your task is more spiritual than material.
(Deal)

Schools are storehouses of our memories . .
they are museums of virtue.(Deal) But they are
also places of making, where the future is

woven.

Learning is the binding action in education; all educators must have the experience of learning regenerated from time to time.

Our society is undergoing an enormous change. *But the manner of the change and the end result is almost wholly dependent on education.* Whatever the system, however marvelous the supporting facilities or terrible the constraints, you are the one who must make education work in America by making your school work.

The distancing of ourselves from actuality, an interval of detachment and reflection in which we acknowledge our limitations, is a moment when we can discern the shape of our lives and our purposes.

Out of exhaustion comes insight. Its characteristic action is to bring victory out of defeat, revelation out of exhaustion.

For it to be useful, information must be placed in a web of metaphors that imagination constructs.

Learning is an act as natural to the human species as loving. To make students learners throughout life is the real purpose of schooling.

Your responsibility is to transform your teachers into Athenas.

THE THREE MOMENTS of learning are grasping, mapping, making. American education spends much of its effort on the middle stage, neglecting the more important first and third.

Experience alone teaches nothing. But experience interpreted is the beginning of wisdom.

The profession of the principalship is one of "reflective practice." {D.Schon}

The *tough* style is useful only in times of crisis.

Leaders must be, like Odysseus, polytropic, many-turning, resourceful, full of stratagems and evasions if need be. Remember you are in a comic drama; survival is the mode of operating -- not survival for oneself merely, but for the enterprise -- for the ongoing of a good in the world that is not merely personal.

Delay is a useful stratagem. The administrator should not allow him/herself to be forced into making decisions in the presence of others.

The leader must not let his followers "get him on a white horse," that is, pressure him into fighting an idealistic battle, adopting a heroic posture, in response to other people's "pet causes."

There is a basic conflict between stability and dynamism, order and chaos, between restraint and desire (the Greek words are *nomos* [law, custom, convention] and *physis* [nature, the flow of things]). Principals are likely to be on the side of *nomos*; faculty on the side of *physis*. The two must harmonize.

There are myths within myths and each of us lives within nests of myths. If you know one myth moderately well, then you know something about all myths.

To the degree that the leader participates in magnanimity, he must look toward the *telos*, the purpose of things: must see ends with unwavering clarity but remain flexible and sometimes even indefinite about means.

This looking toward the end, toward purposes - - is what we mean by *vision* in a leader. This Zeus-like vision tends to be stifled by systematic planning.

Important to the leader are Zeus' clear mind and his vision; but chiefly his wisdom is expressed in his justice (*dike*) by which he contemplates the entire enterprise of being, assigning to each person a proper portion.

It is the teacher -- Prometheus -- who obtains "fire" (imagination) for his pupils and who

wants them to aspire above their station. It is Zeus, the principal, who must hold in his mind the animating purpose of the enterprise, must see that the right order is accomplished, that justice is done, and who must, *in his vision for the school*, see to it that too much individuality does not disturb the general welfare.

The leader is portrayed in *three stages*: first, as hero (leader of warriors, slayer of dragons); second, as founder of cities; and third, as ruler of cities (the one who cleanses, the one who founds, the one who governs). He must have a different style in each of these stages; and he must suit his style to the stage he is in.

Be humorous if that's your style, but not trivial.

Speaking legistically, we can say that *power* is given at the beginning of a transaction by a donor to a doer to accomplish a task; and *accountability* for the task is required by the donor from the doer at the end. But in the moral realm, the doer *accepts* responsibility for the task and *earns* from the task an *authority* to rule in the best interests of all, including the donor, who unobtrusively makes his assessment.

You *hold* your job by satisfying accountability; you *do* your job by satisfying responsibility.

In practice the legal obligation is concerned with minimum requirements; to aim at the moral obligation is to exceed the minimum by a comfortable margin.

You rule by *justice*, not *legalism*. By justice we mean the right order of things, *dike*, as Zeus has it, something you must discern and judge, an internal action. Legalities you must simply know and conform to, an external action. They may constrain you but cannot guide you.

Your judgments must be *even-handed*, not *equalitarian*.

You should not worry about the bugaboo of

"setting a bad precedent." You are free to try for justice in every case. Nothing need be automatic.

One quality all good leaders share is their focus on nurturance.

Every one accepts as fact that motivation is required for learning to occur, but we are reluctant to admit that the only effective motivation for learning is the joy of learning itself.

Teaching the imagination tends by its very nature toward equality; instructing the memory solidifies class.

The realms that the Greeks symbolized as "feminine" -- intuitive, receptive, imaginative -- the realms of poetry, culture, and myth -- all these are "other" ways of knowing, none the less certain if less abstract and linear.

The leader's own problems are not likely to be understood by those he leads.

The refusal to reconsider his/her own course can drive a leader into a blind corner.

When skills are taught, without any content, *as though the learners were machines*, then there is no hope for a free people.

Educators are professionals in guarding the humanity of their pupils and in seeking to endow all children with their diverse cultural heritage -- to make them bona fide members of the human community -- and to make of each a lifelong learner.

The state and the school have as their reason for being the promotion of justice, with an aim beyond the interests of their own institution or even those of their members.

Shakespeare names [in *Macbeth*] "the king-becoming graces:
[As] justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude --"

In times of crisis heroes are needed; in

ordinary times, we need leaders of vision who are willing to have second thoughts about ways and means -- about justice -- and perhaps if necessary to compromise.

James MacGregor Burns sets up two kinds of leaders: the transactional and the transformative. The first, the transactional, merely exchanges one kind of thing for another; privilege for service; you do this for me, I do that for you. His entourage follows him for advantage. The transformative leader is a moral leader; the way in which he transforms his followers is by the virtue for which he stands.

The net result of the leader's influence is to *change the way people think about what is desirable, possible, and necessary*. Changing the way we think ourselves: this is the only real freedom we have; and as educators, it is our greatest power.

The principal must lead by changing the imagination of his people: he has no other real force. Fully as important, he must empower others to be leaders.

Cronyism has no place in the decisions of the good leader.

No legislative action, no agency regulation-- not even the procedures of your own district hierarchy--can relieve the principal of primary responsibility. The crown, I might say, is an uncomfortable hat to hide under. Your school must be good, and you must make it so.

The particular kind of wisdom Socrates spoke of is not the *possession* of wisdom; rather, it is an awareness of one's own *lack* -- and a desire to pursue --that ultimate wisdom which, as Socrates put it, "the god" alone possesses.

Leadership at its highest must root itself in that exercise of humility which is the mark of the philosopher. The leader must be the philosopher in the sense that he has humility -- that he knows he is, perpetually, a seeker after wisdom.

A faculty member's self-esteem is essential to

the wellbeing of our enterprise -- not just how one looks to others but how one regards oneself.

The teacher is the Athena of the classroom, the channel through whom comes the wisdom of eternal things. The principal is the Zeus of the school. (The teacher's vision is vertical, the principal's horizontal.)

The feeling of security a principal can give to a teacher's intimacy with a class is the firmest pillar of authority a principal can establish.

"We return to Greece because it fulfills some need in our own life." (Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*) And that need seems to be summed up in the Greek word *paideia* -- education, culture, the pursuit of an ideal.

Diane Ravitch: "The dearth of literature in the elementary school may go far to explain some of the problems encountered by secondary-school teachers, who complain that children don't like to read, don't read well, and can't apply what they read to their own lives."

My diagnosis of the cultural revolution now taking place is that its underlying impelling power is the seeking of unity for the human race -- a unity that is now possible without the sacrifice of diversity.

A chief characteristic of technology is its lack of concern for process, its direct connection to desire.

While we are changing into the new society, we will experience a turbulence. Chaos is surely ahead, perhaps violently so, with major institutions of society suffering destruction.

If people are going to be empowered -- if they can obtain through technology most of the things they desire -- then we, as educators must be very much concerned to make them desire the good.

The learning event, I maintain, is the central action of education. Why is it rare? Because it is the result of intense concentration, in

all three of its stages -- grasping, mapping, and making -- that requires undisturbed attention.

A binary event -- an opposition between two parties -- should be altered to a ternary one, between three parties, the third being some entity of mutual concern. (Mant)

In this (ternary) sense, leadership is a dialogical movement in which participants engage in that process of critique in which their very identities as the leader and the led are continually in question. (Mant)

But where do we get gifted teachers? Why, right in the classrooms. In all likelihood, the ones that are there *know* enough right now to qualify. What is required for this category is a joy in learning that needs to be awakened and passed on to their students. With that desire they *become* gifted teachers.

Teachers are our greatest asset. But somehow the faculty must be persuaded to drop its traditionally critical and skeptical stance -- it must enter into an affirmative relation with the principal. If it plays its traditional role of automatically countering whatever is proposed, then dialogical relationship is prevented from the very beginning.

The classroom is the "third thing" in the encounter between teacher and principal, that entity that is the mutual concern of both parties. But it belongs more to the teacher than it does to the principal, who must enter that sacred ground by permission.

Not yet do we have a society of free and equal people. We still do not educate toward that end. I am proposing that technology, as it advances, will make people equal on many, many counts, so much so that comparisons will tend to disappear.

Equality occurs when differences are not economically advantageous. Up to now, in history, it has been to the advantage of groups of people to consider others their inferiors. In the coming epoch, not only will differences

of gender and race be unimportant, but even differences in natural abilities will not prove divisive.

Technology, as I am using the term, is something new in the world. It does not seek to perfect the machine, expand the factory. Rather it seeks to know the desires of humankind and to find new ways of satisfying them -- new ways less exploitative of labor and of nature's resources.

There is something benevolent built into technology. It is a great equalizer of persons. It does not require experts.

We have enough sense to know that high scores have limited significance, that what we are really teaching is more profound than any accountability measuring device can possibly reveal. And, in our depths, we know that each human being is "precious and unique". We understand that the least of these is equal, finally, to the highest. We know this in our hearts, or we would not be in the profession we are in.

Let's think seriously about the common humanity of the students in our care.

In order to be valid, the testing process must not have a noticeable effect on the phenomenon being tested.

Paradoxically, "teaching the test " seems to lower scores.

The necessary ingredient (for learning) is teachers who are themselves learners, who can learn from their own disciplines the appropriate mode of knowing which their particular disciplines represent.

Teachers are your most valuable asset. Protect them.

A faculty must be a community centered around learning. It is your job to make it so. Nothing so increases your intellectual stature in their (faculty members') eyes as does your learning something from them.

Trust and respect are the bases of "governance from below," the only way an effective educational enterprise can be run.

Competition, which has heretofore been the safeguard against monopoly, against fascism in capitalism, becomes ineffective in an economy ruled not by scarcity but by the plenty that technology provides.

Competition: Good in sports, bad in intellect.

What you have been experiencing here is *non-competitive learning*. Think about it.

REFERENCES