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A study of the role and responsibilities of a secondary high school department chair as perceived by selected secondary high school department chairs in Iowa

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A study of the role and responsibilities of a secondary high school department chair as perceived by selected secondary high school department chairs in Iowa

Abstract

The position of department chair exists in most moderate to large secondary high schools. This position exists because of an earlier identified need of the principal and other administrative superordinates for assistance in organizing a moderate to large staff of certified personnel in an efficient and effective manner. The position of department chair may be regarded as an extension of the administrative entity by serving as a means to provide leadership to a substructure or segment of the total staff of a moderate to large high school.

This Research Paper by: Dennis Carl Schroeder 501

Entitled:

A STUDY OF THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SECONDARY HIGH SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT CHAIR AS PERCEIVED BY SELECTED SECONDARY
HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT CHAIRS IN IOWA

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Date Approved

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The position of department chair exists in most moderate to large secondary high schools. This position exists because of an earlier identified need of the principal and other administrative superordinates for assistance in organizing a moderate to large staff of certified personnel in an efficient and effective manner. The position of department chair may be regarded as an extension of the administrative entity by serving as a means to provide leadership to a substructure or segment of the total staff of a moderate to large high school.

As the department chair position developed, a sense of ambiguity developed concerning the role and responsibilities a department chair should play and have in the educational framework. The chair was expected to perform quasi-administrative duties as an extension of the administration, but was not trained in the techniques of administrative management. The classroom teacher selected as the department chair of an educational department found an enigmatic factor associated with the position. The department chair was expected to perform administrative duties, but the chair approached these duties from an instructional staff perspective by training and experience. Thus a factor of dissonance has developed as the department chair performs quasi-administrative duties from a staff perspective.

The advent of collective bargaining further obscured the role of a department chair in Iowa. A fundamental question arose as to whether the department chair position belonged in the staff collective

bargaining unit or the administrative management bargaining unit. A further question arose as to the exact nature of the duties a department chair performed. A noticeable vacuum existed in many schools regarding the specificity of enumerated department chair duties and responsibilities. Many Iowa school districts were spurred to create written job or position descriptions specifying duties to be performed by department chairs.

It is difficult to assess the effect written job or position descriptions have had on the role and responsibilities of high school department chairs in Iowa. Questions arise as to the actual utilization of high school department chairs. Do the job or position descriptions have a meaningful effect on the performances of high school department chairs in Iowa? Do the job or position descriptions assign administrative or staff responsibilities to the high school department chair position? How do Iowa department chairs perceive their role of department chairs in light of the existence or lack of existence of a job or position description? In the absence of any substantive study of any sort within the last decade of time and considering the conditions as they currently exist, it is unwarranted to make any authoritative statements or generalizations concerning the role and responsibilities of secondary high school department chairs in Iowa at this juncture.

Chapter 2

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In view of the questions raised in Chapter 1, it seems to indicate there is a need for a study to be made concerning the role and responsibilities played and performed by the secondary high school department chairs in Iowa as perceived by persons occupying the role of a high school department chair at the present time.

To accomplish the general intent of such an undertaking, a study would have to identify three categories of information regarding Iowa high school department chairs. The first category of information would include certain demographic characteristics concerning the individuals currently occupying the department chair position. This would include determining whether a high school department chair was a building chair or a district chair with duties outside of the building to which the department chair was assigned. Further, it would have to be determined if the high school department chair position was considered part of the staff (teacher) collective bargaining unit or the administrative unit. In addition, it would be necessary to ascertain if the school district has a written job or position description for a high school department chair. The second category of information would include a determination of the job performances performed by high school department chairpersons in the performance of their department chair role. A listing of certain duties and responsibilities would have to be developed from the accepted body of literature concerning high school department chairs currently in

existence. Finally, a third category of information would have to be identified concerning the department chair's assessment of the role of a department chair in an Iowa high school. This category would include a determination of the adequacy of the time allotted for the performance of the department chair role, whether a department chair perceives the role of a department chair from a staff (teacher) perspective or an administrative perspective, and if the department chair role presents a challenge to the department chair in terms of its requirements and duties.

Such a study would have to be limited in certain ways in order to establish its relative merit and worth. The study would best be suited for the secondary high school level, thereby excluding the junior high level. The junior high level includes a variety of organizational schemes ranging from a middle school with an elementary emphasis to a junior high school with a secondary emphasis. Second, the study would be limited to a selected group of public secondary high schools in Iowa of moderate to large student enrollment as determined by enrollment figures of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction. The small number, the relatively small size, the lack of collective bargaining agreements, and the different administrative structures of nonpublic secondary high schools in Iowa would not represent an adequate number which to study. Furthermore, small public secondary high schools in Iowa would probably not have assigned department chairs because of the relative close proximity of the administrative level to the staff level.

The value of such a study would be related to the composite profile of the role and responsibilities that public secondary high school department chairs perform in Iowa which the study would produce in the light of an absence of any preceding definitive study on the identified group of high school department chairs or any recent study of any similar grouping in any other state.

Chapter 3

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

The literature concerning the role and responsibilities of a high school department chair contains studies which attempted to identify specific aspects of the department chair position in the high school. However, the collective body of research can best be characterized as cyclical and recurrent. Surveys of the role and responsibilities of high school department chairs are sporadic in nature. A number of articles appeared on the subject in the 1960s followed by a smaller number of articles in the early to mid-1970s.

In 1959 King and Moon surveyed administrators concerning the department chair role in one hundred eighty-three public high schools throughout the nation.¹ They used the results of their survey to develop a listing of the ten most common types of duties of a department chair indicated by the frequency of response which included (1) selecting textbooks, (2) scheduling department meetings, (3) building courses of study, (4) making annual requisitions for instructional materials, (5) supervising classes, (6) preparing the budget, (7) advising new teachers, (8) studying methods of teaching, (9) advising the principal, (10) attending curriculum meetings, (11) interviewing teacher candidates, (12) attending coordination

Fred M. King and James V. Moon, "Department Head in the Secondary School," NASSP Bulletin, 44, No. 254 (March 1960), 20-21.

meetings with junior high school staff, (13) directing the use of supplementary books, (14) helping in the assignment of teachers, and (15) coordinating the work of teachers in the department.² King and Moon found wide usage of the department head in the public high schools of the time.³

Kenneth Easterday's study in 1965 of the duties and qualifications of department chairpersons in fourteen selected high schools in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio indicated that much misunderstanding existed between administrators and department chairs concerning the department chair's role.⁴ From the results of his study, Easterday developed a listing of sixteen duties and responsibilities that department chairs were performing including (a) calling meetings of the department, (b) organizing and planning meetings, (c) inventoring and requisitioning materials, (d) aiding the principal in scheduling, (e) aiding in the selection of new teachers, (f) forming committees to review and select tests and supplementary materials, (g) advising the principal on departmental problems, (h) forming committees to prepare, evaluate, and maintain courses of study, (i) acting as a liaison between the department and administration, (j) coordinating the departmental program with other school departments and schools, (k) evaluating the department program, (l) assisting substitute teachers, (m) orienting new teachers, (n) developing goals of courses in the

²Ibid., 23.

³Ibid., 24.

⁴Kenneth Easterday, "The Department Chairman," NASSP Bulletin, 49, No. 303 (October 1965), 78.

the department, (o) performing normal teaching duties, and (p) participating in subject matter organizations.⁵ Easterday suggested that the items he listed could be used as guides in the development of the duties of a department chair.⁶ In a similar study, Jim Kidd associated the ambiguity of the department chair's role with the principal's lack of training and experience in working with staff in delegating supervisory roles to department chairs.⁷ Altimari, in a survey of department chairs in high schools belonging to the North Central Association in 1967, concluded there was a lack of clarification of the department chair's responsibilities and the line of authority between the department chairs and their building administrators which could cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations of their job performances.⁸

Thorum, in a study conducted during the 1967-1968 school year, compared the development of the department chair's role in new high schools built after 1963 to older more established metropolitan high schools and produced a number of startling results.⁹ Thorum found the lack of time to be the most limiting factor in preventing a department head from functioning effectively.¹⁰ Thorum found no relationship which

⁵Ibid., 82.

⁶Ibid., 84

⁷Jim L. Kidd, "Department Headship and the Supervisory Role," NASSP Bulletin, 49, No. 303 (October 1965), 70-76.

⁸William G. Altimari, "Department Chairmanship in Large High Schools of the North Central Association," NCA Quarterly, 42, No. 4

⁹Reho F. Thorum, "The Department Head in the Large Senior High School," The Clearing House, 43, No. 5 (January 1969), 264-266.

¹⁰Ibid., 265.

existed between the number of duties assigned and the amount of time necessary to perform them.¹¹ Thorum concluded that the department chair's effectiveness was in direct relation to the amount of time in which the department chair is allowed to perform his duties.¹² Fish in 1976 associated the ambiguity of job performance by department chairs with the lack of a clarification of job description for department chairs, indicating that such was mandated with the rise in teacher bargaining power.¹³

Some writers felt there was a trend away from department chairs and replacing them with division heads or coordinators. Manlove and Buser in 1966 concluded there was no widespread dissatisfaction with the departmental chair form of organization.¹⁴ Altimari's study in the North Central Association supported Manlove and Buser's findings.¹⁵

Much discussion permeates the literature concerning the position of the department chair in relation to the positions of the principal and the staff. Kidd noted that the earlier writings on the subject indicated a clear distinction between the supporters of a line position as opposed to a staff position role for the department chair.¹⁶ Beck and Rosenberger summarized the arguments and categorized the job

¹¹Ibid., 265-266.

¹²Ibid., 266.

¹³Kenneth L. Fish, "Department Chairman in Urban High Schools," NASSP Bulletin, 60, No. 398 (March 1976), 108-109.

¹⁴Donald C. Manlove and Robert L. Buser, "The Department Head: Myths and Reality," NASSP Bulletin, 50, No. 313 (November 1967), 101.

¹⁵Altimari, op. cit., 308.

¹⁶Kidd, op. cit., 71-73.

responsibilities of both sides, line and staff, concluding that the department chair's position was most effective when it was cast as a line position.¹⁷

Two studies of the role of department chairs in high schools are regarded by some writers as some semblance of a reference. The first is a model job description developed by Buser and Manlove.¹⁸ Determining from their earlier study that many schools were utilizing department chairs without job descriptions, they set about developing a model job description.¹⁹ The department chair's role was divided into three categories of supervision, administration, and teaching.²⁰ For each of the three categories they identified, Buser and Manlove listed specified responsibilities and tasks.²¹ Buser and Manlove assigned supervisory and administrative duties and responsibilities in addition to classroom assignments to department chairs, but categorized the position as strictly a staff position.²² The other study represents an extensive project by James Callahan culminating in one of the few books on the subject.²³ Callahan discussed the role behaviors associated with the department chair, indicating the role was an

¹⁷William R. Beck and David S. Rosenberger, "Chairman: Where Does He Fit In?," The Clearing House, 46, No. 1 (September 1971), 48-51.

¹⁸Robert L. Buser and Donald C. Manlove, "The Department Chairman: A Model Job Description," Journal of Secondary Education, 45, No. 1 (January 1970), 9-12.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 10-12.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Michael G. Callahan, The Effective Department Head (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1971).

effective device to bridge the distance between the administrator and the staff, but the position should be considered a staff position.²⁴

A subsequent writer, Berrier, utilized a major portion of the roles and responsibilities identified by Callahan to develop a questionnaire which was administered to fifty-seven social studies department chairs in suburban high schools around the Chicago metropolitan area.²⁵ Berrier found that one-half of the forty-four respondents to his study indicated they were considered as faculty (staff) members, but 41 percent indicated they were considered as administrators.²⁶ Berrier further found that the department chair role in his survey was considered by the tasks and responsibilities assigned to it to be a line rather than staff position.²⁷

The time interval between 1976 and the present is characterized by a scant amount of research on the role of the department chair, none of which amounts to any significant contribution to the development of an effective and accurate profile of the role and responsibilities of a department chair. An exception to the trend of this interval was the publication of a book by Thomas Sergiovanni detailing procedures and exercises designed to make a department chair a more effective leader.²⁸

²⁴Ibid., 22-24.

²⁵G. Gatlin Berrier, "What Does the Department Chairman Do?," The Clearing House, 48, No. 7 (March 1974), 432-436.

²⁶Ibid., 435.

²⁷Ibid., 436.

²⁸Thomas J. Sergiovanni, Handbook for Effective Department Leadership (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977).

In retrospect, the efforts and studies designed to examine and clarify the department chair's role and responsibilities in a modern high school were sincere but fragmentary attempts. It should be noted that the studies examined were developed using different sampling techniques and methods of analyses. Furthermore, many of the writers who used the survey instrument as a means to gather information used an exceptionally narrow population base from which to draw their samples. Thus the applicability of the findings of these studies was very narrow and constricted.

Chapter 4

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design centered around the development of a survey instrument of twenty-six items which was sent to twelve subject area department chairs in thirty public high schools located in fifteen of the largest sixteen public school districts in Iowa based on student enrollment figures of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction for the 1980-1981 school year.²⁹ The subject area department chairs included the department chairs in art, business education, driver education, English/communications, foreign language, home economics, industrial arts, mathematics, music, physical education, science, and social studies.

The first three items of the survey instrument identified three demographic characteristics of the high school department chairs; (a) if the department chair position was a building or district assignment, (b) if the department chair position was considered part of the staff (teacher) collective bargaining unit or the administrative unit, and (c) if the school had a written job or position description for a department chair.

The next twenty-three items of the survey identified certain enumerated duties and responsibilities various writers assigned to the role of a high school department chair. The twenty-three items were

The writer's employment by one of the sixteen largest school districts in Iowa necessitated the omission of this district's department chairs from the survey administration.

categorized according to their distinction as a line or staff position responsibility as categorized by Beck and Rosenberger and operationalized in part by Berrier in his study.³⁰ The determination of the line and staff position department chair role responsibilities and duties ~~was~~ as stated in the following;

Line position responsibilities and duties included. . . .

participates in departmental chair meetings as determined by the principal,

produces written periodic departmental reports to the building principal or other administrative personnel,

enforces staff adherence to established administrative regulations,

participates in an articulation process for curriculum development and revision,

plans and conducts periodic departmental meetings,

directs and assists substitute teachers assigned to the department,

coordinates the assignment of student teachers in the department,

prepares the preliminary departmental budget,

selects, procures, and allocates instructional materials for the department,

supervises the equipment inventory and repair in the department,

develops the departmental class schedule of teaching assignments,

assigns classroom space and facilities for members in the department,

³⁰Beck and Rosenberger, op. cit., 49, and Berrier, op. cit., 433-436.

conducts periodic classroom visitations of staff members in the department,

participates in the formal staff evaluation process of members in the department for the purpose of promotion; retention; transfer; or termination,

assists in the selection and placement of new staff members in the department, and

engages in the active recruitment of prospective staff members for the department.

Staff position responsibilities and duties included. . . .

serves as a liaison between the staff and the administration in the school,

attends professional conferences as the representative of the department,

participates in developing in-service programs for the departmental staff,

conducts demonstration lessons for the staff in the department,

meets with sale representatives of firms which provide instructional materials and services,

receives and distributes departmental correspondence, and

supervises the lesson planning procedures of the staff in the department.

The remaining three items of the survey identified aspects of the role assessments the individual department chairs have of their department chair roles. The items included (a) if the amount of time allotted to the department chair was sufficient for the performance of the expected duties of a department chair, (b) if the department chair viewed the role of a department chair from a staff or administrative perspective, and (c) if the role of a department chair presented a challenge to the department chair in terms of its requirements and duties.

For the purposes of clarification and better understanding, the following standardized definitions of key terms and concepts were used in the conduct of the study.

Department - An administrative subdivision of a school giving instruction in a branch of study, as the department of English or the department of mathematics.³¹

Department Chair (Head) - A faculty member who, in addition to performing regular duties of teaching in a department, has additional responsibilities to the affairs of the department.³² Synonymous terms used in this study shall include department chairperson and department chairman.

Public Secondary High School - A school which is tax supported, organized under a school district of a state, and contains grades 9 through twelve or grades 10 through 12.³³

Line Position (administration) - The control, direction, and management of a school. . . .each officer in the line receiving directives from an officer above and passing them to one below, including the delegation of authority.³⁴

Role - The behavioral patterns of functions expected of or carried out by an individual in a given societal context; i.e. the school.³⁵

Staff Position (Officer) - A position which has no direct authority over teachers to make decisions effective, but provides assistance of an advisory nature, including acting as consultants to line positions.³⁶

During the latter part of October 1981, a total of three hundred sixty survey instruments were mailed to subject area department chairs in thirty selected public high schools in Iowa.

³¹Carter V. Good, ed., Dictionary of Education (3d ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973), 172.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 282 and 460.

³⁴Ibid., 14.

³⁵Ibid., 502

³⁶Ibid., 553.

Chapter 5

THE FINDINGS

A total of two hundred sixty survey instruments were returned to the writer of which two hundred fifty-six (71 percent) were usable respondent survey instruments. The tabulation method of the item responses consisted of a tally of the frequency responses which was converted to a percentage figure.

The demographic section of the survey instrument produced the following results. Two hundred forty (93.7 percent) of the respondents were classified as building department chairs with only twelve (4.6 percent) were classified as district department chairs. Two hundred thirty (89.8 percent) of the department chairs were considered part of the staff (teacher) collective bargaining unit with only ten (3.9 percent) were considered part of the administrative unit. Eleven (4.3 percent) of the respondent department chairs indicated the department chair position was not included in the collective bargaining process at all. One hundred twenty-two (47.6 percent) of the respondent department chairs indicated their school had a written job or position description for a department chair, and one hundred thirty-one (51.2 percent) of the respondent department chairs indicated their school did not have a written job or position description for a department chair.

The fifteen duties most frequently performed as indicated by the response rate and percentage number are contained in Table 1.

Table 1

Duties Performed by Selected High School Department Chairs in Iowa

| Number of Responses | Percentage of N (N=256) | Item Description |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 247 | 96.5 | Participates in departmental chair meetings as determined by the principal |
| 238 | 92.9 | Plans and conducts periodic departmental meetings |
| 236 | 92.2 | Receives and distributes departmental correspondence |
| 233 | 91.0 | Serves as a liaison between the staff and the administration |
| 209 | 81.6 | Participates in an articulation process for curriculum development and revision |
| 199 | 77.7 | Supervises the equipment inventory and repair in the department |
| 198 | 77.3 | Assigns classroom space and facilities for members in the department |
| 183 | 71.9 | Meets with sales representatives of firms which provide instructional materials and services |
| 175 | 68.3 | Prepares the preliminary departmental budget |
| 174 | 67.9 | Develops the departmental class schedule of teaching assignments |
| 170 | 66.4 | Directs and assists substitute teachers assigned to the department |
| 161 | 62.9 | Selects, procures, and allocates instructional materials for the department |

Table 1 (continued)

| Number of Responses | Percentage of N (N=256) | Item Description |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 153 | 59.7 | Produces written periodic departmental reports to the building principal or other administrative personnel |
| 148 | 57.8 | Attends professional conferences as the representative of the department |
| 112 | 43.7 | Assists in the selection and placement of new staff members in the department |

The department role assessment items of the survey produced the following results. One hundred five (41.0 percent) of the respondent department chairs indicated the amount of time allotted department chairs during the school day for the performance of the department chair duties was sufficient. One hundred thirty-eight (53.9 percent) of the survey respondents indicated there was insufficient time allotted during the school day for the performance of department chair duties. Two hundred twenty-seven (88.7 percent) of the respondents viewed their role as a department chair from a staff (teacher) perspective while only ten (3.9 percent) viewed their role from an administrative perspective. Five (1.9 percent) respondents indicated they used both perspectives in viewing the department chair role, and fourteen (5.4 percent) did not respond to this item. One hundred forty-four (56.2 percent) of the respondents indicated the department chair role presented a challenge to them while eighty-nine

(34.7 percent) indicated the department chair role did not present a challenge to them. Nine (3.5 percent) indicated the department chair role occasionally did present a challenge to them, and fourteen (5.4 percent) did not respond to this item.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study indicate there still is much ambiguity concerning the department chair role in an Iowa public secondary high school as there has been in other public secondary high schools in other parts of the nation as judged by the review of previous research.

If one examines the demographic characteristics the study produced, the overwhelming percentage of the subject area department chairs in Iowa public high schools are assigned to one building only and are represented by the staff (teacher) collective bargaining unit. The demographic results also indicate the department chair position is classified as a staff position.

Given the adversarial nature of the collective bargaining process, it would seem to be of great value for the school district to have in existence a written job or position description for a high school department chair. Yet slightly more than one-half of the respondents of the survey indicated their school did not have such a job or position description. Perhaps the school districts from which the respondents were contacted do not consider a written job or position description necessary or another element may have to be entered into the analysis of the results. Do the slightly better than one-half of the respondents represent nearly one-half of the public secondary high schools surveyed, or is it possible that within a public secondary high school surveyed some department chairs checked the "yes" option while other department chairs in the same high school checked the "no" option?

Unfortunately, the writer did not retain a frequency distribution by school as to the incidence of the "yes" or "no" responses on this item, but the writer is certain of his contention, based on his tallying of the respondent choices, there were many incidences of the department chairs within one public secondary high school surveyed indicating there was or was not a written job or position description available. This lead the writer to conclude that the written job or position description for the department chair role, whether available or not, is not considered an important priority in the performance of the department chair's role by the department chairs surveyed.

If the demographic characteristics suggest that the department chair position in the public high schools surveyed is categorized as a staff position, do the duties and responsibilities performed by the respondent department chairs indicate this also? If one accepts the categorization of line and staff position responsibilities developed by Beck and Rosenberger and others and examines the duties ranked by the frequency of responses as reported in Chapter 5 of this paper, one can conclude that department chairs in Iowa secondary public high schools are performing many line position responsibilities and duties thereby qualifying them as an administrator rather than a staff person in the performance of their department chair role responsibilities and duties. If one examines the duties most frequently performed by the department chairs surveyed by a percentage limitation of 75 percent or more, the duties would include the first seven items of the frequency listing in Table 1 of which five have been categorized as line responsibility items. If one examines the listing of the fifteen duties most frequently performed by the high school department chairs surveyed as

reported in Table 1, eleven of the duties are associated with line position responsibilities, and four of the duties are associated with staff position responsibilities. This may be explained in two ways. First, the item listing of the survey instrument included more line position responsibilities than staff position responsibilities by a sixteen to seven ratio. Second, and possibly more analytical, high school department chairs surveyed are performing line position duties without being aware of their line position nature.

The final portion of the survey instrument briefly examined the respondent department chairs' assessment of the department chair's role. Slightly more than one-half of the respondents indicated the amount of time allotted, if any, was insufficient for the performance of the department chair's duties, but slightly more than two-fifths of the respondents indicated the time allotted was sufficient. This apparently indicates that the individual performing a department chair role in the high schools surveyed is expected to also perform a complete or nearly complete staff person role with the usual number of class and teaching assignments associated with the public secondary high school in Iowa.

The department chairs surveyed indicated by more than 88 percent they viewed their department chair role from a staff perspective. This is indicative of the consistency of their perspective when it is compared with the categorization of the department chair's role as part of the staff (teacher) collective bargaining unit by a similar percentage (89.8 percent).

It is apparent that department chairs in the larger public high schools in Iowa still face the dilemma concerning their role and responsibilities which the research reviewed indicated. Although the

department chairs viewed their role from a staff perspective and are in fact classified as staff in the collective bargaining process, the department chairs are performing line position responsibilities associated with the position of an administrator.

Certain recommendations can be made to improve the status and position of the role of a high school department chair in a larger Iowa public high school.

First, the job or position description of a high school department chair must be made more meaningful and widespread. Principals and department chairs must view the written job or position description as a dynamic statement of expected enumerated position requirements. Once implemented, the job or position description should be the primary basis by which a department chair's role performance is evaluated.

Second, department chairs in public high schools in Iowa should be certified by the Department of Public Instruction, just as teachers and administrators are at present. Department chairs should be expected to have completed prescribed course work at an accredited college or university before assuming supervisory duties over professional staff persons in a subject area department. Simply designating one member of a department to serve as the department chair based on seniority, subject matter training, popularity, or an interview is an inadequate method to choose someone for a position of supervisory responsibility.

Third, high school principals should closely integrate the position of a high school department chair into the total educational program of the school. This recommendation can be implemented by a variety of means, but the main determinant will be the willingness of

the administrative hierarchy within the school setting to accept the department chair as a legitimate participant in the decision-making circles of the school. The department chair position and the individual holding the position should be identified in a more open manner to the students, staff, and the community as a whole as an essential component part in the operation of a public high school in Iowa.

Fourth, the department chair position should be identified as a position which has line authority in specified areas. From the results obtained in the survey, it is obvious high school department chairs in Iowa are performing line position duties and responsibilities at present, but are approaching these duties and responsibilities from a staff perceptual viewpoint. If department chairs are performing line position duties and responsibilities in Iowa public high schools, then it is incumbent upon the school to recognize the department chair position as a line position rather than continue to operate with the dissonant factor in terms of the perception of the department chair position by the high school department chairs surveyed.

Fifth, if the duties and responsibilities of the high school department chair position are amplified, then the compensatory items associated with the department chair position should be also. A sufficient amount of time should be allotted during the school day for the department chair to perform the duties and responsibilities assigned to the position. Additional salary or a stipend in excess of a teaching salary should be provided for the department chair commensurate with the duties the high school department chair is expected to perform.

Taken as a whole, the five recommendations may improve the assessment high school department chairs in Iowa have of the degree of challenge the position of department chair presents to them. The results of the survey indicated that only slightly more than one-half of the respondent department chairs felt the position presented a challenge, and over one-third of the respondent department chairs indicated it did not. The lack of challenge in being a high school department chair may be one of the bitter fruits of the harvest of dissonance the high school department chair position in Iowa is mired in at present.

In sum one may ask how to view the department chair's role in a high school in Iowa. Kenneth Geils offered an interesting comment on the role performed of a department chair when he wrote the following:

The primary role of the chairman is that of leader, and the hats he wears varies with the function; he is lieutenant in the administrative council, a general at times with students or with teachers, and often a private with the other enlisted men. . . . He looks upon himself as peer with his department members; the basic difference lies in the functions performed.³⁷

What Geils stated so succinctly accurately describes the situation high school department chairs find themselves in Iowa. But can the public high schools tolerate an individual performing the functions of an "general" or "lieutenant" with a "private's" perception? The writer trusts not.

³⁷Kenneth Geils, "The Chairman: A Wearer of Many Hats," The Clearing House, 48, No. 4 (December 1973), 248.

Chapter 7

SUMMARY

Throughout the course of this project, the writer sought to closely examine the role department chairs play in selected larger public high schools in Iowa.

From a review of the literature concerning the topic, it appeared that the work which had been completed on the department chair's role was sporadic and approached the topic from an administrative rather than staff perspective. Many of the survey instruments utilized by research projects for the acquisition of information surveyed only administrative respondents thus basing their conclusions on an administrative sample or utilized a small population from which the sample was drawn as to produce results which were highly tentative at best. Furthermore, the studies in question lacked applicability to the department chairs in the larger public high schools in Iowa which the writer was most interested in.

Utilizing the survey method of research, the writer created an survey instrument to administer to selected subject area high school department chairs in public high schools in Iowa. The instrument contained certain demographic items concerning the department chair's role assignment. The bulk of the survey instrument consisted of twenty-three role responsibilities and duties associated with the position of a secondary high school department chair. The responsibilities and duties were categorized into line position and staff position responsibilities and duties as judged by the research of

numerous writers. Finally, the survey instrument contained three assessment items whereby the respondent department chairs could indicate the orientation of their own perception.

The writer distributed the survey instrument by mail to twelve subject area secondary high school department chairs in thirty public secondary high schools located in fifteen of the largest sixteen Iowa public school districts, amounting to three hundred sixty potential respondents. Usable returns were received from two hundred fifty six (71.1 percent) of the respondents from which the analysis of the high school department chair's role in an Iowa public secondary high school was completed.

From an analysis of the survey instruments received, it was determined that more than 90 percent of the respondent department chairs were categorized as staff positions and over 88 percent of the respondent department chairs perceived their departmental chair role from a staff perspective. By a frequency listing, it was determined that the respondent department chairs were performing primarily line position responsibilities and duties associated with the administrative perspective and position.

The writer concluded that the results of the survey instrument determined that the secondary high school department chairs in the larger Iowa public schools face the same dilemma in the performance of their role responsibilities and duties which the research of the past decades has advocated be removed. The writer advanced five recommendations which could clarify and enhance the role a department chair plays in a larger public high school in Iowa.

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