

School Leaders

Roger Bordeaux, Ph.D.

Introduction

EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL leadership in rural and reservation schools and communities serving American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) children requires that leaders be sensitive to the needs and desires of the culture of the people served. Regardless of where the leader is – at home, in early childhood programs, at K-12 schools or in colleges and universities – the effective leader exhibits behaviors that influence the learning environment. The leader blends modern leadership theory and practice with American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) traditional leader practice.

This paper will discuss traditional AI/AN leadership and modern leadership theory and practice. It will also discuss the contextual factors necessary for consideration in AI/AN communities. The contextual factors include humans (learners, parents, teachers, etc.) and organizational structure including school improvement efforts. The paper will propose the characteristics necessary for effective leadership in rural and reservation schools and communities that serve American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Effective leaders in rural and reservation schools and communities serving AI/AN children, including early childhood and K-12 programs, must *seek visions, practice the oral tradition, gather goods, and put family first.*

Tribal Leaders: Past, Present and Future

Deloria (1969) declared “the Indian struggle for freedom was symbolized by the great war chiefs Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph and Geronimo” (p. 196). These leaders of the past were able to convince many Lakota, Nez Perce and Apache tribal members that freedom was worth fighting and dying for. These leaders had specific characteristics including oral expression, use of traditional

ceremonies, tribal loyalty, and sensitivity to their peoples' needs and desires. He also contended that the only difference in tribal leadership in two centuries is that the Bureau of Indian Affairs defines the ground rules. If tribal leadership has not changed, then current tribal leaders need to research previous AI/AN leaders' leadership knowledge, attributes, and skills. Current tribal education leaders must also investigate outside influences, such as bilingualism, biculturalism and the influence of acculturation.

While looking at her own tribe, Deloria (1969) identified the following skills necessary to be a quality member of the tribal community:

- One had to be a good relative.
- All had a job to teach children.
- Formal education was transmitted through ceremonies, precept and example.
- Giving was glorified (p. 17).

These skills or contextual factors are necessary to internalize and live if a leader hopes to be effective in similar AI/AN communities including leaders in modern business and education serving American Indian and Alaskan Natives.

Tippeconnic (1984) reported that leaders in AI/AN communities need the following knowledge and skills:

- Effective communication and meaningful contact with community
- Tribal education policy and practice
- Ability to integrate local tribal language and culture
- Parent and community involvement
- Ability to recruit and retain quality staff, preferably bilingual or bicultural

Effective leaders need to completely understand the modern and traditional culture of the local community, including the political

environment, the economic conditions, the family relationships, and the traditional communication practices.

In *American Indian Education*, Reyhner (2004) contends that the purpose of formal education for many years for AI/AN children was to “Christianize and civilize.” The federal government and various religious orders were given the task of teaching the American Indian and Alaskan Natives the knowledge and skills that they thought were necessary for survival. Not until the mid-1960s were American Indians and Alaskan Natives allowed to be active leaders in their own education programs. The progress in AI/AN education has happened in the last 40 years. Tippeconnic (1999) concluded that the tribal control of education could benefit students attending those tribal schools, students in public schools, and colleges and universities primarily in the integration of Indian cultures and languages. Tribal control would also improve current and future AI/AN leadership in order to achieve greater tribal self-sufficiency and ensure cultural and language survival.

A case study (Fuentes, 1995) of the Maryetta School in Stillwater, Oklahoma, identified leadership strategies used by the superintendent so that the school would be successful. The school population was about 500 K-8 low-income students who were primarily American Indians. The strategies included gathering input from the community, implementing ideas from the community, grantsmanship, organizing special events, managing money wisely, and long term planning.

Allen (1993) contends that the use of AI/AN values, combined with modern leadership practice, provides a framework for effective management of educational institutions on reservations. The Lakota values mentioned are wisdom, fortitude, respect for others, timeliness, generosity, respect for Mother Earth, and bravery. Values-based leadership has always been at the heart of AI/AN culture. When going to war, praying for the ill, getting ready for a ceremony, or even waking up in the morning, many effective leaders used values to guide their everyday life. There was a time when all in the tribal community were leaders in their own roles whether hunter, child bearer, orator, or spiritual leader.

Young AI/AN learners appreciate the presence of native people in leadership roles in schools because it brings positive role models (Pavel, 1999). Educational institutions on reservations must always seek qualified AI/AN leaders who exhibit and model behaviors that will positively influence the learners. The success of AI/AN learners in schools include attitude, motivation, and parent involvement (Johnson, 2003). The following resiliency factors specific to American Indian and Alaskan Natives should also have an influence on school leaders in AI/AN schools; extended family system, positive tribal identity, and biculturalism, insight/understanding, self-reliance, relationships, and resilient perspective (Klassen, 1996) . The school factors influencing resiliency included having a culturally relevant teaching method, a culturally relevant curriculum, and having long term mentoring relationships.

A report of research (Bergeson, Griffin, & Hutado 2000) suggests the relatively low level of academic success among American Indian elementary and secondary school students, as a group, is largely the result of discontinuities between the cultures and languages of these students' homes and communities and the language and culture of mainstream classrooms. American Indian students also tend to perceive academic success as offering few extrinsic rewards, and they are likely to view learning much of what is necessary to succeed academically (such as the standard language and the standard behavior practices of the school) as detrimental to their own language, culture, and identity. The report suggests many strategies that teachers of AI/AN students can use to improve the success of those learners.

An instructional leadership research project by Eastman (2005) concluded that "first, teachers, in general, have a need to feel supported and backed. Teachers in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) contract and grant schools that are contracted from year to year with no tenure policy applicable have an even greater need for support, especially teachers that are non-Native and non-tribal members. Secondly, it is critical for instructional leaders to have a thorough understanding of the culture or culture(s) of the students for which they serve. Additionally, they must utilize culturally appropriate and

accepted practices when interacting with students, staff, parents, and community members. Finally, principals must work closely with superintendents to properly train locally-controlled school boards to maximize their empowerment to improve education for their tribal children.”

Ball and Pence (2001) report positive results of an innovative Generative Curriculum Model. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the University of Victoria collaborated to develop a Cree and Dene early childhood care curriculum and implemented the curriculum for 2 years. The program was primarily a professional development program. The key results included high rates of student retention and program completion, parenting and grandparenting skills improvement, increased cultural integration, and increased partnerships.

John (2001) discussed the importance of family involvement in early childhood programs. The family involvement included the recognition of American Indian history and culture. The “Hintil Kuu Ca,” which means “house of children,” is a preschool, summer school, and after-school program attended by 125 children age 3-12. The program has had positive influences including having more American Indian children graduating from high school and some attending college.

Lipka (2002) reported evidence supports inclusion of Native language and culture in educational programs as a strategy for improving outcomes.

Apthorp, D’Amato, and Richardson (2003) reviewed research and related literature to summarize evidence on the effectiveness of instructional practices for helping American Indian students meet standards. The promising practices identified included teaching indigenous language first followed by instruction in learning to read and write in English, emphasizing reading comprehension, peer interaction, frequent monitoring of student progress, using culturally congruent materials and instruction in math, and collaboration with the community to create culturally congruent classrooms.

Demmert and Towner (2003) conducted a review of research literature on the influence of culturally based education on academic

success of Native American learners. They reported that culturally based education programs developed cooperatively with parents and community members strengthen relationships between home and school and that excellent language and culturally based education programs hold promise for improving academic success of learners.

### Modern Educational Leadership

Leadership, second to classroom instruction, is the most influential characteristic in schools on student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The influence of educational leaders on student learning has been also reported in many other papers, research and books. The bibliography in this paper clearly shows the importance that effective leadership has on student learning. Leaders must always remember that what they do, every day and every minute, while in the presence of fellow leaders, parents, teachers and students, will determine the success of the school.

Covey (1990) includes the following principle-centered behaviors necessary for leader effectiveness: continually learn, be service-oriented, radiate positive energy, believe in other people, lead a balanced life, see life as an adventure, be synergistic, and exercise for self renewal (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). These behaviors are identified as necessary for effective educational leadership and school effectiveness. Leaders need to model learning by reading current educational journals and books and actively participate in school-sponsored professional development activities. They need to balance their personal and professional life so that there will be time to have fun and time to work. The effective leader should always be positive in all environments so that modeling will radiate energy.

Sergiovanni (2002) stated that the following principles facilitate teaching and learning; cooperation, empowerment, responsibility, accountability, meaningfulness, and ability-authority. Since educational leaders should always be teaching and learning, they need to follow principles that facilitate teaching and learning. Educational leaders must always be in the continuous learning mode so they can serve

as models in their educational institution. Leaders need to empower parents, staff and students and give them the responsibility while making them accountable for their actions.

Senge et al. (2002) provides an excellent field book for all who work in educational settings. The field book helps educational leaders apply the five disciplines and also sets out four competencies for educational leaders. The disciplines are:

- Personal mastery
- Shared vision
- Mental models
- Team learning
- Systems thinking

The competencies necessary for educational leaders are engagement = mobilize to tackle tough problems, systems thinking = recognize systems and find leverage, leading learning = all learn and lead, and self awareness = know impact on people and systems. When applied on a daily basis, the competencies will increase teaching and learning at educational institutions. The field book provides contextual factors that the educational leaders must keep in mind when leading. The community characteristics in which the school resides need to be studied and analyzed in order to understand the many communities within the community.

Murphy (2001) contended that preparation of school leaders was not driven by education or leadership. He provided the following qualities for education leaders: an understanding of caring and humanistic concerns as a key to effective leadership, knowledge of the transformational and change dynamics of the superintendency, an appreciation of the collegial and collaborative foundations of school administration, and an emphasis on the ethical and reflective dimensions of leadership. These new qualities were developed into standards for school leaders by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (1996). The specific standards are:

1. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
2. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture.
3. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Educational leaders have to be ethical. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) reviewed numerous ethical questions and behaviors for educational leaders. Zubay & Soltis (2005) used case studies to raise various ethical questions facing educational leaders. They were able to raise issues that educational administrators confront every day. Issues such as cheating, racial and sexual orientation discrimination, and rumors were some of the ethical problems discussed in the case studies. The four ethical necessities for human beings proposed by the Dali Lama (1999) also relate to educational leadership. They are empathy, restraint, fortitude, and compassion. School leaders need to be well grounded in personal and community ethics. The four ethical necessities are: empathy = the supreme emotion, restraint = habit of

inner discipline, fortitude, and compassion.

Hunter (1998) states that the true essence of leadership includes listening and accomplishing tasks while building relationships. Monroe (1997) provides educational leadership lessons. The lessons provide additional skills and competencies that should be reviewed in order to formulate effective educational leadership. Some of the lessons include working from the heart, having a positive attitude, persevering, being an idealist in a less than ideal world, teaching and learning, and working toward making things new.

Kouzes & Posner ((2002) report on five practices necessary for effective educational leadership. The practices are model the way = model behaviors they expect of others, inspire a shared vision = what could be, challenge the process = innovate grow and improve, enable others to act = foster collaboration and build trust, and encourage the heart = carry on dramatic gestures or simple actions.

Deal & Peterson (1999) suggest there are symbolic roles that educational leaders must perform in order to be effective. The symbolic roles are:

- Historian: probe the past to give meaning to present
- Anthropological sleuth: look for present rituals and values
- Visionary: picture of positive future
- Potter: shape school culture
- Poet: communicate with language
- Healer: healing wounds during transitions

These symbolic roles would create an educational environment that would focus on teaching and learning. The leader would jump from role to role dependent on the specific situation. When transforming school cultures, Stolp & Smith (1995) report that a leader is a cultural leader. The effective educational leader must be a designer, teacher, and steward. The leader must design from within using available resources, modelling effective teaching strategies, and being a protector of the sacred children.

The Jossey-Bass *Reader on Education Leadership* (2000) is an excel-

lent resource for educational leaders. The book is a collection of 30 authors including Deming, Evans, Gardner, Glasser, and Lieberman. Each chapter provides a framework for educational leaderships. Some topics include leadership, management and organizational behavior, moral leadership, and shared leadership.

Connors (2000) contends, “successful schools only survive when there are successful administrators leading the way” (p. 12). The book provides specific characteristics of a well-adjusted leader. The characteristics are:

- Ability to care and be concerned for others
- Desire to be successful
- Ability to handle stress
- General feeling of good health
- Ability to think logically
- Ability to have fun

Connors (2000) also stated that great educational leaders use teachers as resources to serve as solution finders to provide feedback, to spread the good word, to share their talents, and to provide support.

McEwan (2003) identified seven effective steps for educational leaders:

- Establish, implement and achieve academic standards
- Be an instructional resource for your staff
- Create a school culture and climate conducive to learning
- Communicate the vision and mission of your school
- Set high expectations for your staff and yourself
- Develop teacher leaders
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with students, staff and parents

Keeping these seven steps in the forefront of an educational leader's every day life would insure a focus on teaching and learning.

## Contextual Factors to Consider

Effective educational leaders must create a school environment that insures a safe and orderly environment. Effective leadership includes insuring that educational institutions are conducive to learning and teaching. Lezotte and McKee (2002) contend that effective schools research included instructional leadership as a key correlate within the context of continuous school improvement. Other correlates included a clear mission, focus on teaching and learning, availability of resources, frequent monitoring of staff and student success, and having a safe and secure environment. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1992) stated the following characteristics as necessary for school change: be visionary, remember schools are for learning, value human resources, communicate and listen, be proactive, and take risks. The Council for Exceptional Children (1994) identified specific leadership characteristics necessary in order for a school to be inclusive for children with handicapping conditions. Effective educational leaders should create an environment so that children with handicapping conditions are safe and secure. The school characteristics necessary for inclusion included having a common vision and a sense of community, site based authority, shared leadership, scheduling planning time, staff development, and redeploing resources.

A review of literature by Hoachlander, Alt, and Beltranena (2001) provides leaders with guidance on school improvement strategies that work. The strategies included raising the bar: higher achievement standards for all students, increased student engagement and motivation, and focused sustained professional development. The review also reported that if school leaders also build linkages with parents and staff, there will be positive school success.

Barth (1990) stated students, parents, teachers, principals are/ could be the community of leaders. The human resources involved in education can be the leaders. He (2003) later identified his own cruising and working rules, as well as his norms of personal behavior for

effective educational leaders. One of his norms of personal behavior is when a party is talking, do not interrupt, and pay attention.

Fullan (2001) states that when change happens, leaders can be the positive change agents and influence the change process. He reports that there are key roles that effective leaders need to use during the change process. The roles are to have a moral purpose, understand change, develop relationships, be a knowledge builder, and facilitate coherence making. When leaders change, an effective educational leader should define the desired results, and then grow people and processes to ensure those results (Martin and Mutchler, 2003).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper discusses the research framework of these two questions:

1. What are the characteristics of effective leaders in rural and reservation schools and communities serving AI/AN children, including early childhood and K-12 programs?
2. What are the key contextual factors leaders should consider and how do tribal languages and cultures influence leadership?

It is well documented that effective educational leadership has a monumental influence on teaching and learning regardless of environment. Whether at home or in a formal educational setting, the leaders set the tone and direction of the family or educational institution. It does not matter if the institution is a Head Start program, an elementary or secondary school, or a college or university, the educational leaders need to prepare learners (sacred children) to be good family and community leaders.

The characteristics of effective leaders have been researched for many years and there appears to be accepted standards for school leaders. There are specific knowledge, skills, and attributes that educational leaders must have in order to be successful. The current focus on accountability requires school leaders to always remember

the primary purpose of schooling is teaching and learning. The effective leaders must also be aware of the environment in which they practice. These contextual factors should be in the forefront, every minute, in order to survive and thrive in AI/AN communities.

The leaders now and in the future, in communities that serve AI/AN learners, must be well-versed in oral tradition (speaking and listening), seek visions (be a strategic visionary), gather the goods (use all available resources), and always think family first (be a community builder). These essential skills are based on my own review of the literature and over 25 years of leadership life with American Indians and Alaska Natives. Each of these essential skills necessary for leadership success is discussed in more detail:

1. To seek visions (be a strategic visionary), educational leaders in AI/AN communities need to have a clear and focused personal vision of leading, teaching and learning. The formulation of a vision takes years of seeking what is near and dear to a leader's heart. The vision should be values based and the values must be congruent with AI/AN values. The leader must also be able to help educational institutions and communities seek their collective vision and mission. Guiding all communities to a collective vision and mission will increase the likelihood of school success. Once the collective vision and mission are formulated then the task of developing and guiding a continuous strategic plan are essential. The basic part of a quality plan includes collecting and analyzing data, formulating specific objectives, designing actions or activities, evaluating the success of the plan, and then beginning the process again.
2. To use oral tradition (speaking and listening combined with reading and writing), leaders must be able to communicate their vision of teaching and learning as well as the mission and vision of the institution they are leading. Oral tradition in a modern bilingual/bicultural society means having the ability to speak, listen, write, and read. The necessity to speak well is an important presentation skill not only before parents, teach-

ers, and students but also on the phone, before tribal, federal and state legislators, and community organizations. The leader must also be a good listener. Gathering information by listening is an excellent data solicitation skill. The analysis of oral information is necessary so that leaders can access information from others who may not be able to communicate by using the written word. The skill of writing is changing so that it is now more important to be able to write and edit text on computers and other text storage devices than it is to have good penmanship. It may even be necessary to learn voice recognition software so that leaders will be able to use oral tradition and technology at the same time. The ability to read and keep up with current education research is necessary so that leaders will know the latest leading, teaching and learning strategies. Leaders must have quality speaking, listening, writing and reading skills.

3. To gather the goods (use all available resources), educational leaders and AI/AN communities must always gather the best human and material resources necessary to guide schools and communities toward a collective vision and mission. Leaders must always seek the best available human resources. In AI/AN communities it is beneficial to seek AI/AN human resources. An educational leader must support a learning community within the AI/AN communities. The adults of a learning community are always learning, which provides young learners with models.
4. To place family first (be community builders), educational leaders must develop a sense of family within AI/AN communities. All in the community must believe that the sacred young learners are children to all the adults of the community. When the whole community believes in the sacredness of children then all will want to work toward the collective vision and mission.

The key contextual factors effective leaders in AI/AN communities need to consider are bilingualism, biculturalism, extended family

involvement, community partnership, and positive tribal identity. Communities on AI/AN lands are diverse in language and culture. There are many families that practice traditional culture, others that practice a mix of traditional and modern traditional culture and others that practice modern culture. The effective leader must be aware of the individual and collective cultures of the people they serve. The success of leadership includes the ability to rally the community to a common vision and mission. The leaders of today need to rally all cultures of the families to a common culture of the school. Leaders must get all extended families involved in the sacred learners' educational community. The sacred learners need to feel that they are an important part of the educational community and the tribal community.

The common leadership threads between past and present, and both AI/AN cultures and other cultures of the world, need to be further analyzed. The combined skills of leading, teaching, and learning are essential so that educational leaders in AI/AN educational communities can be the best that they can be in this bilingual/bicultural world. Leaders in AI/AN communities must have specific knowledge, skills and attributes and be able to know when to use which skills within the context of leading, teaching and learning.

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