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When leadership and vision fail: The dismantling of a School-Based Family Counseling leadership program

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This article describes the development at a major California university of a successful School Counseling and Administrative Leadership program. This was an integrated School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC) Masters of Science Degree (MS) leading to a School Counseling Credential and an Administrative Services Credential (School Administration). The program, which began in 1990, lasted for over 17 years with many graduates being hired for school leadership roles, typically as Deans of Students, Assistant Principals or even Principals of schools. In many instances, these candidates were hired prior to completion of their program, as they were seen as highly capable of handling difficult challenges found in urban, economically disadvantaged and highly diverse environments. However, after an administrative decision restructuring the Division in which the program's department was housed, the program was discontinued. The article describes the political and professional barriers that brought about this dismantling and discusses the implications for SBFC programs and educational practice.

Keywords: School-Based Family Counseling, leadership, public education, school-based family services

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Introduction

This invited article is based on the author's extensive experience as a practitioner, professor and student/follower of those who preceded him, and who spoke more eloquently about their passion for a just and caring society; a society that values human worth and human potential. Specifically, this article owes its foundation to an article published in the Journal for a Just and Caring Education (Soriano & Hong, 1997), titled, "School-based family services: Administrative leadership for a caring model of effective education" and co-authored with Dr. George Hong. Although the thrust of what was requested of the author was to outline the results of a "dismantled program" at California State University, Los Angeles, it is my hope not to

lament, but rather to inspire those who may follow in my footsteps into action, in order to promote a more just model of education, one that values human experience and human worth and potential. For indeed it does no good, and it may actually cause harm, to lament a program's passing; rather it is more helpful to seize upon the evidence of our collective learning experience and continue on our journey to promote programs that demonstrate evidence of success. Before launching into the dismantling of a program, let me briefly lay the foundation of what may be called a just and caring education.

A major challenge to traditional American values has been confronted during the last two decades and is already affecting public education. This challenge is framed by the current discussion that is taking place in Congress about the role of government in a democratic society and its responsibility in providing basic health care for children, senior citizens and families (King, 2017; Donovan, Steinberg & Savin, 1994). Furthermore, while health care reform is being proposed as a way to cut expenses at the national level by shifting responsibility to the local communities, managed care is capping and reducing services at the local community level, thereby leaving gaping holes in health care. Lawson (1994) therefore rightfully asks "What are the constitutional rights of children and their families?" (p.62). Moreover, school administrators are increasingly challenged by many problems affecting the school's ability to educate children. Confronted with diminishing resources, schools are being called upon to respond to a growing variety of needs among their students, such as physical and emotional security, nutrition, guidance and support, and the availability of culturally appropriate, positive role models. These needs are traditionally met in the context of the family. However, the composition and viability of the contemporary American family has been rapidly changing, and many families are no longer able to provide adequate resource for their children (Angier, 2013; Lambie & Daniels-Mohring, 1993; Melaville & Blank, 1991, 1993). Schools have more and more students who are being raised by single parents, foster parents, grandparents, or other adult caregivers (Blankenhorn, Bayme & Elshtain, 1990; Krogstad, 2014; Simeonson, 1994; Soriano, Soriano & Jimenez, 1994).

Also, more students are coming to our schools from families facing multiple challenges, including those presented by adolescents who have not quite left their own childhood and yet are parents themselves. As a result of these confounding family conditions, many children are not able to benefit from the school's academic instruction and may even be exhibiting other emotional and behavioral problems, including gang violence, drug use, truancy, and early school termination (Fine & Carlson, 1992; Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004; Simeonsson, 1994; Soriano & Hong, 1995). In turn, educators are often implicated as being ineffective, and school environments are often seen as eroding and comparatively volatile (Edelman & Taylor, 1993; Dear, 1995; Foster, Rollefson, Doksum, Noonan, Robinson, & Teich, 2005). Instead of being the "little red school house" that evokes a feeling of warmth, security, and coziness, many schools today present children with an environment that is cold and impersonal. Schools have frequently become fortress-like institutions, with teachers acting more like prison guards than caring, nurturing educators (Weiner, Zahn & Sagi, 1990).

The change in the image of public education, especially among those outside the "guild" who see a different paradigm for schools, has led to a growing interest in school reform (Payne, 2008; Soriano & Hong, 1995). Many innovative approaches to school reform have been

proposed (David, 1991; Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003; Sizer, 1991; Steflovich, 1993). The general consensus in the literature at the end of the 20th century was that schools must be ready to step beyond their traditional position of solely focusing on academic skills, and move toward a more encompassing social service orientation (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Benard, 1991; Dryfoos, 1994). In that context, the model of school-based family services has been found to be a caring, effective and cost-efficient approach to this complex situation. Moreover, the changing paradigm for schools has been paralleled by a change in demographics in the United States, as well as dramatic changes in health-care with the advent of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, signed into law by President Barack Obama. In the end, these confounding streams of societal change would indicate the need to embrace a new paradigm for the teaching, modeling and preparing of school leaders and counselors who would be able to envision the new paradigm for schools. Indeed, this took place in several institutions, including the University of San Francisco and California State University, Los Angeles. In order to further explain the myopic nature of the current paradigm for education, let me more explicitly define the rationale for a shift in paradigms for education and social services.

Rationale for school-based family services

The complexity of issues faced by schools is often a reflection of problems in the general society (Dear, 1995; Soriano et al., 1994; Weiner et al., 1990). Many of the problems exhibited by students are actually extensions of problems in their families and communities. For example, students who engage in aggressive behavior, drug abuse, or sexual acting out are likely to conduct themselves in the same manner whether or not they are in school (Soriano & Gerrard, 2013). In fact, many of these problems are caused by factors outside the school setting. For another example, children who are exposed to inappropriate role models at home or in the community, such as drug abusers or street gang members, are more likely to become involved in these behaviors (Dear, 1995). Children from families with multiple challenges or from homes with inadequate supervision are more likely to manifest emotional problems or to become disengaged from the academic process (Blankenhorn et al., 1990; Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, Bates, Crozier, & Kaplow, 2002; Soriano, 1995). Moreover, it is not simply the schools that seek better ways of reaching and serving at-risk youth and their families. Faced with funding reductions and other barriers for reaching at-risk children and families, other social service professionals are discovering the centrality of schools as vehicles for reaching them. For example, at its recent annual meeting, the American Psychological Association outlined its plans for bridging psychology and the schools in its document “Schools as health service delivery sites: Historical, current and future roles for psychology” (Bricklin et al., 1995). In 2006 the American Psychological Association formed the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, which includes representatives from 14 APA divisions (American Psychological Association, 2006). Given the inextricable relationship between the school, the family and the community, it is clear that no single institution has the resources or the capacity to address these complex problems alone (Foster et al., 2005; Guthrie & Guthrie, 1991; Melville & Blank, 1993). As a result, collaboration among schools and other public agencies is becoming increasingly crucial. So is the need for visionary leaders who can embrace the new paradigm for training, supervising and mentoring these paradigm pioneers.

There are several important advantages to the school-based family services model. First, when services are brought to the school, they can be easily coordinated and monitored. This

avoids duplication of services when different providers are working with the same child or family. It also helps to provide for a more streamlined and effective services plan. Second, when services are wrapped around the child and family's needs, gaps in service can be readily identified and addressed. Third, when multiple services are provided at the school site, children and families do not have to go from agency to agency for help. This convenience makes it more likely for them to follow through with referrals. Indeed with regard to mental health, more and more culturally appropriate community-based organizations concerned about underserved groups find schools an ideal place to develop pro-family systems of care that are culturally congruent (Hong, 1995; Soriano, 1995; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Thus school-based family services models also make services more accessible to children and their families. Finally, school-based integrated services are cost-effective. For example, considerable savings in administration, record maintenance and case supervision were found in California's Healthy Start Program, a model of school-based family services involving mental health, social services and preventive medical care (Bookmyer & Niebuhr, 2011; Melaville & Blank, 1991; New Beginnings, 1990). In sum, school-based family services emphasize the importance of taking a holistic, pro-family approach to helping children. Instead of fragmenting services into different areas such as academic, mental health and social services, and then parceling them to various agencies outside the school, these agencies collaborate within the school to provide those services needed. Rather than limiting its focus to the child, this model extends assistance to the family, especially parents, which in turn helps the child and the school. This is a new paradigm. Instead of a bureaucratic and insular system for delivery of instruction, the school-based family services mode is a caring, compassionate and comprehensive approach to education.

Dismantling the new paradigm: Keeping the “silo” model

The new paradigm of “full service schools” grew from one or two states developing and implementing these programs, to a variety of diverse programs that maintained the fundamental principle of identifying and serving the needs of children and their families (Campbell-Allen, Shah, Sullender, & Zazove, 2009). However, what was missing and became the demise or dismantling of a promising paradigm was the failure by training institutions to embrace the new paradigm. Doing so would have required that faculty training the diverse professionals engage in team-teaching experiences where each professional learns from the other; the counselor and school administrator sharing perspectives, research from their own disciplines, and developing a familiarity with each profession's contributions to meeting the needs of families. Instead, what continued is the traditional “silo” model of separate disciplines training their own professionals with no knowledge or exposure to the training of the others (Paul & Peterson, 2001; Tett, 2015).

In order to place this collective learning into perspective, it may be helpful to describe what was dismantled after a long history of success during the zeitgeist of school reform in the 1980s and 1990s at California State University, Los Angeles. This was the period during which Hillary Rodham Clinton published her book, “It Takes a Village” (1996) based on the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child”. This clearly falls into the zeitgeist of a societal realization that the problems challenging the raising of children require a visionary collaboration of leaders who understand the needs of children and families in a changing and challenging society. This was a time when researchers with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) discovered contributing causes of school violence. The multidisciplinary team found that the causes of school violence stated in its final report were multifaceted, as were the possible

solutions. Simply said, the CCTC Panel concluded that "...the problems in the schools are but a reflection of the problems in society; and the solution to those problems requires collaboration among all stakeholders, including schools, parents, social service agencies, mental health agencies, government and businesses organizations, among others" (Dear, 1995). Finally, this was a time when strong evidence of early intervention through the Healthy Start Program showed positive results, despite strong challenges from those who felt the business of schools should stop with the "three R's". However, let us proceed with the account of a dismantled SBFC leadership program.

During the 1989-90 academic year I was recruited to accept a joint appointment at California State University, Los Angeles, teaching both School-Based Family Counseling courses and school administration/leadership courses for students interested in an innovative Masters Degree of Science, with an optional emphasis on School Counseling Leadership. The SBFC program was the first such master's degree program in the USA (Carter & Hernandez, 2013). This integrated SBFC/leadership program seemed to approach my vision of an ideal school leader who holds strong values in social justice, as well as the core values of humanistic education that truly believes that all children can learn, given an opportunity to do so. Having been a practitioner as a school counselor, site administrator and district level administrator, I envisioned this appointment to lead a combined leadership program in SBFC and school administration to be the golden opportunity of a lifetime. It promised to help realize my vision of school leaders who would help eliminate barriers to student achievement through collaboration with families and others. The decision to take on this challenge during the time when the Healthy Start collaborative movement was taking place in California with impressive results was also helpful. Nationally, collaborative one-stop shopping centers were established in many states with impressive results on student health and wellness and academic achievement.

The result was that I did accept the challenge and in 1990 became the faculty coordinator of the Combined Option in SBFC and Leadership. My peers and supervisors in both departments afforded me strong support. This included the Co-chairs of the School Administrative Leadership Program, Drs. Randall Lindsey and Carol Sweeney, as well as the support from Dr. Ray Hillis from the Counseling Department where the SBFC program was housed. As a core faculty in both departments, I taught foundation courses in both programs. The result was a blending of highly competent SBFC "leaders" and compassionate "administrators" who saw the needs of children and families, as well as the rationale for needed changes in institutions and society. These graduates saw a new paradigm for school leaders. Graduates from this program quickly gained visibility as highly capable, humane and effective leaders in the schools. They were frequently hired before completion of their program's coursework and hired as assistant principals, deans of students and often as principals. As a faculty in both, School Administration and Counseling, I taught courses and team-taught with faculty in other disciplines such as child development, organizational change and parenting education. I attended both faculty meetings and shared with each group my excitement about the new paradigm, which also won a significant grant for SBFC program development and implementation, which we called Mission Possible. However, this was not to last.

Early in the 1997-98 academic year, a new College of Education dean was appointed by the university president. This dean lacked vision, and followed the old paradigm of school

administrator education and training. The dean dismantled the Combined School Counseling and Leadership program by moving the Counseling Department from its Division of Administration and Counseling to a new Division of Special Education and Counseling. This was done with no consultation with faculty! The dean's rationale was to place school administration training within a proposed new doctoral program. Counseling faculty felt that the Counseling Department was farmed out to the Division of Special Education and Counseling, sealing the permanent divorce of school administration leaders from leaders in the counseling profession. It is my belief that the dean's decision was interpreted by the administration faculty to mean that counseling was not relevant to enable effective schools. The Combined Option ended in 2007, soon after it was voted by the new Division of Educational Leadership to be eliminated, as faculty in school administration did not feel comfortable with the new paradigm.

Joel Barker, a futurist and historian of social change, says that paradigm pioneers are those who ask the fundamental questions such as "what is the best way to solve a particular problem". In other words, what is the best way to help children achieve academically when they are homeless, hungry, the victim of neglect, in sheer poverty or with health problems? Better testing, better teachers, or more accountability alone are ill guided. The new paradigm for effective schools is one that defines schools as the place to meet all needs of children and families. The question is why don't leaders see this vision of schooling? Why are leaders wedded to the old paradigm of a school leader as one who administers and supervises teachers within the old paradigm only to see more failure? Why are parents blamed, why are teachers blamed? The answer lies in what Barker calls paradigm paralysis; the old paradigm blinds them to other more effective possibilities of how educators and other professionals should be taught. The old paradigm requires them to be taught by experts and organizational systems, colleges, universities and guilds that use the old paradigm, which define how and by whom these professionals must be taught. I refer to this model as the silo model of education. Teachers are taught by master teachers, administrators by master administrators, counselors by counselors, psychologists by psychologists, social workers by social workers, etc. Each professional master is equipped with a set of blinders that prevent him or her from seeing anything possibilities beyond those provided by the old paradigm, by their craft or guild master. The result is a system that protects its vision of their craft and, when failure happens, blames the others.

Concluding Remarks

As a practitioner who now has retired from California State University, Los Angeles after more than thirty years of service, it gives me pause to think about the future in these times of rapid change in the healthcare industry, in education, and most importantly in the training of public school leaders and other professionals. While there are remnants of programs that are once again resurrecting school-based services, few educators appear to be posing the question as the new shift in paradigms approaches. This is the fundamental question, "what is the best way to address today's complex problems affecting children's optimal development?" Or the question, "how do we eliminate barriers to learning and promote family wellness?" The answers may challenge today's continuing silo model of training professionals. The new paradigm suggests envisioning professionals divorced from their guilds and instead being committed to a just, caring educational and social system that supports families through collaboration and system's thinking. A visionary leader is well aware that it takes the whole village to educate a child. School-based family services, such as SBFC programs, are a step in this direction. The model

recognizes the link between a healthy community and a school full of healthy learners. Most importantly, at a time of emphasis on evidence-based decision-making and limited resources, a shift in paradigms away from the silo model may be necessary as a way to usher in a new collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to services.

In the meantime, the silo model in higher education continues to produce professionals wedded to their individual guild, or to their narrow vision of teaching and learning. For health care professionals, their narrow vision of helping lies in treating symptoms, not the root cause of the child or family's complex problems. Psychologists continue to be taught by psychologists, school administrators are taught by school administrators, teachers by master teachers, social workers by social workers, each with their freshly issued set of blinders that narrow their vision. Nonetheless, I remain a diehard optimist hoping that the swinging paradigm will shift and force us to once and for all pose the question, "how do we best train professionals with passion and vision?" How do we produce strong collaborators who understand and value each profession's potential contributions for solving complex problems, and who are more interested in effective action rather than the orthodoxy of more of the same?

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