College: The Undergraduate Experience in America

Susan Day Harmison

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to a better job. All saw their move as a departure from a low prestige district to one with higher prestige.

Discussion and Implications

Turnover appears to be a constant feature of the Nebraska school landscape and it may be a phenomenon on the increase. During 1987/88, Nebraska’s schools experienced 50 superintendent turnovers, a percentage of about 15%. Sixty-six percent of those leaving one superintendent district to another were in positions in Nebraska or other states. Eighteen percent retired. Two percent died and it was unknown what happened to the remaining 14%. These turnovers continued to be concentrated in small, rural, isolated schools in dying communities.

American society grows more stratified and economically segregated (Martin, 1988). School districts are not outside these societal changes. Thus, in terms of wealth and stability, some school districts fare better than others. Policy makers need to face this reality and begin to redress the unequal distribution of resources that is manifested in differential turnover rates of superintendents.

More information is needed about superintendent turnover and its causes. When top school management changes, the ability of school leaders to provide a nurturing environment for educational programs is compromised. This is not to say that management should not change. However, some degree of organizational stability is necessary for schools to function. High superintendent turnover is a symptom that the local school organization lacks direction and future orientation.

This study explored turnover and its implications only in a rural context. While the investigators did not empirically contrast the rural districts and superintendents of this study with other districts and superintendents, there is reason to expect unique differences in rural areas. Too often, state and national policy studies are directed at schools regardless of local environment and organizational conditions. Such approaches miss critical distinctions.

References


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Statistics and facts about Nebraska schools: 1979/80-1985/86. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Department of Education.

Book Review


In the four years since the National Commission on Excellence in Education appeared on the scene with A Nation at Risk, America’s have exhibited an increased interest in the state of education, its function, its successes, and ultimately its failures. While the focus has shifted from the rudiments of elementary education to the preparatory service of secondary instruction, the interest has far from abated. Now, with texts such as Cultural Literacy by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind topping the non-fiction bestseller lists, the examination of this nation’s institutions of higher education is at hand.

The most recent study by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is detailed in College: The Undergraduate Experience in America by Ernest L. Boyer. A companion to High School: A Report on Secondary School in America, the current text explores the next step on the continuum of knowledge, baccalaureate education. Focusing on eight primary problems identified by the Carnegie group as undermining the success of higher education, Boyer examines each not only from the standpoint of the individual, but likewise endeavors to analyze the implication of the insufficiency of knowledge will have on the nation and world in which we live. While the unearthing of problems in colleges and universities is obligatory in any such analysis, it is perhaps Boyer’s attention to the role the college graduate will play in society that sets this study apart from the rest. What is college doing to prepare students for democratic leadership? Are steps being taken to bridge the gap between public policy and public understanding? Does graduate understand and appreciate the dignity of work? To Boyer the dual traditions of individuality and community in higher education must work in harmony:

“Colleges... should help students become independent, self-reliant human beings, yet they should also give priority to community... To serve private priorities while neglecting social obligations is, ultimately, to undermine self-interest.”

With this study and the resulting analysis, Boyer and the members of The Carnegie Foundation call for a reduction of the depersonalization of the college experience. As the university setting is ideally to represent society at large, effort must be made to reduce the distancing of the student from his world. To meet the needs of the global community, that which is learned must be applicable to “human ends.”

The philosophical nature of this inquiry makes Boyer’s text both readable and thought-provoking. While intended as a guidebook for American higher education, the tenets set forth by this study are no less relevant to institutions of higher learning throughout the world.

Reviewed by Susan Day Harmison
Book Review Editor

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