



Ray Budde and the origins of the 'Charter Concept'

By Ted Kolderie

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When Ray Budde recently died, the news made the New York Times. This is not easy to do. The Times obituary page is reserved for people of special interest and of significant accomplishment. Susan Saulny, who covers education, wrote the story. It was reprinted elsewhere. On the West Coast, National Public Radio did an interview about it. So this was pretty special for the charter idea.

All the attention given to Ray Budde's passing did puzzle people, especially younger education policy leaders and charter movement leaders. "Who was Ray Budde? What did he have to do with chartering?"

It's an interesting story, important for what it says about the way ideas begin and spread and about the way movements grow and develop. And it helps to explain where the charter idea began, how it has evolved over time and where it may yet be headed.

BUDDE'S IDEAS AROUND CHARTERING FIRST APPEARED IN 1974

Ray Budde said he'd always had a strong interest in "the way things are organized" and in "how things work or don't work in organizations". He'd been a teacher, then a junior high principal in East Lansing MI. In the late 1960s he was teaching educational administration at the University of Massachusetts when the dean reorganized its school of education. He was interested in organizational theory, and in 1974 presented the Society for General Systems Research some ideas for the reorganization of school districts in a paper he titled "**Education by Charter**".

As he told the story many years later in a piece he wrote for The Kappan (September 1996) he asked colleagues and friends: "Does this make sense? Is it workable? Would a district be willing to give it a try?"

The response? Zero. Nobody thought there was a problem significant enough to require such a restructuring. The attitude then was: Get a good new pro-

gram idea, do some in-service training. That'll do it. So Budde put the idea away and went on to other things.

Then came the 1980s: The **Nation At Risk** report and all the media attention and the Carnegie Forum report that followed. Suddenly everyone was talking 'restructuring'. So Ray dusted off his paper and in early 1988 got it published by the Northeast Regional Lab. He sent it around widely; even to then-President George H.W. Bush. Then he waited. And waited.

One Sunday in July Budde's wife Priscilla put down the newspaper and said: "Hey, Ray, you've made the New York Times!" And she showed him the column reporting the American Federation of Teachers' support for the idea of teachers setting up autonomous schools. AFT President Al Shanker had in fact floated the proposal in a talk at the National Press Club in the spring of that year. He said Ray Budde had the best name for these schools: "charter schools."

BUDDE'S IDEAS EXPANDED UPON BY AL SHANKER, THEN JUMP TO MINNESOTA

Ray Budde's proposal was actually for a restructuring of the *district*: for moving from "a four-level line and staff organization" to "a two-level form in which groups of teachers would receive educational charters directly from the school board" and would carry the responsibility for instruction. It dealt with existing schools. It was the concept that Paul Hill later called the 'contract district'; that the Education Commission of the States later termed the 'all-charter district'.

Shanker expanded on this idea by proposing that teachers start schools *new* (though within existing school buildings). But like Budde, Shanker simply put his idea out there; did not move to implement it.

But, it didn't take long after Shanker's talk for implementation to begin in Minnesota. A study committee of the Citizens League, chaired by John Rollwagen,

then CEO of Cray Research, soon picked up the idea that summer and fall. It further modified the concepts advanced by Budde and Shanker, envisioning a framework of state policy and the possibility of schools being authorized by the state as well as by a local board.

The League had a plan fairly well thought out by October 1988 when the Minneapolis Foundation brought Al Shanker to Minnesota for The Itasca Seminar. Two legislators present - Sen. Ember Reichgott and Rep. Ken Nelson - picked up the idea and, as legislators are wont to do, began thinking about legislation.

Sen. Reichgott's charter provision got into the Senate omnibus bill in 1989 and again in 1990. The House would not accept it. As the conference committee was breaking up in 1990 Rep. Becky Kelso went over to Reichgott and said, "If you'd like to try that charter program again next year I'd like to help you". And in 1991 Kelso and Nelson did get a - compromised - version through the House. The Senate agreed. Gov. Arne Carlson signed it into law.

Interestingly, in today's highly partisan environment – both in Minnesota and nationally – Reichgott, Nelson and Kelso were all Democrats; Carlson, a Republican, picked up on the public school choice initiatives advanced by his Democratic predecessor, Rudy Perpich, in the mid-to-late 1980s.

In 1992, California enacted a chartering program, in a somewhat different form. In 1993 six more states acted, introducing more variations on the original idea, including non-district authorizers (Michigan and Massachusetts) and a state-level appeal (Colorado).

In 1991, Minnesota's U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger, a Republican, brought the charter idea to Washington, joining forces with Connecticut's Democratic U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman to introduce what became the Federal charter school grant program. That legislation, adopted in 1994 with strong support from the Clinton Administration, added further encouragement to states to pass and implement charter laws.

Through the 1990s the concept continued to evolve through new and amended laws in the states, including significant expansions on the original law adopted almost every year in Minnesota. Like LINUX, chartering helped create an 'open system' continually changed and improved by all those working on it.

BUDDE CAME TO ACCEPT AND SUPPORT EXPANSIONS ON HIS ORIGINAL IDEAS

As the new-schools idea spread, people asked Ray Budde how he felt about what had happened with his idea. For some years he would say: "This is not what I originally had in mind".

But by the time of his 1996 Kappan article his feelings had changed. "There are more powerful dynamics at work in creating a whole new school than in simply restructuring a department or starting a new program", he wrote. He saw that the states were creating an expanding movement "challenging the traditional form of organization of the local school district". Which of course was what he originally had in mind.

Ray Budde continued to hope the decentralized model would come to be used by districts, too; felt this was important to revitalizing district public education. Call it chartering or site-management, there is "a necessity of placing more decision-making at the school level, close to the classrooms", he wrote. He went on to note, "The charter schools movement was, indeed, the catalyst that brought about my writing '**Strength-en School-based Management by Chartering All Schools**'. " That book was published in 1996.

Ray Budde had come to believe, he wrote me in 1992, that "there has to be a formal/legal change that would . . . remove power from most central office positions and flow funds directly to schools" and that these changes would have to be "grounded in state law".

The last letter I have from him came in January 1998, attaching "my second-to-last effort in education reform". Its 17 "Action Areas" urged continued transfer of real authority to schools, smaller schools, and the transfer of instructional responsibility to groups of teachers.

The 25-year body of work by this obscure teacher/administrator in New England was strikingly prescient. He saw clearly the limitation of, the essentially conservatism and defensiveness of, all organizations. Unusually and importantly, he was open-minded enough to accept – even champion – the changes and improvements in the concept that were made later by others.

This whole story is testimony to the usefulness of having people who think, creatively, about problems and about solutions. And to the importance of changing the structure of organizations and institutions. Structure matters.

The story running through the 25 years also makes clear how complex are the origins of major change. Asking, "Where did it start?" is like asking where a river starts. You have to go upstream, where you probably will find no single source, but a variety of little streams flowing together as they run.

Ray Budde's work was one of those upstream sources. One of the earliest ones. One of those that weren't afraid to change course as they continued flowing downstream.

APPLICATIONS OF CHARTERING NOW RETURNING TO ITS 'TEACHER ORIGINS'

It's fascinating to watch the chartering concept now evolving in ways that return to the central role of teachers, so important to the early thinking of both Ray Budde and Al Shanker.

First in Minnesota and then in Milwaukee, teachers have been forming collegial partnerships, like those in other professional fields like medicine and law. The chartered school or (in Milwaukee) the board of education gives the teacher partnership the authority to organize the learning program of the school; the partnership in return accepts the responsibility for school and student success.

Like the charter concept itself, the idea of the teachers having responsibility for the school is 'a bumblebee'. All conventional option says the bumblebee cannot possibly fly. But it does. All conventional wisdom says schools must be run by administrators; says that the work of running the school would distract teachers from their instructional duties.

But as RAND found to its surprise in a recent study of chartered schools in Pennsylvania, those noninstructional duties apparently create a "sense of engagement" that in fact contributes to the success of student learning in the school.

The Milwaukee arrangement, in particular, accommodates the interests of board, teachers, parents and the union in a way I think would have delighted, and amazed, Albert Shanker. It simply took some time for the arrangement to evolve; some thinking, and some trying-things *new*.

Ray Budde's vision may yet be realized, in full, by those who follow and by those who now continue to expand and improve-upon his original good and sound ideas.