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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

In the classroom and in coaching we are able to affect certain groups of kids and hopefully touch their lives in a positive way. An administrator should be able to have an even greater impact on the school community and create a positive environment in which even more people will benefit. The greatest challenge will be to persuade people to make positive changes towards a common goal and vision. Rosalyn Carter in Maxwell (1994) said, "a leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they do not necessarily want to go, but ought to be." I want to be that kind of administrator.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

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Master of Arts in Education

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by

Troy E. Becker

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In the classroom and in coaching we are able to affect certain groups of kids and hopefully touch their lives in a positive way. An administrator should be able to have an even greater impact on the school community and create a positive environment in which even more people will benefit. My personal gift is the amount of energy I am able to put into things. Sometimes I feel limited by my role as a teacher and coach. Having gone through the administration program, I am even more convinced that as an administrator I could significantly impact the lives of students. It excites me to know that I can help students and staff to be successful by providing input and leadership.

As I have gone through the various courses in the program, I have been reflecting on my own educational beliefs. It is probably normal for someone to have concerns and apprehensions regarding a career change towards administration. For me, the greatest concern is the fact that I love what I am doing now and I am somewhat afraid to give it up. The reason I still consider the principalship is the thought that I can have an impact on an entire learning community. The experiences gained through the classes and practicum work have shown me that you can indeed make a very big difference as an administrator. Because of this, my concerns and apprehensions are starting to diminish.

I think the purpose of education is to help students develop attitudes and skills that will help them become lifelong learners. Education should help

students become people who are responsible and caring citizens. Wentzel (1993) points out that behaving in socially appropriate and responsible ways can be a strong indicator of academic achievement. It is important that we put students in the position where they will be able to become economically self-sufficient which in return will permit them to become contributing members of society instead of someone who relies on society for support. If we can do these things, then it will help develop character and help students have a high level of self-esteem.

<div align="center">Personal Characteristics</div>

Having a general understanding of your own personal values, beliefs, and purposes of education is a key for becoming a successful administrator. Through my upbringing, schooling, professional experiences, and knowledge obtained from the administration program, I have been able to establish a foundation from which I can make decisions. I am also more aware of what my philosophies are. According to Gorton (1991), "Administrative behavior results from two basic elements: institutional-role expectations, which emanate from the normative dimension of the organization, and individual personality and need dispositions, which together constitute the personal dimension" (p. 90).

In life, things are always changing, and in today's world of advanced technology it is more important than ever to be able to recognize that things change. There will be opposition to change, and in the process of creating change,

leaders have to be willing to be risk takers. In this way an administrator has to be a little daring because there is no guarantee that your change will be viewed positively by everyone.

As an administrator I must be assertive. I need to stick by attempts to change because some people are opposed to change and will want to do what has always been done. I also must be assertive in fighting for what I believe in and try to focus on what is right for the students.

I need to be humble as an administrator. I need to be humble enough to realize that there are other sides to issues and different opinions. I cannot assume that I am automatically right. If I am willing to be a good listener, I will discover that others have a lot to offer, and at the very worst they will help me strengthen my views.

With this in mind, it is important that I remember to keep an open mind to others and try to listen to their different ideas. Even when you think you are an expert on a subject, you may find that there are things you don't know. Closed-minded administrators are never able to gather all of the information because they foolishly assume that they are already right and have closed their minds to any other input.

It is important as an administrator to be able to identify the key issues facing the district and more importantly the individual school. If an administrator

does not have a clear understanding of what the issues are, obviously he/she will not be able to work toward addressing them. If some issues are left alone, they could cause the school system problems. Once you do identify the issues, then you need to be an effective problem solver to make decisions that will most benefit the school and more importantly the students.

After looking at some of the basic issues of the school system, I need to be able to identify objectives that will lead to school improvement. This can be done by first looking at what the school system's overall objectives are and then expanding on them for my individual assignment.

An administrator must then work in collaboration with the stakeholders to develop a plan of attack. A good strategic plan provides direction and gives people a road map by which to take the necessary steps of problem solving. The strategic plan guides you on what will be the best way to set goals.

After laying out a strategic plan the administrator should set up some very clear short term and long term goals. For me goals are very crucial. As a former athlete and now a coach, I have seen time and time again how goals can be effective in pursuing a desired outcome. Your goals must be realistic and obtainable. Also, a person's short-term goal should be set up to help them accomplish their long-term goals.

Once all of this is in place, the most important task presents itself, developing a team approach to making things happen. It is critical that an administrator be a team builder. We must be able to motivate individuals to work together to accomplish a common cause. To be successful at this, an administrator must be able to motivate different types of people. Even the greatest of ideas can fall through, if you cannot get your staff to buy into the idea or concept.

An administrator has to have a tremendous amount of integrity. We will be in position to be role models for students and staff. We need high personal standards and values that we live by. Our communities will give us a tremendous amount of trust, so it is important that we live up to that trust. For me individually, this falls under something that is very important to me and that is simply being a good Christian person. My personal faith and values from my upbringing as a Christian will serve as a foundation for doing what is right versus what we know is wrong.

As an administrator, I want to be a very positive role model within my community. As a member of the school system I want it to be obvious that I care deeply about children and their successes. But, I also want it to be clear that community issues are also important to me. I want to be able to represent the school system as a positive active influence in the community, someone who is

willing to help get things done for the benefit of all. An important aspect of this is to remember that my actions, either good or bad, will reflect upon the school system.

If I am to be an effective administrator, I must improve my ability to be a good listener. As an administrator I have to be patient enough to let people come into my office and vent some of their frustrations. I must be willing to listen to their problems and show by listening that I care, and that I want to help. People sometimes need nothing other than to simply talk about what is bothering them.

I need to be able to evaluate individuals fairly and provide constructive criticism when necessary. Administrators need to be very positive in the way they make suggestions to teachers. I do not want to attack someone who I feel is doing a poor job. I want to be able to give them suggestions in a positive manner that will hopefully encourage them to want to make the needed changes.

When I become an administrator, I need to remember that the staff is a group of professionals who have probably been very successful. It is all right to make some suggestions and to give some constructive criticism, but after that I need to be willing to step back and let them do their jobs. I have had administrators who have been control freaks. I personally believe that an effective administrator has to have the confidence to let people do things they are good at. I think by giving up more power I will actually become even more powerful in the

end as a leader. You need to give up power, to gain power (Sergiovanni, 1990). A good leader naturally has the ability to manage people. The key is not to try and over manage people.

An effective administrator has to have several important qualities and abilities. An administrator must be committed to improving the school, then have the courage to make decisions that will bring about the needed changes. Administrator's personal values must be above reproach, both in the school and in the community.

In this paper I will discuss a few of the areas that I think are important to the success of an administrator. Professional development, staff development, integration of technology, and shared decision making will be essential for me to be successful.

Professional Development

Professional growth should be an important concern for staff and anyone who wants to remain an effective leader. The principal serves as the instructional leader, giving the curriculum strength by encouraging teachers to take responsibility for their professional growth (McNeil, 1996). We need to frequently self evaluate ourselves. Things are constantly changing, and as life long learners, we must deal with constant change. By self-evaluating and trying to grow professionally, we will also be constantly reminding ourselves of the

essential qualities and beliefs that are important to us. With this in mind, it is important to establish a base to work from and compare to in the future.

Through the Professional Development course, I was able to complete the Life Styles Inventory (LSI). There were two parts to this inventory that needed to be completed. The first part involved distributing inventories to people who know you very well and in the second part of the inventory you respond to the questions while reflecting upon yourself. The LSI provides feedback in twelve different leadership areas. Evaluating the information gave me an opportunity to compare where I am to where others and I thought I was in each area. By using this instrument every few years an administrator should be able to reflect on where they are at and where they want to go. They can use the feedback and analysis from this self development guide as the foundation for examining areas that can help them focus on how to become a better person and administrator.

It is important that the principal lead by example with individual professional growth. Principals should participate themselves in instructional improvement activities and support such efforts by providing time, encouragement, and resources (McNeil, 1996). By diving into development activities the principal can demonstrate how important professional growth is to change.

A big part of professional growth will come through staff development. Professional development is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate development. It will require time, resources, and a long-term plan (Geiger, 1996).

Professional development can be addressed in many different ways. Some ways that are effective could include ongoing class work through higher education programs, the LSI inventory, personal reflection, reading of professional related literature and magazines, principal and teacher collaborative goal setting, conferences, workshops, and contact with an individual support network of peers. By addressing professional development in these ways teachers and administrators should be able to continue their individual growth and become or remain effective.

<div align="center">Staff Development</div>

Staff development plays a key role if schools want to remain on the leading edge of education (McNeil, 1996). New ideas and concepts help to keep teachers focused and energized. An effective administrator needs to motivate everyone to participate enthusiastically in staff development and to share in the goals and mission of the training. A shared vision of what good staff development programs look like should be established by both staff and staff

development planners (Grossnickle & Layne, 1991). A very important aspect of my personal strategic plan will involve staff development.

I believe an administrator's goal should be to create an environment in which growth, renewal, and improvement have a good chance to succeed. Our overall purpose of staff development should be to increase student learning. The purpose of staff development programs then should be to provide content in areas that promise increases in student learning and aptitude to learn (Joyce, Showers, & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1987). Staff development needs to be relevant to administrators, teachers, other school employees, and the district.

Staff development needs to give teachers a chance to further develop their teaching strategies and increase their knowledge in subject content. Staff development should be planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate development.

One method to foster staff development is to bring in experts in a particular field to give ideas and ask questions. People will gain knowledge and understanding through the dialogues and hopefully start to reflect and learn on the issue presented. It would be a double win situation if the expert can be found in the community. This would provide a source of local support and add another direct tie between the school and community.

In-service training can serve as a valuable tool for staff development. An effective program allows teachers time to practice the new skills that they have learned from best practice. Allowing teachers time to practice and receive feedback will increase their confidence and enhance the chance that they will utilize it in their classrooms.

Finally, the concept of inner and outer department sharing in staff development is appealing. When you work with others in your department it helps to foster a bond in the department. In the same way, working with other departments can help you meet those individuals and this helps lead to a school wide togetherness among the staff. Also, when you can share within the building you always have someone you can go to directly with questions or concerns.

Preparing Teachers to Utilize Technology in the Classroom

When discussing school leadership the term vision repeatedly comes up. I think that any school administrator today has to think of utilization of technology as a vital part of that vision. The need for students to have access to the latest technology has never been more pronounced than it is today. In the future, I think it will become even more of an emphasis.

Feenberg (1991) states, "...technology constitutes a new type of cultural system that restructures the whole social world as an object of control..." (p. 7). Feenberg suggested technology has become a directing influence on human

society. Muffoletto (1994) points out that technology in education does not only influence our daily life, but also opens the window of knowing the world.

There are various definitions of technology. The root word "technologia" was used by Greeks as the meaning for a scientific method for achieving a practical purpose or the totality of the means employed to provide objects necessary for human sustenance and comfort (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). According to Gentry (cited by Anglin, 1995), "technology is the systemic and systematic application of behavior and physical sciences concepts and other knowledge to the solution of problems" (p. 7). Technology also is, as Simon (1983) stated, "a rational discipline designed to assure the mastery of man over physical nature, through the application of scientifically determined laws" (p. 173). Technology is a way of thinking and acting (Muffoletto, 1994), which could reform any movement of human society, especially in education.

An effective administrator has to be willing to embrace technology and be willing to stay current with its many changes. If we do not utilize new technology, as it becomes available, then the students will suffer. As a life long learner, we will want to keep up on the latest technology. Technology will create positive change and can help all of us perform our jobs more efficiently. We also

must be aware that are jobs may change along with the development of new technology.

One of the challenges for principals is how to train staff on the utilization of technology as a learning tool. If use of technology is going to be successful, then a plan must be in place for how the school trains the teachers to use the new technology. The teachers will only utilize technology if they feel comfortable using it and see the value of its use. "Dollars spent training and equipping teachers will provide a return many times over" (Martinsen & Adams, 1993, p. 26).

Using staff within the school to conduct training shows that someone you know has already learned the technology and will be available to help. The training sessions can be good for staff morale and comradery. More people will utilize the technology when you know that the teacher next door is using it and is there to offer support. The process of learning technology within the school has provided me with an opportunity to get to know my colleagues better and learn from each other's mistakes. Also, by having people in the building it cuts down on the frustrations of having to wait for extended periods of time for answers.

A survey to determine staff needs in utilizing technology is a great first step. The summary would ask questions on what they already know and what it is they would like to see presented to the staff. This provides for shared decision

making and it will help the people in charge of technology training get a feel for the level of understanding on the staff.

Technology is constantly changing so the administrative plan has to be long range enough to account for the constant need of upgrading. "There must be an eye toward the future in meeting tomorrows needs..." (Sydow & Kirkpatrick, 1992, p. 32). A solid long-range plan recognizes that implementing technology is *an ongoing process, not a one-time matter of putting a computer in a classroom.* Kerry Johnson, Director of Educational Technology for the Poway Unified School District notes, "Often there is a perception that technology is an event, that it is something that happens at some (specific) time" (Wall, 1994, p. 45). The developed plan has to allow for the continued changes in technology and yet it must provide enough vision so that the benefits of technology can be planned for and utilized. People involved in the planning should not be limited in their thinking by what now is deployed or available. They need a vision for the use of technology in the schools and districts of tomorrow.

The one draw back with all of this technology is the amount of time and effort it takes to learn it all. Schools are exhausting their resources to get teachers the new equipment but they do not have any money left over for training. Therefore, teachers may spend a lot of time trying to figure out the technology themselves. This can be very frustrating and sometimes teachers will end up

spending hours figuring out the most basic operations. We might be better off spending a little less on equipment so we can have some money to utilize towards training. Some of our machines are not being utilized to their full potential because of the self training that is going on. Administrators need to put a great deal of effort into watching out for these problems and trying to find a way to deal with them.

Technology can be addressed with professional and staff development. But, I believe it is also important to establish a good technology plan for the building and district. At the high school level, I would want to form a group of leaders to serve as the technology committee for the school I am administrating. I would rely on this committee for suggestions and feedback to develop and provide the best technology plan possible.

The benefits of technology have never been clearer. We must make sure that educational methodology integrates technology into the teaching of our students. The future in education demands that we provide students with the ability to manage the technologies of tomorrow. Some may feel that technology is a luxury and it is not. It has become a necessity.

School-Based Management Utilizing Shared Decision Making

There is now a strong push towards shared decision making in leadership. A collegial relationship with staff will provide them with ownership in the

decision making process. School-based management can be a very important

component for achieving shared decision-making. Sergiovanni (1990) notes you

need to give up power, to gain power. Decisions are made best by the individuals

who are affected by them (White, 1989). It also will provide the principal with

valuable input for decision making. It is important that all members of group feel

as though they can be a leader. In Maxwell (1994) Ralph Nader states, "I start

with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders not

more followers" (p. 22).

The main focus should be thinking in terms of empowerment. Principals

need to make individuals feel as though they can make an impact and are

important. Some of the ways to do this is through consensus building, shared

decision-making and by simply listening. Empowerment plays a key role in how

effective an administrator will become as a team builder. Vann (1992) states,

> Principals who are sure and confident in their abilities as instructional
> leaders are willing to share power with staff members because they know
> that by sharing, they become even more powerful leaders. A strong,
> sensitive and effective principal is one who retains vivid memories of what
> life is like in the classroom, and who understands that leadership is not so
> much a consequence of power as of positive human relations skills. (p. 31)

A principal can play a key part in helping decision-making teams work.

When possible, it is beneficial to the process if the principal is willing to

participate (Mataranga, Horner, Hill, & Peltier, 1993). Successful schools are the

ones where student achievement is greatest, collaborative planning in encouraged, and collegial relationships are valued (Roy & O'Brien, 1991).

In order for shared decision making to be effective I think the district needs to establish a school-based philosophy in which decisions are shifted from the school board, superintendent, and central administration to each individual school. The purpose is to improve performance by making teachers and administrators more collaborative and responsible for the schools' operations (Hill, Bonan, & Warner, 1992). "The ultimate goal is to improve the teaching and learning environment for students" (White, 1989, p. 2). The make-up of the shared decision making teams will vary depending on the decision to be made. At different times we should include teachers, parents, non-parents, non-certified staff, and occasionally students. School-based management will give the principal the opportunity to have a new level of involvement. The principal can see different situations from the viewpoint of others (Bergman, 1992).

If principals want to utilize individuals in a cooperative site-based system it is going to be important that they be collaborators. Payzant (1992), stated that collaboration is "jointly agreeing to identify and then address specific problems and areas of service" (p. 141).

There are a few areas of concern among some educational leaders when switching to a school-based management system. A few of the barriers faced by

education professionals with school-based management are the fear of losing power, taking risks, and the resistance to the change in their roles and responsibility when setting up the program (Matranga, Horner, Hill, & Peltier, 1993).

School-based management is not a matter of setting up a school council for the school but as a matter of changing roles and responsiblities throughout the educational system (David, 1994). The process of changing roles and responsibilities will not happen overnight and it is best to involve the individuals being effected. The entire concept will take time and patience from those involved and as an administrative leader it is going to be my responsibility to constantly sell the process. "Because real education improvements happen school by school, the teacher, principal, and parents in each school must be given authority and the responsibilities to make important decisions about how the school will operate" (Uhl, Boschee, & Bonaiuto, 1993, p. 6).

According to White (1989) the three most common areas of decision making under school-based management are curriculum, budget, and staffing. Staff involvement in curriculum development will enable staff to select instructional materials and textbooks, design in-service training, and develop instructional programs. Those who have helped suggest them will more likely carry out ideas and training.

A form of shared decision making is the staff survey mentioned in the last section on technology. This gives the staff a chance to have input towards the development of technology and gives them some ownership on what areas of technology we emphasize in staff training. The staff is going to be much more enthused about training on something they suggested as opposed to something that is required.

It will be important to think in terms of an open collegial system where everyone can have a voice. A good way to accomplish the goal of shared decision making is to make sure you have adequate representation on your committees. Administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members all need to be considered.

A successful tactic mentioned in class is to seek out those who may be negative or have a problem. We should then give them the opportunity to be involved in solving it. By doing this you will give them ownership in the process and you will most likely turn a potential distracter into a person who will defend the position.

<center>Summary</center>

In many cases, the areas of emphasis in this paper will effect and act upon each other. Professional development may generate ideas that are then utilized and presented in staff development. The use of new technology is going to be a

very important part of staff development. Finally, which technologies we pursue and train staff in should be decided through a shared decision-making process within the school-based management system. These are just a few examples of how these components interact and effect each other.

As I look at professional growth, I think it is critical that I continue to monitor and evaluate areas of concern on a continuous basis. As an administrator, I would like to take the LSI throughout my career. This will be a great instrument to acquire feedback on where the staff thinks I am and give me an opportunity to reflect myself. I would also like to give every staff member an opportunity to provide me with feedback through a year end evaluation form. This form will give them an avenue to make comments, suggestions, criticisms, and positive comments with out worrying about me knowing who made the comments.

I think it is important that I find some people on staff who can be straight forward with me and be willing to provide immediate feedback that is both positive and negative. These steps, a long with personal reflection, should help me keep up on what the true status of my leadership is. To be an effective administrator is definitely a huge challenge. If I can go into it with the realization that I do have weaknesses, and be willing to address them, then I should have a great chance of improving them so I can be more successful.

Staff development is an area of importance in schools. If it is not, the kids will end up suffering from the staff being stagnant. I intend on leading by example in staff development. I will also make sure that my personal vision and the school's vision show a constant reflection on development.

Preparing for the future means dealing with technology. Technology is constantly changing and therefore we must be willing to change with it. I look at technology as a positive learning tool and find it exciting. As an administrator, my actions and attitude must reflect that to the staff.

In the process of the many changes of technology, professional development, and staff development it is going to be critical that I seek out the opinions of community and staff. Shared decision making provides for ownership and will greatly increase my chances to generate positive change.

Gorton (1991) states that the administrative roles are: "manager, instructional leader, disciplinarian, human relations' facilitator, evaluator, and conflict mediator" (p. 85). If nothing else, the process of going through the administrative program has shown me that you need to be all of these things and more. An administrator must be able to handle an enormous amount of different situations to keep the school functioning at a high level. To do so, I realize more than ever that I must be prepared to deal with criticism because of the broad scope of individuals I will be dealing with. My strength will come from knowing that

my decisions will always be based on the bottom line. What is going to be best for the students.

Ultimately, I think administrators strive to be great leaders. For me personally, I know that I can be a good leader because I have been blessed with a lot of positive influences in my upbringing and background. I also enjoy and actually seek out leadership positions. In Maxwell (1994) Dwight Eisenhower once described leadership as: "the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it" (p. 63). I think shared decision making will help me to accomplish just that as a leader. The greatest challenge will be to persuade people to make positive changes towards a common goal and vision. Rosalyn Carter in Maxwell (1994) said, "a leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they do not necessarily want to go, but ought to be" (p. 37). I want to be that kind of administrator.

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