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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

Administrators need to continue learning and growing to be effective. Technology, school laws and mandates, the students and community themselves are rapidly changing. Our society is always talking about school reform. Reform from what? To what?

Administrators need direction and vision. We cannot get where we want to go if we have no idea where we want to be. On our journey we cross the paths of many, many people. How we treat them and help with their needs will be remembered for a long time.

Our schools need to look ahead. The classes I have had have shown me how to do that, to be visionary. Administrators need to be proactive rather than reactive. Crises are not planned, they just happen. How we react makes us the administrator that we are.

**A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
University of Northern Iowa**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts in Education**

**by
Mary L. Boehmer
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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Administration, the word itself entices, shudders and creates criticism from many teachers. So why would anyone want this demanding and sometimes unpopular position? Why would any sane individual knowingly accept this role? These are questions that I hope to answer in this reflective paper.

When asked how I decided to pursue a masters in administration degree, the answer I give is simple. My goal has always been to be an elementary principal. I do not really remember making this decision on a conscious level, but then again I do not remember making the decision to be a teacher at a conscious level either.

Let me start at the beginning. After high school, I went to business school to become a medical secretary. I acquired a secretarial position at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha as a Curriculum Coordinator. During this time, I was responsible for approximately 40 medical students each month during their pediatric rotation. I basically set up their curriculum, organized the lecture series, and met with the students on a daily basis to give assignments as well as daily quizzes. I proctored final exams and corrected and graded all quizzes and tests. I enjoyed working with students a great deal - maybe because it gave me a great deal of responsibility and some power.

After a few years, we began our family and so a decision was made that I stay home. For eight years during this time, I ran a daycare in my home. As my children grew, I knew that I needed to

make a decision on what to do with my life. I put my love of children together with my love of working with students and came up with a decision to be an elementary teacher. So, at the age of 32, I became a college student, graduating in just three and half years with a degree in elementary education. I then had the "privilege" of substitute teaching for three school districts for one and a half years. I eventually got a full-time teaching position at Franklin Elementary School in Le Mars where I have been teaching 5th grade for four years. Since the beginning of my college years, I have known that I would like to seek an administrative position.

As I attended the various classes throughout this master's program, I began to eternalize goals and objectives for myself as an administrator. The biggest goal that I have set comes from learning my leadership style.

Leadership

How one manages is unique to their own personality. Leadership skills, however, can be learned. As an administrator, I must determine which type of leadership skills will best suit my personality and the type of leader I intend to be.

Leadership Styles

According to the Life Styles Inventory (1989), how managers confront challenges and handle responsibilities is a function of their thinking styles. After taking the inventory and learning my own leadership styles, I am now aware of my organizational skills and

hopefully the type of administrator I will become. While I realize that the Inventory is not one hundred percent accurate, I did score fairly high in the affiliative, self-actualizing, achievement and humanistic areas. I believe that having these qualities will help me as an administrator to be willing to listen and care for others, to set goals and expect to carry them out, and demonstrate a concern for staff members and their needs.

The Life Styles Inventory helped me realize the various ways I think about myself and my abilities. These thinking styles may help influence my behavior as an administrator. It showed both my strengths and weaknesses. By knowing who you are now is the most important step in deciding how you will act and react in the future. Not only did this inventory tell me more about myself, it will help with my personal growth as well as my cognitive thinking.

Along with the Life Styles Inventory, I have also assimilated the William Glasser (1993) theory of boss and lead managers. According to Glasser, boss managers tend to use coercion by telling others what to do and how to do it. Lead managers, on the other hand, have a goal in mind, but approach it from a different angle. They discuss this goal with others and together come up with a consensus on how to achieve the goal. As a Quality School trainee (I have attended the basic training week and am currently pursuing a practicum), I have seen the results of this style of leadership in my own classroom. I have allowed the students various opportunities to

decide how we will approach a learning task. I always set the goal (teaching objective) but the students come to a consensus on how they will all reach it. Not only does this give the students some ownership in their own learning, but it also creates a better teacher-student relationship.

As an administrator, the same lead manager styles can be used. Administrators have the authority to set goals, but how they achieve these goals can be varied. This will help not only with administrator-teacher relationships, but will also allow ownership from those who helped with the decisions.

I am not naive enough to think that all decisions can be made in this way, or that an administrator can be a lead manager at all times. I do realize that some decisions must be made by a principal only. I also realize that no matter how a decision is made, the administrator is responsible. We should not give up any decision that we are not prepared to handle the consequence. I truly believe that as an administrator, I can retain my lead manager skills I use in my classroom. Being a lead manager is a skill that must be learned. We are all conditioned to being directed by stimulus-response. Lead managers need to learn to direct their attention away from this.

When I think of an administrator I think of a leader, one who accepts the authoritative expectations of others to responsibly guide the activities and performance of an organization. A leader is one who needs to possess a vision of what their school should be like.

He/she knows how to motivate and inspire those with whom he/she works. As we have completed our classes, I now realize how much it takes to be a leader.

If you were to ask an elementary student what a principal is they would probably say a "man" who the teacher makes you go see when you have done something wrong or the man who comes in to talk with your teacher or watch to see what your class is doing. Students do not realize, and I do not think I did either, how much an administrator is really a leader.

When we discussed, "are leaders born or made", I believe that they are born. My reasoning for this is simple. To be an administrator you must be strong and have a great deal of *confidence in your ability*. *You must have a "take charge" type of personality and be willing to go to the limit with your vision and ideas.* Guthrie and Reed (1991) believe that leaders can be made. In some instances I believe this to be true in that people who possess the necessary drive can be taught to develop these ideals. However, most people either have the desire to be a leader or they do not and I believe the desire is what is inborn. For me, the desire has always been there. I have always taken and enjoyed being the one responsible, the one in charge. I have also learned that this is not always a popular position to take and have at time been called "bossy" by others. However, I see things that need to be done and *have the ability to organize and get them done.* *As an administrator,*

I feel this is a trait that will not only be useful, but will be admired by my staff. An administrator needs to learn how to motivate others to become involved in the "vision". This, I believe, is something that a leader can be taught. Management skills are taught, but the desire to be the manager can not.

Self-reflection and evaluation are other important aspects in the role of a leader. We must constantly be asking ourselves what worked, what did not, why it worked, or why it did not. A leader needs to be cognitive of his thoughts and actions. Without this self-reflection or evaluation, we can neither improve nor repeat actions. A good teacher will evaluate a lesson, a good administrator will evaluate an action whether it be disciplinary or goal setting. We must constantly "check" our progress of being an effective leader.

No female administrator's reflective paper would be complete without taking a look at what it means to be a female in the male dominated world of school administration. As I have discussed in article reviews by Rosemary Papalewis (1995) and Charol Shakeshaft (1995), in order for women to be an effective administrator they must learn to live in and adopt to doing things the "male" way. Women, according to these articles, are not always taken seriously as a leader. Female administrators are going to have a more difficult time administrating than male administrators. To do an effective job, we must learn to toughen up and accept the consequences of our decisions. It is not that males do not have to

accept the consequences, it just seems that female administrators may be questioned more about their decisions. I think the most important thing we can do for ourselves is to make sure that what we are doing and what we are saying is what we believe is the very best for our school district and students. We cannot be "wishy-washy" just so that we do not have to face any consequences we do not think we can handle as a female. Males may get angry and accuse us of being a "woman" and therefore not understanding how things really are, but whatever the results, we must be strong enough to deal with it. Before we take an administrative position, I think everyone, not just females, need to look inside themselves to decide if they are really strong enough for the position. Money, prestige, and status in the community are the extrinsic rewards of this position. However, if you do not have the intrinsic rewards such as caring about the students and what is best for them, then you have no business being an administrator, male or female.

Technology

The state of Iowa is now allocating several thousands of dollars for school technology. As administrators, we will need to be informed as to how to most effectively use the monies in our schools.

Technology Opportunities

As an administrator, we need to be flexible and current in educational trends. One area that many administrators are finding difficulty with is in the area of technology. The simple truth is that for

most of us, changes in technology are occurring so rapidly that most of us cannot keep up or do not know when or how to jump in.

According to O'Brien (1983), American education commonly asks "How do we get there?" without first asking the question "Where do we want to go?". It seems as if we are trying to decide what vehicle to take before we even decide what our destination is. As an administrator, how do we deal with these rapidly changing events in our schools? How do we decide how to best spend the technology monies that the states are affording us? Where do we begin?

As a teacher, I have been a member of my district's technology strategic planning committee for the past two years and am currently a member of my elementary building technology committee. I am also the recipient of an ISEA/US West technology grant. Through my involvement with these committees and the grant, I am trying to acquaint myself with as much knowledge as possible to help make good decisions for not only my district now, but also any school district I may find myself in the future. In order to make good decisions, I believe you must be as familiar as possible with all the alternatives.

Bruder (1992) believes that technology must be looked at as a way to reform American schools. Students today are constantly being bombarded with a variety of multimedia. If schools hope to keep and maintain student interests, we must do it with technology. More and more students are coming to school with skills they have

obtained from working on home computers. School districts need to introduce and enhance these skills. We have an enormous task ahead of us in education: we must prepare our students to live happily and productively in a century whose demands we can only imagine. Teachers must be allowed the technology and the inservice necessary to *provide the students with opportunities to take control of their learning, to master tasks that they previously thought impossible*. Our classrooms need to become a stimulating multidimensional environment. In technology, administrators need to set realistic yet visionary goals. We need to look at what is available and how it would best suit our school's needs. An administrator must be a leader in the area of technology not just a follower. Hopefully, my personal experiences will provide me with a basic background knowledge to make me the leader that I intend to be. While technology seems to scare some administrators, it excites me to think how students who have not seen success in other areas of the curriculum seem to excel in technology. I say bring on the technology! Not only will it create classroom involvement, but will force the schools into the next century.

Personally, I would like to have on my staff a computer technologist. I realize that I will need the advice and competency of a person specifically educated in this field. If schools are to progress into the next century, we need to determine not only our vehicle but our destination as well. We must keep our "wish list" high but

somewhat realistic. We must take every opportunity to keep ourselves knowledgeable of current trends and changes in this field. The state of Iowa has finally given us some financial support necessary to move our students forward in the technology. Now it is up to us to use these funds to ensure that our schools become a multidimensional environment.

Community

It takes an entire village to raise a child is even more true today than it has been in the past. More and more families have both parents working outside the home. More and more children are coming from homes with single parents. The schools are faced with the problem of helping these families to get involved with their child's education while realizing time constraints that parents have.

School-Community Relations

Another area that administrators deal with on almost a daily basis is the community. From forming parent-teacher organizations to hosting open houses to leading a discussion on policy changes with community members, administrators are constantly dealing with "outsiders". Administrators need to learn how to be a good public relations person. They need to learn how to handle irrate parents or community members. I believe administrators of a school district are always "on show". No matter where they are, people see them only as a school administrator and so the behavior exhibited must be portrayed as positive at all times, at any place. School officials are

moral models for our students and parents. A good administrator will live up to that position.

Today, more and more schools are discussing parent involvement. In my own school, I was the parent volunteer coordinator for two years. Schools and parents are realizing that it takes "an entire village to raise a child" to quote Hillary Clinton. But is there a basis for this? Does parent involvement ensure student success? It all depends on the way parents are involved. Critics propose that parent involvement is frequently "guided", even manipulated by school authorities (Wong, 1990). Principals were observed to mitigate and screen parental demands in sensitive areas of professional discretion such as disciplinary action, homework or grading policy, teaching style, and curricular emphasis. As a reward to certain parents for "acceptable" behavior, principals may go out of their way to secure special individual help, extra resources, or a bending of school district's rule. For less compliant parents, the response may be "those are the rules" with no special consideration offered.

Another criticism has been that educators traditionally have perceived parental involvement as representational rather than a participatory activity. In representational involvement, we ask a few hand-picked community members to be on advisory committees. While this is important, it can be far removed from a participatory attitude toward parents. In participatory involvement, parents are

encouraged to be in the schools on a daily basis, helping the teachers and staff with whatever needs to be done. Examples include working as a peer-tutor with students, helping with "housekeeping" duties such as attendance or lunch room activities, helping with specific school activities such as book fairs or field trips.

Finally, critics of parental involvement strategies charge that parents have typically been the "passive" recipients of information from the schools rather than active members of the teaching-learning community (Cervone and O'Leary, 1982). An example of this is an open house where parents passively listen to the teacher explain how a typical day in a student's life is executed. Beyond such special events as the open house, the school's consideration of parents throughout the year tends to be dominated by an information-reporting philosophy. Newsletters, parent-teacher conferences and "good news notes" all tend to be highly valued communications.

Atkin and Bastiani (1988) warn that all of the rhetoric about cooperation and partnership is "cozy and uplifting". However, an improvement of school-community relations might best begin with the basic and seemingly simple task of listening to parents. This can be a difficult task for many school administrators. We say we want their input but do we really listen when the input differs from our way of thinking? Parents bring to school their complaints and concerns. They also ask for a bit of special treatment, or extra help, or some

favoritism to be shown to their own child. They can cover up, offer excuses, and overprotect their children while placing the blame on the children of others. The act of listening responsibly to parents can require considerable understanding of where the parent's concerns come from. Parents bring to meetings a deep concern of their own contributions to their child's development. This comes from an intimate knowledge of the child from birth on. Teachers and administrators must be made aware of how the parents are feeling and why they react in certain ways. Listening helps. Teachers usually bring a formal philosophy to their work, but parents are similarly equipped. A parent simply has expectations of the educational system and concerns about his or her child's experience in school. A responsive school should not be asked to lose its own professional identity and pander to parents, but there are ways in which a school can improve its capacity to "listening" to parents. One of the best ways to open up the lines of communication, according to Swap (1987), is to provide occasions where parents as well as teachers can be "just people" with one another. Excellent examples of this I think are found in my school. Birthday breakfasts, in which parents are invited in for their child's birthday, grandparents' day, and muffins for moms and donuts for dad are occasions in which parents come into the school for a few minutes just to say "hi" and are given the opportunity to comment on how they see the school as not only a place of learning, but as a place for parental involvement as well.

These are activities that I would continue as an administrator because of the overwhelming response received from the parents.

I am reminded here of what I once heard William Glasser say. He said, "You can't always get everything you want, but you can always get something of what you need". This statement helps with understanding how to become a responsive school when dealing with parents and the community. As a two-year parent volunteer coordinator, I have been able to see the benefits derived from parent involvement. Students enjoy seeing the parents take an active part in their education. Parents are modeling for the students by their presence in the building that education is very important not only to the student, but to the entire community as well.

Supervision and Evaluation

As an administrator, we are responsible for the teachers in our building. These are two duties that I think all administrators will agree take time to learn and will each handle in their own specific ways according to their own leadership styles.

Teacher Supervision

Another area of great concern for administrators in the supervision and evaluation of instruction. As a beginning teacher, the first time I was approached by my administrator to set up a time for my first evaluation my heart almost stopped. I knew (or thought) I am an effective teacher but just the thought of having your administrator sit and evaluate your every movement and word makes

even the most veteran teachers concerned. Until attending our supervision and evaluation class, I did not give any thought to the administrator's role in this. To me, it looked as if he/she had the easy part. Sit back, listen, and script. Then set up a time for the formative evaluation. End of job. I now realize that evaluating teachers is much more demanding than I thought. First of all, the act of scripting is a technique that is very hard and one that takes a bit of practice. Oh how I wish I had stayed in my shorthand class! Once the scripting is completed, an efficient administrator will go back to their office, shut the door, and synthesize all that he/she had just seen and heard so that he/she is prepared to give back direct, honest, and specific information to the teacher. I will always hear in the back of my mind Dr. Robert Decker saying "BE SPECIFIC!". As a teacher, I never cognitively realized that when I was asking questions of my evaluator that what I was asking for was specific information. I wanted to know exactly when or how I did or said something. Now I realize the importance of being specific.

Unfortunately not all administrators are blessed with a staff of top-notch professionals. Occasionally, you will have teachers with whom a simple evaluation is just not simple. You cannot just stop with a formative evaluation. Remediation may be necessary. But how do we know when to remediate? First we must know what an effective teacher and lesson looks like. According to Langlois and Zales (1992), an effective teacher is one who seeks ways to minimize class

time lost to activities other than instruction and present it with as few interruptions as possible, stopping and starting lessons on time, eliminating unassigned time, and cutting down on distractions. They plan to manage student behavior and to institute procedures that make the class run smoothly and automatically. They are confident in their role as an instructional leader and they assume responsibility for student achievement and behavior. They set high expectations and prepare students to meet them. Effective teachers allow time for learning and help students to learn to manage and control their own behavior.

As an administrator walking into a classroom for a teacher evaluation, you must have a clear vision of what you believe an effective teacher is. As an elementary principal, I believe that an effective teacher will vary from grade to grade. What is effective in kindergarten may not be effective in a fifth grade classroom. We need to look at each evaluation itself and not compare it to others. What works for one teacher may not necessarily work for another. There are as many different teaching styles as there are teachers. An effective administrator will know this, keeping in his mind exactly what makes an effective teacher and is this what he/she is seeing.

One of the areas that surprised me was that during evaluation time the administrator does not evaluate the material being taught, just the presentation. I am not sure why this surprised me - it just

did. I have never thought about how hard it would be to evaluate the content of material for each individual lesson.

Let us go back to the teacher who needs remediation. The first obstacle will be to convince the teacher that her teaching style of classroom management needs help. Decker in *The Act of Criticism* (p. 197, 1996) lists several good ways to offer corrective criticism without arousing resentment. I truly believe that this is a skill all administrators learn if they want to be effective. Nothing turns a person off more quickly than destructive criticism done in a spiteful manner. For me, having a good background in William Glasser's Reality Therapy will help me to not only know how to offer constructive criticism, but also to do it in a way that the teacher still feels good about him or herself and therefore will be more willing to discuss methods of remediation. These types of formative or summative evaluations can be as nerve-racking for the administration as it is for the teacher.

Effective administrators will help the teacher come up with ways to improve rather than just "tell" them how they will do it. One important lesson here to remember is that you cannot make anyone change. Change is internal. It is something that only you can do. But an administrator can and must help to show them ways to become a better, a more effective teacher. That is our job. We must encourage the person along the road of improvement and offer both praise and corrective criticism as needed.

What do we do with the teacher who still refuses to be remediated or who simply is incapable of it? This is where certain due process steps in. If the teacher is a probationary teacher (less than two years in the district), you have the option of simply not renewing their contract. If the teacher is a veteran teacher (more than two years experience), you must know the procedural and substantive due process laws and follow them, making sure that all your facts are correct and that specific evidence has been documented to begin the dismissal procedure. Hopefully this will be the exception rather than the rule. I believe most teachers enjoy teaching and want to improve and learn ways of being effective. If it seems you are always in the midst of dismissal procedures, you as an administrator need to step back and evaluate your vision of what an effective teacher is along with your hiring techniques. Administrators are human and capable of making mistakes as well as teachers. We must take special care of avoiding a fatal flaw here. What we must not do is always assume we are the one who is correct. Self-evaluation will help with this.

Instructional Leadership

As an instructional leader, administrators must keep abreast of new ideas in education. They must also have the skills needed to present these ideas to their faculty with the determination of success without the use of coercion.

Hit or Myth

Another area in which administrators find themselves in is as an instructional leader. Fallon and Weldy (1979) argue whether this is a "hit or myth". Fallon argues that principals do not have the time nor the educational background to be an instructional leader. He states that most administrative backgrounds are in administration and management rather than instructional education. Weldy counterpoints to say that principals must denounce the charge that they cannot be instructional leaders because they are not trained in every subject area taught in school. The question then arises is who then is the instructional leader? Principals really have no choice. They must furnish instructional leadership whether they want to or not. If they do not know how, they must learn. If they do not have the time, they must make the time. I believe this goes back to our evaluating a teacher. We must have a clear vision of what an effective lesson looks like. There are generally accepted teacher traits and behaviors that contribute to successful teaching. These characteristics of effective teaching are observable by supervisors. They are areas easily improved upon with the assistance of an observant, perceptive, helpful instructional leader, usually the principal.

Principals who care to function as instructional leaders can put to rest the time-worn fallacy that a supervisor of instruction has to be trained in the subject in order to qualify as an observer and

evaluator. Principals, as instructional leaders, also will pay close attention to teacher behavior outside the classroom in areas such as attendance, record-keeping, evaluation systems, and grading practices. None of these behaviors relate in the least to a teacher's subject matter expertise - or a principal's lack of it.

Principals are in a position in which the teachers assume he/she is the leader. He or she is the one they go to for advice and leadership. These two areas also add to the fact that a principal is an instructional leader.

Child Psychology

As administrators, we deal with children on a daily basis. An effective administrator will understand that not all children will think and act alike. We must be aware of the varying factors that determine both the psychology and physical growth of the children in our buildings.

Adolescents

Child psychology is an important area of expertise for administrators. We deal with many different types of students on a daily basis. Each child brings with him a unique background and schema. As an administrator, we need to know what makes a child "tick". We need to know how a kindergartener is different both psychologically and physically from a fifth grader. We need to understand the racial backgrounds of our students' cultural diversity

as our schools get more and more ethnically mixed. Without the understanding and knowledge of the different cultures, an administrator could be setting him or herself up for a "fatal error". An elementary principal needs to understand the different cognitive abilities each child has. Trying to reason with a fifth grader will be a lot easier than with a kindergartener who is sitting in your office in tears. Knowing why will make your life a little bit easier.

Child psychology is one area where our schools do a good job in preparing us to be teachers and administrators. My Quality School background will greatly benefit me when dealing with student and parent conflicts. Remember, we cannot always get what we want, but can usually get some of what we need.

Another fact that will help me personally as an administrator is my 18 years of being a parent. No book or class can prepare you for dealing with children quite as much as the on-the-job training you receive from being a parent. I sometimes tease my students by reminding them that I am a mom as well as a teacher so I am not as big of a "pushover" as they might hope. Pouts, whining, and arguing does not work with me because remember, I am a mom!

Student self-esteem should be an educators number one concern when dealing with students. Greene (1996) has found if students are to build their self-esteem they need to experience the four A's - Attention, Acceptance, Appreciation and Affection. Students can get attention in either negative or positive ways - at-risk students usually

take the former. Students need to be accepted as they are - not excused for nor to hide their past behaviors. They should be given a fresh start. Students need to be appreciated for their positive abilities and characteristics. Students need to be shown affection. Love and belonging is one of the most powerful forces in helping others. Building students' self-esteem can help to alleviate some of the behavioral problems found in classrooms.

Kohn (1993) argues that punishment is counterproductive. Students view these disciplinary approaches as "highly controlling", "power assertive" or just plain "punitive". This leads students to become more disruptive, aggressive and hostile. The root of punishment is coercion. We coerce students into following our rules. Punishment is the dominant form of discipline in our schools and discipline is what we seem to think children need. When a student is bullied into acting the way we demand, he/she will often resist. Greene (1996) has found that the more we restrict students' choices - the more controlling we are - the less likely they will comply. The less students comply, the more controlling we become, thus entering us all into a vicious cycle called punishment. Punishment often leaves students to feel worse about themselves since they often assume they must be bad if they are always getting punished. It may also spoil a relationship between a student and teacher and, since the student views the teacher as the "ruler", it may prove to be someone to avoid. In order to help students develop good values,

teachers must establish a caring relationship with them. The punishment makes that much less likely to happen. Classroom teachers and administrators ultimately must care about the kind of people our students will be. Good values have to be grown from the inside out. Praise and privileges and punishments can change behavior, but they cannot change the student who engages in the behavior - at least, not in the way we want. No behavioral manipulation can ever help a student develop a commitment to becoming a caring and responsible person. No reward ever gave anyone a reason for continuing to act that way once the reward was terminated.

By understanding why and how a student behaves, administrators will be able to competently deal with the behaviors and hopefully guide the student into making the best choices available at the time. Child psychology is just not a class to students but it is who they are and administrators need to take a careful look at it.

Philosophy

As individuals, we all have our own thoughts that lead to actions. Each unique administrator will have their own vision of what they want their school and staff to look like. It is because of our uniqueness that schools are different.

Vision

Administrator. The word is defined, according to Funk and Wagnalls (1975), as one who is a manager or an executive. As I

back on my last three years I am reminded of many things. My perceptions have changed at time from those of a student, to a parent, to a teacher, to an administrator.

When I was an elementary student, I honestly cannot remember who my principal was. I did not get in to trouble and so was never "invited" to visit him. He never came into our classroom. To me he was an imaginary giant whose chamber horrors I could only imagine. In middle school, my principal was Mr. Murray. His first year in LeMars was my class' first year in middle school. If someone today asked me who my role model as an administrator would be, it would without a doubt be Mr. Murray.

He was known as a strict disciplinarian but he was the most fair person I have ever met. He treated students as individuals and was there to help you in any way he could. I remember a basketball game in 8th grade. We were playing against Woodrow Wilson in Sioux City, where Mr. Murray had been the previous year. The entire week before the big game he teased us all that Woodrow Wilson was going to beat us. At half time during the game, LeMars was down 15 points. Mr. Murray went into the locker room and talked with the LeMars boys to tell them how he knew they could beat the Sioux City team and raised their team's esteem by quite a bit. LeMars went on to win the game by four points. I will never forget the respect we all had for him after that. He went above and beyond

and I will always admire that quality in an administrator and will try my hardest to imitate it.

When I envision myself as an elementary principal, I have some very specific goals in mind as to the type of administrator I want to be. If we want to be technical, we can call this my philosophy. I went into teaching because of my love of children. I do not think all teachers can say this. Coaching and summers off are given regularly as reasons for this career choice. I like to tease and hug and teach students new ideas. I like being able to hear about what they did at home and being able to call them silly names. I like it when younger students come up to me and say that they hope they can be in my 5th grade classroom. As an administrator I intend to continue doing these things. My desire is to remain active in classroom activities in some way, whether it be teaching occasionally or watching while a teacher needs to leave the room for awhile. I intend to let the students learn who I am as a person, who my family is, and why I believe the things I believe. I will not just be the giant in the chambers that they only see when they are "bad". I want to be able to call students by their first names. I want to be fair in my dealings with all students as well as their parents. If principals are to be instructional leaders, I believe they must get themselves into a classroom to see what is going on. It is too easy to criticize when you are not on the battlefield. I intend to stay in the trenches

with the faculty and students so that I can be the best leader I can be.

As I look back at all I have learned in the last three years, I realize that this is just the beginning. Administrators need to continue learning and growing to be effective. Technology, school laws and mandates, the students and community themselves are rapidly changing. Our society is always talking about school reform. Reform from what? To what?

Administrators need direction and vision. We cannot get where we want to go if we have no idea where we want to be. On our journey we cross the paths of many, many people. How we treat them and help with their needs will be remembered for a long time. Administrators have choices. We can choose to treat people with respect and concern or we can choose to treat people as an authoritarian because will have the status, the power. Some may choose to look at situations as only black and white. I prefer the gray area myself. I want to see and weigh both sides of an issue before making a decision. I want to help others to realize that they also have choices. I want to be able to help them weigh their choices so that they can make good decisions.

Our schools need to look ahead. The classes I have had have shown me how to do that, to be visionary. Administrators need to be proactive rather than reactive. Crises are not planned, they just happen. Parents do not call to make appointments to see you before

they are upset over a situation. Students do not plan ahead to misbehave. All these situations however do happen. How we plan for and react, makes us the administrator that we are.

To prepare myself for my future as an administrator, I am planning to remain as involved as possible with as much as possible in my school today. The more experience I receive now, the more prepared I will be as an administrator.

No one can ever plan for all that life throws at you - that is why it is called life. But you can plan to never stop learning, to never stop planning for the future. Reflecting, self-evaluating, planning, and visions are what the life of an administrator is all about. Our classes have given me the direction and the focus. It is now up to me to take that focus and grow. To find the path that will lead me to where I want to be as an administrator. To follow not only my vision, my ideals, but my heart as well so not to compromise myself for any job or position. I have choices to make that will not only affect me but my students, staff and community that my life will touch as an administrator.

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