Graduate Research Papers   **Student Work**

1998

A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Julia Burton-Varn
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Recommended Citation

A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

Whole language; inclusion; acceleration; best practices; integrated curriculum; back-to basics; Education 2000; Carnegie Report; School-to-Work Initiative; technological course-ware; multiple intelligences; emotional intelligences; multicultural, non-sexist education; and strategic planning are all educational issues that have emerged, submerged, and in some cases re-emerged during the fifteen years that I have been teaching. As schools embrace or reject standards or movements, one can ask if the quality of education has actually changed. There are frequent reports and articles concerning the poor quality of the educational system within the United States. A continual debate surrounds the effectiveness of a system and the quality of students, teachers, and administrators. In this paper I will address some of the issues facing education today such as administrators as change agents, the role of parental involvement, effective instruction and important leadership skills.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY 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
Master of Arts in Education

----

by
Julia Burton-Varn
July 1998

This Research Paper by: Julia Burton-Varn

Entitled: A Preferred Vision For Administering Secondary Schools:
A Reflective Essay

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Education.

7-29-98
_____
Date Approved

Dave Else
_____
Advisor/Director of Research Paper

2/29/98
_____
Date Approved

Dale R. Jackson
_____
Second Reader of Research Paper

7.30.98
_____
Date Received

Michael D. Waggoner
_____
Head, Department of Educational
Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary
Education

Whole language; inclusion; acceleration; best practices; integrated curriculum; back-to basics; Education 2000; Carnegie Report; School-to-Work Initiative; technological course-ware; multiple intelligences; emotional intelligences; multi-cultural, non-sexist education; and strategic planning are all educational issues that have emerged, submerged, and in some cases re-emerged during the fifteen years that I have been teaching. As schools embrace or reject standards or movements, one can ask if the quality of education has actually changed. There are frequent reports and articles concerning the poor quality of the educational system within the United States. A continual debate surrounds the effectiveness of a system and the quality of students, teachers, and administrators. In this paper I will address some of the issues facing education toady such as administrators as change agents, the role of parental involvement, effective instruction and important leadership skills.

As the daughter of a Republican doctor and a Democratic artist, the art of politics and the importance of education were of supreme importance when I was growing up. Discussion, persuasion, compromise, exposure to controversial ideas, let alone people at our dinner table, without a doubt influenced my beliefs, my attitudes, and commitment to learning. As a product of the Iowa City School District and the University of Iowa, I began my teaching career fairly aware of the

trends and bandwagons associated with education. After being in the field for fifteen years, I've experienced innumerable in-services and workshops. As I complete my coursework at the University of Northern Iowa and enter the administrative phase of my career, the personal and professional skills that I honed as a teacher and as an educational leader are of paramount significance. As I reflect on my decision to become an administrator, several areas come to mind for exploration. First, what was my perception of administration before I began my coursework? Second, what are my educational beliefs, values and philosophies? Third, what skills, knowledge, and personal attributes do I have to be an effective leader? And finally, as I complete my coursework, what is my professional vision as member of an administrative team?

As a teacher for fifteen years in a relatively small school district (1,000 students), I have had one administrator at the high school and one at the junior high, while there have been two principals at the elementary building. My impressions of administration have been undoubtedly affected by my experiences. Before entering the program, I looked at administration as an opportunity to make more money, further develop leadership skills, and initiate change which would invigorate a tired staff and would also stimulate better teaching. The power of a dynamic personality and a willingness to build collaborative teams appeared to be relatively easy to utilize in one's principalship. I wanted to be an effective leader without really having any academic background in leadership roles. I could see

myself greeting faculty, staff, and students; circulating throughout the building every day; meeting with change agents; evaluating staff; and leading discussions about standards and transformations.

Of course, in looking back at my decision to become an administrator, there were a few gaps in my perceptions and gigantic holes in my reasoning. I hadn't considered the impact that the conflict between my commitment to my children and a job would have on me. This is an issue which I continue to ponder and cannot easily resolve. Models of leadership by Kouzes and Posner (1995) and Schlechty (1990) have broadened my understanding of the complexity of being a principal.

Personal Beliefs

Whether I am wearing the police officer's hat while on lunch or hall duty, or the doctor's coat when some one has a serious cut, or the regal crown because my word is unquestionable, or my zookeeper's helmet and whistle during home football games, my most basic belief about education does not change with my situation and my apparel. I believe that an individual's right to a free and appropriate education can only be achieved when there is respect for humanity, as well as an understanding of the unique qualities, circumstances, and needs of learners.

Multiple Intelligence Theory

As Gardner (1991) points out, children learn and process information in highly different manners while educational institutions often have only one or two methodologies, leaving potential untapped, boxed, and even squashed. Accepting that people have different learning strategies allows teachers, parents, and administrators to generate authentic learning environments. Immersion into Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory sparks creative teaching and effective leadership because it revolves around the understanding that our current educational structure is inherently flawed and ill-equipped to respond to the natural pattern of thinking. Instead, Gardner's theory forces one to consider, How can I best help this child learn? How can I be an effective teacher? How can I be an effective leader in a system out of sync with what we know is educationally appropriate?

An individual in education can have an enormous impact. Yes, it would be much easier to be a principal who does not stray far from the main office or to be a teacher using the same lesson plans from twenty years ago; but easy can usually only guarantee inadequacy. An appropriate education for all learners requires intense preparation from teachers, counselors and administrators. The roadblocks are numerous, but the outcome is an energized, dynamic school with students embracing their learning experiences.

Leading a faculty to embrace all learners, by now, should be a matter of

routine. Unfortunately, change is often slow and even painful for some people.

Resistance to Gardner's (1991) theories is usually not overt; lip-service is

maintained. But an effective administrator, concerned about the well-being of all

students will be in the classroom focusing on teacher and student behavior.

Respecting one another in and outside of class fosters the ability to learn and the

ability to teach.

> An administrator who recognizes the learning styles of staff members is empowered to tailor in-services, conferences, discussions, and even confrontations. I believe that adults tend to teach in the same manner in which they learn. The very nature of secular schools (Gardner, 1991) make it implausible for human inclination toward learning to exist. Bureaucracies, Carnegie units, seatwork, manufactured units, standardized measurements all block the road to individual learning. Furthermore, understanding theories of multiple intelligences leads to a more comprehensive path to human psychology. According to an interview conducted by Daniel Goleman, Gardner's intent was to focus on emotions. When I first wrote about the personal intelligences, I was talking about emotion, especially in my notion of intrapersonal intelligence-one component is emotionally tuning in to yourself. It's the visceral-feeling signals you get that are essential for interpersonal intelligence. But as it has developed in practice, the theory of multiple intelligence (MI) has evolved to focus more on metacognition rather than on the full range of emotional abilities. (p.17)

As many schools study Gardner's theories, backlash emerges.

In a 1996 NASSP Bulletin, Gardner responds to criticism.

> I am actually a proponent of teaching the classical
> disciplines and I attempt to adhere to the highest
> standards, both for others and for myself. Unlike many
> readers, I see no incompatibility whatsoever between a
> belief in MI and pursuit of a rigorous education. Rather, I
> feel that only if we recognize multiple intelligences can
> we reach more students, and give those students the
> opportunity to demonstrate what they have understood.
> (p. 42)

The implications of multiple intelligence for education are profound. Thomas

Hoerr, (1996) director of the New City School in St. Louis, states that multiple

intelligence theory has caused a real paradigm shift, not just another hashing of

educationalese with little discernible effect.

> Rarely does an insight have the potential to change how we
> view students, teach, assess, and communicate with their
> parents. The theory of MI, however, does just that. MI theory
> is a paradigm shift because it changes the way we look at
> students and their potentials. As a result, we view our roles and
> responsibilities quite differently. (p.46)

Hoerr (1996), also points out that because MI is a theory and not a curriculum it

has a greater impact for individualization. "...each school's implementation of MI

will be culture-specific, context-specific, and school-specific. Pursuing MI

remains something that is best done by faculty members working together as

colleagues, creating strategies for their unique teaching situation" (p.46).

As a proponent of MI, a principal has several responsibilities. If the principal is a catalyst for change, according to Sue Teele (1996) of the University of California at Riverside, he/she will encourage teamwork, collaboration, and sharing of resources and talents. "The principal enables staff members and students to stretch and grow and be different from each other by capitalizing on their strengths. The principal creates opportunities for students and staff members to share and accept different ways to master skills and concepts" (p.49).

My belief that every student has a right to an appropriate education parallels the MI construct. An educational leader has the wonderful chance to help establish the building climate; maintain high expectations; promote creativity; and ensure learning. An advocate of multiple intelligences can lead a staff to examine student learning from a different perspective.

Change Agents

A second key belief of mine is that without effective leadership, schools stagnate. An effective leader, in my opinion, is one who creates a comfortable environment for change. Glasser (1990) articulates the need for principals to be non-coercive leaders. "The essence of good managing is caring and hard work. The message must come across loud and clear from the manager: No matter how hard I ask you to work, I work as hard or harder" (p.10).

Life in Iowa schools can be very quiet, but change is seldom quiet. Many of our schools are not only struggling with violence, drugs, and corruption; they are

struggling with student boredom and teacher inertia. As schools hand out stickers for good behavior or hold pizza parties for being quiet in the library, students seek external rewards for modest expectations. An effective leader will be one that does not condone such tangible rewards or have such low expectations for behavior. A fair system of consequences, positive and punitive should be in place. Principals who hire and mentor outstanding individuals with a commitment to quality teaching will have a much more dynamic environment for students than the staid, "But I've taught this way for twenty years" teacher can ever possibly provide.

"Educational leaders, if they are to be visionaries, must learn to be troublemakers, for new visions cause trouble. Unfortunately, many educational leaders got where they are by being problem solvers, not by being troublemakers"(Schlechty,1992, p.141). An effective leader, I believe, is a problem solver and a visionary. Leadership dedicated to excellence, a teaching staff willing to take responsibility for innovative strategies and implementing change, and an involved community are all present in schools with a commitment to excellence.

Parental Involvement

The third ingredient in my ever-changing educational beliefs requires opening the school system to parent involvement. When our children are in elementary school we get to know their teachers; we feel connected to them. We feel that

they really know and understand our children. So what happens? According to various studies (Loucks, 1992; Steely, 1994; PTA, 1995) there are several barriers to parental involvement. Time, feeling unwelcome, intimidation, scheduling conflicts, and adolescent drive for independence, are all contributors. The University of Oklahoma (Dryfoos, 1998) conducted a small, but in-depth study which revealed that parents stayed involved in their children's school life despite adolescent protestation. But the parents felt that the school personnel were indifferent and uninterested in their children's lives. The study found secondary teachers were concerned only about the progress in their particular subject. This is a damning perception and indictment of American high schools. Excuses can be offered. "How can I connect with parents of 150 kids each term?" As a teacher, if you are connected to a child, you will be connected to the parent. Students talk about school, their classes, their friends, and their teachers. Parents are often privy to the pain and joy in their children's lives which means that they know about teachers.

Parent involvement at the elementary building may be limited to organizations or volunteerism. A kindergarten teacher in my district asked parents to come in for a day to share information about themselves and their careers or interests. Some parents brought their favorite childhood story to read to the children. Another parent brought a model of human lungs to demonstrate the danger of smoking. The most popular parent brought in puppies that she was raising! Each

parent felt committed to the classroom; each person felt valuable. The teacher did

not ask the parents to staple papers or cut out figures for the bulletin board.

Instead, the parent participant helped plan the entire day and helped make the day

interesting to all students. Adolescents would cringe if their mothers or fathers

spent the day with them at school. Indeed, it is often a form of punishment to

have a disobedient student's parent accompany him/her around school for the day.

What could be more humiliating to a teenager than to have a parent around? Not

having one who cared would be even more humiliating. Parents of secondary

students are often involved in Athletic Booster Clubs or Music Auxiliaries. They

are in attendance at every extra-curricular event. But they are not overtly

involved in the academic arena of school so there is a perception that parents do

not care about secondary schools. Many parents probably do not see a compelling

need to attend parent-teacher conferences if the teacher has not attempted any

prior communication. Teachers then do not understand why parents are not there

to see them. Is there a way to break the cycle?

A part of Goals 2000 (national set of far reaching expectations, policies, and

standards) was an implementation of parent partnerships in schools. If schools

would be more family oriented and families more school oriented (Epstein,1995),

change could take place. A school system which welcomes families and family

involvement goes beyond parent-teacher conferences. Opening the school doors

for before and after school for activities lets the community know that the school

is a part of the community. Utilizing facilities, resources, and technology for all district patrons gives everyone a sense of belonging. According to Epstein, if children feel cared for and are encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more than likely to try their best to read, write, calculate, get along with others and stay in school. Parents who also have positive experiences with the school improvement process are involved in the school community. There is a feeling of ownership and of having input into the decision-making process. Parents have a stronger sense of how to support their children to be successful in school. There is a sense of cooperation and support from the school and from the parents. Teachers also stand to benefit from a close relationship with families. They will have a better understanding of the individual child; an enriched curriculum which recognizes the family strengths and interests. Teachers also have an established network of support and resources by infusing the community into the learning process.

Unfortunately, many districts do not have a comprehensive approach for parent involvement. They solicit parents to serve on committees or to chaperone events, but there needs to be a full-fledged commitment for parent partnerships just as there is a plan of action and usually a coordinator for school/business partnerships. As we prepare our students for the work force, we must not forget the families and the meaning of education. Preparing students to be capable and participating members of a democracy is certainly one goal, but it is not the

solitary goal. In mission statements across America one can find a commitment to ensuring that life-long learns will receive a challenging curriculum. This certainly sounds reasonable. But how will it be implemented so that the curriculum is interesting, academically sound, relevant, challenging, and appropriate? Schools that have not established frameworks for instigating change whether it be change in teaching style, change in curriculum, or change in management structure, are creating their own barriers to success. Whatever change or reform that a school or district embraces, parental support and involvement are essential for success. If parents perceive that their local school is meeting the needs of the children, they are more likely to support direction from the building administrator. A principal who has cultivated a collaborative relationship with the community will be seen as a sincere in his/her efforts to institute change. If a principal is distrusted or viewed as ineffective, parents will become suspicious of any change initiative sponsored by the school. Parents are advocates for their children. If they believe the school is heading down the wrong path, they have the power to not only block the path, but to change the course of direction altogether.

Whatever change or reform that a school or district embraces, parental support and involvement are essential for success. If parents perceive that their local school is meeting the needs of the children, they are more likely to support direction from the building administrator. A principal who has cultivated a

collaborative relationship with the community will be seen as a sincere in his/her efforts to institute change. If a principal is distrusted or viewed as ineffective, parents will become suspicious of any change initiative sponsored by the school. Parents are advocates for their children. If they believe the school is heading down the wrong path, they have the power to not only block the path, but to change the course of direction altogether.

Leadership and Communication Skills

There are many personal attributes of successful leaders which school administrators need to develop and then finely tune. Communication skills must be at the top of the list. Coming from a politically active family, articulation of ideas and sharp listening skills were practiced daily. I was active in drama and forensics throughout junior high and high school. Public speaking is extremely easy for me because I have the ease of experience. Whether it is extemporaneous or a prepared speech, I understand how to reach an audience. As a teacher, I have been an advocate of education and a laison from the school to the community. Whether it is making a presentation at a Board of Education meeting, meeting with staff, or conversing over coffee with patrons, proficient oral communication is vital. My passion for education is obvious and sincere when I communicate with others.

Besides public speaking, an administrator must be able to write clearly. Administrators have to compose more than the occasional memo. Paperwork

demands and grant-writing continue to escalate. An administrator needs to be

confident in his/her ability to write concisely. Good public relations programs

have principals communicating in a written format via newsletters each month.

Poor writing skills reflect poorly on the district. People cringe when educators

misuse the language. In fact, they soon doubt one's ability to lead a school if

writing is incoherent or just flawed (Gilligan, 1992).

Another aspect of communication is being able to listen to what is being said

and to what is not being said. Careful listening and paying attention to the body

language and atmosphere are requirements for effective communicators. The

differences between the communication styles of men and women are revealed

not only in best-selling books, but also by serious scholars, as well.

> In view of the evidence that women perceive and
> construe social reality differently from women and that
> these differences center around experiences of attachment
> and separation, life transitions that invariably engage
> these experiences can be expected to involve women in a
> distinctive way. And because women's sense of integrity
> appears to be entwined with an ethic of care, so that to see
> themselves as women is to see themselves in a
> relationship of connection, the major transitions in
> women's lives would seem to involve changes in the
> understanding and activities of care. Certainly the shift
> from childhood to adulthood witnesses a major
> redefinition of care. When the distinction between
> helping and pleasing frees the activity of taking care from
> the wish for approval by others, the ethic of responsibility
> can become a self-chosen anchor of personal integrity and
> strength. (Gilligan, 1992, p.88)

Gilligan's (1992) work has had a significant influence on my personal interactions and understanding of myself and others. The ethic of care includes paying attention to the needs of others, be it emotional, social, academic, intellectual, or otherwise. The stereotypical Boss-Manager who works in punitive reaction to the behavior of others really does not have a place in a school system striving to develop a partnership with the community. I believe teachers who care about the lives of their students are the most effective teachers. Administrators who are able to demonstrate that ethic of care, whether they are male or female, are bound to be more successful because they are personable. Understanding that individuals have different methods for communicating allows an administrator to develop different but appropriate responses.

> While an ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality-that everyone should be treated the same-an ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence-that no one should be hurt. This dialogue between fairness and care not only provides a better understanding of relations between the sexes but also gives rise to a more comprehensive portrayal of adult work and family relationships. (Gilligan, 1992, p.104)

A feminist approach to management believes in the understanding of behaviors, compassion for people, and a collaborative work ethic. As an administrator I would need to conscious of my style and the effect which it has on others. I will also need to manipulate my style for different situations and

purposes. As a reflective administrator, I would want to try to examine how I am communicating with staff, parents, students, and the community.

My blueprint for administration would include, at the top of the list, to promote an atmosphere of genuine care. A beginning principal from outside of a district has the disadvantage of being known by every one, but knowing few in return. If students and staff are to feel comfortable and or secure with a new administrator, being visible, friendly, and engaged are important. I think it is important to know one's audience, so to speak. By initiating conversation and truly listening, one can demonstrate sincere interest and concern. A secondary principal is not just visible in the halls and in the cafeteria, but is visible in the classrooms, before and after school and is present at student events. What better way to meet parents in a positive climate? Encouraging student participation in extra-curricular activities and demanding academic achievement lets parents and the students know that one cares about the whole person, not just the behavioral outlook.

The principal and school reform. Across America schools are immersed in school reform. According to Shields and Knapp (1997),

> thousands of districts and schools are attempting to make
> school level changes that would conform to a broad
> definition of school-based reform; such as: taking steps to
> energize, empower, and reorganize the work of teachers
> and school administrators, both individually and
> collectively, in the context of particular school sites.
> (p.21)

It is critical for districts to determine if reform is needed before jumping on the latest fad. As a person on an administrative team, I would hope that a needs assessment was common place. The focus of school reform should be on improving classroom practice (Shield & Knapp, 1997). Schools which have a collaborative atmosphere have the strongest chance of success for school reform due to the team approach and team effort involved. Curriculum issues and best teaching practices can only be dealt with if adequate time is allotted. Some schools arrange for shared planning time, yet that diminishes the time a teacher has to prepare for class. Other districts work with staff development teams to determine in-services which are then included in the formal school calendar. If a principal does not arrange opportunities for teaching improvement, the whole notion of school reform is moot.

> Learning is the core purpose, the quintessential
> mission of schools and schooling. Learning and its
> sundry issues also present problems for school leaders:
> Who can learn? What can they learn? How should
> opportunities for learning be structured? To whom should
> such opportunities be directed? These questions are
> fundamental to the issue of inclusion in schools. (Parker
> & Day, 1997, p.85)

Leading the way to more effective instruction. An effective leader is one who has the ability to sort through the educational bandwagons which appear, disappear, and reappear. One of the current educational trends is inclusion.

Schools with successful inclusion programs provide differentiated curriculum for

its learners and participate in a thorough monitoring of student progress. The role

of the principal, as outlined by Parker and Day (1997), is the key component in an

inclusive environment. The school leader needs to be able to articulate the goal

and mission; foster a school climate in which all members understand that the

school is interested in success and achievement for all of its students; and manage

resources for curriculum and instructional practices which explicitly support

inclusion for all students. The principal must also directly supervise teaching

practices to ensure success for inclusion. Instructional leadership is framed by

five dimensions: (a) defining and communicating mission; (b) managing

curriculum and instruction; (c) supervising or reflecting on teaching; (d)

monitoring student progress; (e) and promoting instructional climate (Krug, 1990,

1993). As an administrator I would want to keep these key elements in mind

throughout the day, year, and mission. How would I implement these

dimensions? I would model, discuss, and model again. The primary role of a

leader is leading through one's actions and beliefs.

For change to work, there must be an ethic of care in the instructional

climate. Students typically spend at least eight hours a day in school, often more

if the student is involved in extra-curricular programs. The emotional base of a

child is usually the family It makes sense then that if schools are going to

dominate the time and energy of children, school should be viewed as a safe and caring place to be (Wynne, 1997).

Questions regarding student behavior and curriculum which focuses on student behavior have come under fire by some parents. The oppositional approach of denouncing curriculum and the equally ineffective administrative technique of ignoring the parental concerns confuse the issues. An effective leader must be able to stand up and say, "I believe that we have a responsibility to demand respectful behavior" and then to precisely explain what that means for all educational community members. Berenbaum as (cited in Goldberg 1996), notes: I think values education-education against racism and discrimination and toward tolerance and pluralism and decency and human responsibility--is the single most important effort in our society (p. 37).

A moral education is taught every day in every classroom. Having clear standards of behavior modeled and demanded in classrooms grants students a window on civility. Schools must be a safe haven for all students. According to Kaufman and Burbach (1997) revealed that 89% of Americans think incivilty is a serious problem, and 78% believe the problem has worsened in the last ten years.

Certain components are associated with successful school reform initiatives (Dryfoos, 1998). In the classroom there must be: (a) a change of classroom techniques to encompass cooperative learning and team teaching; (b) extensive teacher preparation and training; (c) higher expectations for students; and (d)

smaller class sizes. For the whole school one must have: (a) teachers involved in

planning and decision-making;(b)schools-within-schools, houses, and academies;

(c)on-site facilitators from outside to work with school staff on restructuring

issues; (d) a shift toward the use of mental health professionals in teams; (e)

partnerships among schools, community agencies, and businesses; (f) extension of

hours the school is open; and (g) parental involvement. Dryfoos(1998) states,

"Schools can be changed to become developmentally responsive to the needs of

adolescents, can enhance achievement, and can overcome barriers created by the

past treatment of minority and poor students" (p.155).

Are schools in such a deplorable condition that change needs to take

place? There is a significant difference between the poverty and corruption

stricken inner city schools and white bread America schools. Berliner and Biddle

(1995), suggest that the presentation of the American education system by the

media and politicians is a misrepresentation at best.

> The Manufactured Crisis was not an accidental event.
> Rather, it appeared within a specific historical context and
> was led by identifiable critics whose political goals could
> be furthered by scapegoating educators. It was also
> supported by an assortment of questionable techniques-
> including misleading methods for analyzing data,
> distorting reports of findings, and suppressing
> contradictory evidence. One of the worst effects of the
> Manufactured Crisis has been to divert attention away
> from the real problems faced by American education-
> problems that are serious and escalating in today's world.
> Family incomes and financial support for schools are
> much more poorly distributed in our country than in other

industrialized nations. As a result, the achievements of
students in schools that cater to the rich and the poor in
our country are from equal. (p.12)

A vision for an improved educational system is offered by Berliner and Biddle

(1995) to include: (a) families with dignity and children with hope; (b) extra

funding for schools goes where needs are greatest; (c) equalization of school

funding takes place within states; (d) average school size is reduced; (e)

traditional conceptions of the goals of education are modified and enlarged; (f)

teaching methods are changed in such a way that they emphasize more

collaborative learning; (g) curricular changes that foster the skills actually needed

for employment and citizen-ship in the twenty-first century are introduced; (h)

new evaluation systems evolve so they reflect the new curricula, methods, and

actual achievement of educators; (i) age-graded classrooms and ability tracking

are abandoned; (j) local communities are more involved with efforts to improve

their schools; and (k) and teachers and other educators are treated as intelligent

professionals.

I agree with all of Berliner and Biddle's (1995) suggestions except for the

abandonment of ability tracking. True ability tracking would guarantee an

individual assessment and an individual education plan. Special education

students have unique needs for services and strategies. High ability students must

also have a curriculum which is challenging and useful. To me, flexible ability

tracking allows a student to achieve at his/her own pace and level. An educational leader who is effective is not afraid to ask questions about the status quo. Curriculum issues and policies are important to the public, to teachers, and to the academic and emotional growth of a district.

Summary

When I think of a blueprint for success or a "vision" for myself as an administrator, I close my eyes and am drawn to a place sacred since my childhood. With both of my parents native Montanans, I would spend entire summers with my grandparents in the mountains. There I found my contemplative spots. In times of stress or reflection, I can mentally send myself back to the Pintlar Mountains of western Montana. As I sit under the tall lodge pines with rushing glacier water hitting the rock beds nearby, I can see myself working in a district that is responsive to the needs of its students and its parents. I see myself as some one who can make decisions evenly, but who can also listen and share in the decision-making process. I do not have to control every aspect of a successful school. Effective staffs function amazingly well when principals allow them to. As dark storm clouds blacken the sky, my disposition does not shift. An optimist who believes in the best that humanity has to offer sees beyond the rain soaked clouds and can even feel the warmth of the sun breaking through. Understand the reason why, deal with it, and move on. My grandfather, who only finished eighth

grade, voiced his mantra without remorse or harshness. Both of my grandmothers were born in 1906. Both were college graduates in Montana. One's success was always linked with education. Their beliefs still echo in me.

My unique upbringing, thanks to my vastly different parents, gave me access to a world of art, science, intellectual achievement, and a life of hard work. There is little that is romantic about leading a school into the next century and sustaining its dream and quest for excellence, let alone instigating continual improvement. But, there is excitement! I see a commitment of not only the heart, but of one's sense of what is right. A high school leader who is good at his/her job will have a variety of interests (Ripley,1997) which take one outside the schools. Yes, a principal must be dedicated of course, but there is more to understanding and participating in life than one's commitment to education. There is also a need for a healthy family and personal space. One cannot be reflective, energetic, calm, demanding. interesting, if not flamboyant, all of the time. The need for "a room of one's own" cannot be overrated. A principal who lives and breathes school will lose sight of how students, families, teachers, and other staff live. If we expect our students to function in society outside of the walls of the school building, we must do the same for ourselves.

In the midst of the hot, humid Iowa night, memories of people and places coolly wash over me. Dreams of what is yet to come are encroaching. I believe that my innate leadership abilities and my coursework will continue to assist me

as I foster my leadership work. Kouzes and Posner's (1995) five leadership characteristics are imprinted on me as I think about myself as a leader: (a) challenge the process, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c)enable others to act, (d) model the way, (e) encourage the heart. One through five--they should be simple steps to take, but deliberate action and reaction must be guided and tempered. I know that I have developed some of the skills. I know I will continue to grow as a leader, yet I am not sure if I am ready to sacrifice my children for other people's children. Is it possible to be an effective leader and be an effective parent? This question haunts me.

References

Armenta, T., & Reno, T. (1997, November). The forgotten leadership skill: Range of interest and the school principal. The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 81 (592), 81-84.

Berliner, D., & Biddle, B. (1995). The manufactured crisis. White Plains, New York: AddisonWesley Publishing Company, Inc.

Davis, S. (1997, November). The principal's paradox: Remaining secure in a precarious position. The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 81 (592), 73-80.

Dryfoos, J. (1998). Safe passage. New York: Oxford University Press.

Epstein, J. (1987). Parent involvement: What research says to administrators. Education and Urban Society19 (2), 76-85.

Gardner, H. (1991). The unschooled mind. New York: BasicBooks.

Gilligan, C. (1993). In a different voice. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Glasser, W. (1992). The quality school. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.

Goldberg, M. (1997, December). The holocaust and education: An interview with Michael Berenbaum. Phi Delta Kappan, 79 (4), 317-325.

Goleman, D. (1995). Emotional intelligence. New York: Bantam Books.

Hoerr, T. (1996, November). Focusing on the personal intelligences as a basis for success. The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 80 (583), 36-42.

Kauffman, J., & Burbach, H. (1997, December). On creating a climate of classroom civility. Phi Delta Kappan, 79 (4) 320-325.

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (1995).The leadership challenge: How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Loucks, H. (1992, April). Increasing parent/family involvement: Ten ideas that work. The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 76 (554), 41-42.

Parker, S., & Day, V. (1997, March). Promoting inclusion through instructional leadership: the roles of secondary school principal. National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 81 (587), 83-89.

Ripley, D. (1997, May). Current tensions in the principalship: Finding an appropriate balance. The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 81 (589), 55-65.

Schlechty, P. (1990). Schools for the 21st century: Leadership imperatives for educational reform. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Teele, S. (1995). The multiple intelligences school: A place for all students to succeed. Redlands, California: Sue Teele and Associates.

Wynne, E. (1997, March). Homerooms: Rediscovering new possibilities in an old tool. The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 81 (587), 46-50.