

1997


## A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Anthony F. Dehl  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©1997 Anthony F. Dehl

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dehl, Anthony F., "A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay" (1997).  
*Graduate Research Papers*. 393.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/393>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

---

## A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

### Abstract

The education system in the United States is changing rapidly. The role of teacher and administrators should also change. Opening the school to its community is one of the changes taking place, not just for physical use but also planning of the school's future. Part of this change should include more, and better training for our teachers. As part of this training, teachers need to develop technology skills to share with all students. Communication is an important part of this change as we become a globally competitive workforce. Planning for our future will take a cooperative action from members of our communities. As we plan for tomorrow, should the education system of today adapt moral teachings and can we learn from past experiences? This paper will examine my vision for administrative practices, the philosophical steps needed for change and experiences compounding these philosophies.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:  
A REFLECTIVE RESEARCH PAPER

---

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  
Anthony F. Dehl  
May 1997

This Research Paper by: Anthony F. Dehl

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTRATING SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

Robert H. Decker

3-7-97

Date Approved

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor/Director of Research  
Paper

Dave Else

3-10-97

Date Approved

\_\_\_\_\_  
Second Reader of  
Research Paper

Michael D. Waggoner

3.10.97

Date Received

\_\_\_\_\_  
Head, Department of Educational  
Administration and Counseling

The education system in the United States is changing rapidly. The role of teacher and administrators should also change. Opening the school to its community is one of the changes taking place, not just for physical use but also planning of the school's future. Part of this change should include more, and better training for our teachers. As part of this training, teachers need to develop technology skills to share with all students. Communication is an important part of this change as we become a globally competitive workforce. Planning for our future will take a cooperative action from members of our communities. As we plan for tomorrow, should the education system of today adapt moral teachings and can we learn from past experiences? This paper will examine my vision for administrative practices, the philosophical steps needed for change and experiences compounding these philosophies.

## **VISION**

I believe that an effective school is one which puts the student first and teaches all of the students. This school should promote staff development, have long/short range plans, and promote open, democratic communication. When you have these things, you will work for a better school. The principal must live the vision and be a strong example for others to follow. Even though I feel that the democratic principal is the best administrator, I do realize that on occasion, even he/she may have to use some autocratic management techniques. This does not imply an autocratic leader who has a rigid vision should force all staff to have that same vision (Fullan, 1992). A strong instructional leader works with the staff, parents and the community to develop a vision for the school that is shared by all.

The phrase "four walls of the school" (Coleman 1987) historically has meant a separation between the school and its community. All members of the learning environment need to take part in considering the size and space-usage effects of facilities, the commitment-reinforcing and the quality of children's education. Efforts need to be made in involving many members to create a successful vision.

While representatives of the community serve the school district as its formal policy making body. Parents need to be encouraged to seek an active role. A partnership between the school and parents needs to be created. Parents, teachers, and school administrators need to be supportive of the movement toward greater parental involvement in secondary education. All of the research shows a positive result when parents become active in their children's schooling. Communication is an integral factor in taking a step toward this partnership. Schools need to invite parents into the schools in such a way that parents are a factor in all facets of education. As the achievements of children improve, the quality of the school improves, the parents and teachers work toward a common goal, and children benefit. The schools should become more responsive to parents, more open and encourage participation toward an active partnership in learning and creation of the vision.

Another group that should be involved in the vision are senior members of our community. They are an untapped resource of older volunteers. A strong case for involving the elderly is made; as many as 70% of the voters in a given community are not parents of school-age students (Amundson 1991). One way to increase support for the school system among older voters is to get them directly involved in the schools. This type of program takes great organization and time. Mentoring, volunteering for clerical work, media center assistance and repair of

grounds and buildings are a few of the places to begin their involvement. Once the ownership of the school is felt by many older citizens, it is then time to seek input on the vision planning. This vision should be the guiding force for all that goes on within the school walls. The vision of the school must be clear and challenging, stable - but constantly subject to question, and planned by all members of the community. The community and staff will hold the key to success of the plan. They must have ownership of the plan and pride in the plan.

Technology and staff development for teachers are two key parts of a successful vision. One of the most important things a school can do is to make sure that each student becomes a literate user of the computer. A computer lab is a special kind of learning environment. Computer learning should help children become more self-reliant and more willing to accept challenging material out of curiosity (Alverstad & Wigfield, 1993).

This type of commitment to technology can not happen without hard work, dedication, financial support, administrative leadership and many hours of teacher staff development. School effectiveness ultimately depends upon the skills and abilities of instructional and noninstructional staff (Guthrie & Reed, 1991). Staff development is the opportunity for self renewal for moral, personal, and professional growth. These programs need to be a continuing agenda focused on a wide range of skills and abilities to meet the needs of the group. Some of the most effective staff development is organized by staff: that includes participation, evaluation and clear expectations for application. The dividends derived from staff development can enhance school effectiveness, heighten staff moral, and further community satisfaction. Unlike business or industry, which seeks to

eliminate the need for human services, education is a labor-intensive field. Hence, a key to educational change must include staff development.

My vision for a good school is founded in good communication, parent, community, and staff involvement, technology and staff development. The above activities are all centered around the student learning, individual groups or people must not become the focus of a good vision. The collaboration of all involved makes the vision become a reality. When people see the benefits of the group's efforts to better the learning for students, the process is justified. Some groups may not see the benefits, then it becomes time to reevaluate the vision and make changes. This change process once again involve all representatives of the community.

## **PHILOSOPHIES**

The ever-changing society we live in places new demands on our schools to adjust and produce productive, globally-competitive students. Students needs to learn to be prepared for life and the careers society will have to offer. The schools exist to enhance the knowledge and understanding of those within them. With these challenges, I believe, the prime professional responsibilities of administrators are to effectively utilize the resources of the schools as to fulfill the hopes of individual students and to serve society.

### **Communication**

The first step in meeting these challenges is to improve communications within our learning institutions. Principals need to lead with soul, they need to



follow their heart songs (Bolman & Deal, 1994). They must listen to all involved so that all can have ownership. Communications between staff and administrators has improved through shared decision making. Change occurs from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. The emergence of the foregoing situation makes me realize that many of the values and traditions that schools have transmitted are not the values and traditions of all people. The school principal will need to sort through these differences. He/she should come to know all groups and their positions to unify support for public policy and achieve quality education for all. It is a world in which the only constant is an increasing rate of change. Schools alone cannot be held responsible for defects in our society. Teachers, principals, community leaders, parents, and central office personnel working together can implement change to improve education. The changes need to keep the students in focus throughout the process. Teachers need to define goals for student's academic and social development; they need to provide instruction accordingly and the need to create a supportive climate for students. These changes have the potential to increase productivity in teachers and, ultimately, students. With the support and endorsement of central office administrators and business leaders in the community, the school building is the fundamental location of change (Education is Iowa's Future, 1994). These changes in education need to happen before a dual school system in America becomes predominant. The public school system needs to show the public what it is really capable of (Swartzindruber, 1996).

## Understanding the Learning Cycle

Another step in meeting the challenges in schools is to realize that all students can learn. This includes, challenged, gifted and special needs students. All students can learn, however, students learn at different paces and levels. We must not classify students, disadvantage students whose primary language is not English, discriminate students on race or gender and we should not discriminate against handicapped students. The public schools may portray themselves as democratic, classes and institutions; but, the research points out that school is not a socially neutral setting (Berla, 1995). The school climate could be improved by promoting integration, getting rid of tracking and developing bilingual programs that lead to English-only classes. Major changes in special education placement and tracking policies should also be considered (Berla, 1995). We have not done more of the preceding integration because, "Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far" (Edmunds, 1995). The lack of confidence and low self esteem of some students can be a big part in deciding whether or not to stay in school. Minimizing the drop-out rate and educating all students will benefit our society; but more importantly, the student will benefit. Instructional programs need to be developed that deal with the diverse need of these at-risk students and families. Some interactions are being developed, such as family support programs, and family resource centers (Education is Iowa's Future, 1994). Expansion of alternative schools for high school completion and educational programs for adjudicated and homeless students need to expand. The entire realm of student needs to be dealt with. Education needs to leave no stone unturned. I feel education is expected to enhance social cohesion, promote academic achievement, stimulate vocational

relevance and provide skills to assure success in the future. More can and should be done for the 10% of American students not graduating from high school. More should be done to promote more than 50% of high school graduates going to post secondary schools. The United States school system needs to become more effective in dealing with these issues in order to protect the nation's position in an evermore competitive global economy. I believe that an effective school is one that teaches all students to learn, as well as students with little academic talent, students with learning disabilities, students with physical handicaps, or students who have little motivation to learn. There are great advantages to teaching all students. In order for the United States to continue to compete in a world market we cannot afford to give up on any of our citizens. Our citizens must be educated if they are to make intelligent decisions on living in a global society.

Many of our social problems are the result of inadequate education (Davis & Thomas, 1989). The principal can exert leadership by helping colleagues to become sensitive to what is going on around them and deal with potential social problems early (Uriarte, 1991). Some of these social problems our students face today include pregnancy, child abuse, sexual abuse, drug abuse, gangs, infectious diseases and racism. I wonder, can our schools solve these problems? Can we help build moral fiber in our students? The answer to me would be "yes", but a new way of addressing these issues would have to be developed. This type of action could only be done when schools and communities work together. Is it the responsibility of the public schools to address these moral issues that have previously been dealt with exclusively in the home? It is my belief that our society needs some direction and action on these issues. I believe that all students can and should learn. I also believe it is the responsibility of schools to teach all

students. Not all students can succeed at the same task, or to the same level, but every student has the ability to succeed. Our job as educators is to create an environment that ensures success for all. One method for avoiding such criticism is to plan for the future, and to work with businesses to supply society with an adequate workforce for the future.

### Planning

The third step in meeting these challenges is to believe in the benefits of planning. Planning is the process for systematically determining future allocation of resources (Guthrie & Reed, 1991). The main reason we need to plan is to reduce uncertainty and focus on our activities. When we plan we can utilize our resources effectively and efficiently.

As a building principal, you must have both long and short range goals planned out. Through systematic long-range planning of goals, it may be possible for schools to reduce the amount of time involved in delivering services to pupils, produce greater pupil achievement or parental satisfaction.

Through short-range planning immediate problems can be resolved. Some problems that occur may need to be dealt with in a more attentive manner. Some changes may be imposed on the principal from central administration or his/her own faculty. These reactions should be planned out with input from the staff. The goals are stronger and more obtainable when the entire staff participates in the process of setting the goals. When you fail to plan, you plan to fail! Administrators must plan budgets, staff development, building goals, and parent meetings, just to mention a few. The organization and planning skills of a principal can be a major part of their success. Giving the staff the ownership and

responsibility of planning goals takes careful guidance. The principal is responsible for seeing that the faculty is prepared to participate in the planning session. There is nothing more frustrating than to attend a faculty planning meeting that is no more than a pooling of ignorance. The principal should provide necessary background information and be prepared to evaluate what additional data will be needed.

The principal needs to exert many skills throughout the planning process; some of the key skills are knowing how to get support and assistance, knowing how to exert the energy needed for completion and knowing the limits of what is possible (Parks & Wormer, 1992). Many questions should be asked during planning. Some of the important questions include who will this affect, will it improve student achievement, do we know the experiences from other schools, who will this effect outside the school ( Drake & Roe, 1994). Successful planning does not always ask the same questions or follow the same steps. Planning: "the act or process of making or carrying out plans; the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures for a social or economic unit" (Webster, 1979), in other words, planning is the making of policies in a social setting in which goals are mutually satisfying to the school organization and members in the school. Planning takes a great deal of people skills. The principal is not the person to take credit, the staff should always be acknowledged for the success of a plan well done!

### **Staff Development**

The fourth step in meeting these challenges in education, I feel strongly about, is staff development. Students deserve teachers who are working to

become stronger educators. There is nothing more appalling, to me, than a teacher who hands out the same worksheet they have used for several years in a row. Students change, and to keep interest levels and excitement in the classroom, educators should be exposed to new or alternative strategies. The teacher must continually strive to learn new teaching methods and to develop resources that help students to internalize and personalize information. "A real investment in staff development" so that teachers and students can learn (Payzant, 1994). Staff development can keep experienced teachers fresh and provide new teachers with direction. Staff development is not simply a "shot in the arm" at the beginning of the school year. This program needs to be prescribed for the staff. Staff development needs to meet the needs of the staff, this can be as different as the faculties in different buildings can be. To fill the correct prescription for the correct staff a principal should choose knowledgeable professional people to present and share the "medicine". The need to set a professional environment that will inspire and release the staff's talents. The principal should encourage teachers to reflect on the treatment and the staff should also work together in gaining strength toward a healthier school.

The main goal of staff development should be to improve learning. "Staff development can be conceived of as the process of constructing a mosaic that is enlarged and sharpened with the addition of each new piece" (DeBevoise, 1983). Those pieces may be a teacher developing a classroom management skill, a subject area department applying the newest research findings on an effective instruction strategy, or in updating of efforts to work with the community. The major objectives of this program should be twofold; first, the staff development consists of all activities and efforts of the school that contributes to the personal

and professional growth of individual staff members, so that they may perform better and with greater satisfaction. Second, staff development should build unity and teamwork among staff members (Drake & Roe, 1994). With these objectives implemented, and the money spent, the time devoted, the resources used can have a strong influence on improved learning.

## EXPERIENCES

Most of my life's experiences have helped to develop me into what I am. Some of the most potent experiences came from dynamic personalities and frustrating situations. Since the very beginning of my teaching career, five different individuals have held the leadership positions in the school buildings I have taught in. All of the principals I have worked for had excellent qualities of leadership, but some just had different styles of administration. Two of these principals I felt like I worked "for", the other two I felt like I worked "with". The autocratic principals left me feeling that I should always do what they asked of me and to never suggest or try new ideas in the classroom. The classroom management skills prevailed as important. The staff surveys and paperwork seemed more important than did the students.

The democratic administrators who I worked with seemed supportive of new ideas and willing to find funding for the things I wanted or needed in the classroom. The overall atmosphere of their buildings seemed to have a higher level of professional cooperation among the staff. Under the democratic principals, I was allowed to seek staff development in Content Enhancement and Site Based Management. This training helped me reach inside and develop new

feelings and compassion for my subject area. I began to look at myself as a professional that had something to share. The training helped me develop confidence in what I was teaching. This inturn helped me to create new challenges for myself. Once I started feeling good about my career, I wanted to learn more. This staff development experience provided me with an insight on how to motivate and share new ideas. As a result of this new attitude, I have been asked to chair committees and become an advisor for student organizations. When the correct training is supplied to a staff member the end result can be fulfillment and pride in one's job. Even though the style of each of the types (authoritative or democratic) principals I have worked under has varied, there was a comfort zone for me under the democratic style of leadership. "A leader has to explicate a vision in terms with which followers or an audience is familiar, and yet in ways which will stretch intelligence and imagination beyond the stereotypes" (Cawelti, 1984).

Working with people is a challenging and rewarding style I prefer to use, yet not all administrators can function in this realm because you have to care about individuals. The supervising teacher of my student teaching experience with was excellent, yet lacked some of the caring skills I mentioned previously. The resulting frustrating experience has stayed with me and taught me a few things about communication skills.

I had just finished teaching the worse lesson of my life as a student teacher, my father was dying in Iowa City and I was in Ottumwa. The lesson was in advanced economics over marginal propensities. The supervising teacher and I went into the hall for the passing of classes. The supervising teacher loudly confronted me about the down-falls of the lesson I had previously taught. I



noticed several students and staff peer at us during this reprimand. I could not have felt any smaller. I turned away from him and began to walk out, but I stopped after a few steps down the hall and returned to the classroom to prepare for the next class.

This experience gave me the foundation to dignify student's answers, discipline away from the group, and provide choices instead of embarrassing or harassing. This is a communication skill I will use throughout the rest of my career. There is a great value in allowing people to grow from experiences and leave the door open. Some people will just walk and avoid the problem. Some will find a reason to deal with the problem. Nobody should be publicly humiliated to be able to grow. There is one other experience that has helped to create my desire to be an administrator. When I was in third and fourth grade, I was on crutches, debilitated by a leg paralysis disease. For two years of my childhood I watched. This created a desire to belong, a desire to help, and a desire to make things better. There are many things one can not do if one is on crutches, but one does have a lot of time to think. Now that I have had two and a half years of study, and more time to think, I want to help again. The study of administration can not take the place of practicing the profession but, it can prepare one for some of the events that may happen.

These are a few of the people and situations that have provided me with some insight. Classes like School and Community Relations, Classroom Evaluation and Secondary Administration have been the classes that have given me more people skills. Some of the experiences I have gained from these classes have helped me develop a novel idea of what the work place will be like. School and Community Relations helped me to understand how a school open to the

community benefits students, but increases the amount of organization and communication a principal needs. Classroom Evaluation provided me with the tools an administrator needs to help a staff member grow in his/her professional teaching career. This class also gave me the knowledge of procedures needed to remove a staff member if this situation would become necessary. The class Secondary Administration gave me more than I had hoped for. The array of knowledge I gained was beneficial. I learned what it was like to be a "minority". The class was composed of several male foreign exchange students, and several females. The preconceived conservative notions that I had were changed when I heard the expression of others in the class on how some males communicated with the females or minorities. Sometimes in this class I felt as though I was put on the defense, but I gained a compassion for the gender issues and minority issues that were brought to my attention. These skills are the backbone of what I hope to take into administration. Curriculum leaders, policy makers, disciplinarians, negotiators, technology planners, and leaders all need good communication skills to make it happen.

## REFERENCES

- Alverstad, Kathryn, Wigfield, Allan. (1993). A Matter of Motivation. The Executive Educator, 15 (1), 12-13.
- Berla, Nancy. (1995). School Mission-School Cultures. Effective Schools, 10.
- Bolman, Lee G. and Deal, Terrence E. Leading With Soul. 1994. Jossey-Bass Inc. p39.
- Cawleti, Gordon. "Behavior Patterns of Effective Principals". Educational Leadership. Feb. 1984:3.
- Coleman, J.S., 1987. Educational Researcher. Families and Schools, 16, 32-38.
- Davis, G. A. & Thomas (1989). Effective Schools and Effective Teachers. Needham Heights, MA: Allynard Bacon.
- DeBevoise, Wynn. R & D Perspectives. Eugene OR: Center for Educational Policy and Management. 1983:1
- Drake, Thecbert L. and Roe, William H. The Principalsip. Macmillan Publishing Company Inc. 142, 375.
- Edmunds, Ron. (1995). School Mission. Effective Schools, 10.
- Guthrie, James L., & Reed, Rodney J. (1991). Education Administration and Policy. 346.
- Education is Iowa's Future, The State Plan for Educational Excellence in the 21st Century. Iowa Department of Education. Revised March, 1994. 19.
- Payzant, Thomas. Payzant Promises 'More than Symbolic' Federal Action. Leadership News. 6.

Parks, David, Wormer, Wayne. Four Essentials of Leadership.

(Alexandria VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1992).

Swartzendruber, Arlis Dr. (Guest Lecturer, December 13, 1993)

Uriarte, Christina Bodinger-de. (1991). The Rise of Hate Crime on School Campuses. Research Bulletin, 48. Phi Delta Kappa.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. G. & C. Merriam Company. 1979.

871.