

2002

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

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### Recommended Citation

Eschweiler, Gregg, "A preferred vision for administering high schools : a reflective essay" (2002). *Graduate Research Papers*. 596.

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

### Abstract

Without an educated population, this nation would not be as strong as it is, nor will it be as strong as it could be. We still have a strong educational focus in the state of Iowa which lends us to believe that we can stand alone. That might not be the case in the future. Our state, communities, school districts, parents, teachers and students must keep striving to be the best and not rest on its laurels. We can not afford to let a generation of our youth slip, while we entertain a policy of isolation. I believe that the state of Iowa will take the step into the next millennium and lead the nation with the development of a strong set of standards and benchmarks that give all students a chance to learn.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTRATING HIGH SCHOOLS:  
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

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by  
Gregg Eschweiler  
May 2002

This Research Paper by: Gregg Eschweiler

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING HIGH  
SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

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5-10-02

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Without an educated population, this nation would not be as strong as it is, nor will it be as strong as it could be. School became a necessity when it stopped being a luxury of the elite and a function of the public masses to promote policy (Alexander, 1998, p. 22-30). Public education was emphasized even more when two other trends developed in our country. Immigration was the first trend which necessitated universal schooling. In order for the masses to become trained in "our" culture and have a chance of economic opportunity, they needed a centralized school. The second event that required a literate public was the right to vote. To be part of the political system, meant that a person possess an education to vote with intelligence.

Everyone has the right to an equal chance at an education. That chance is part of the Constitutional rights of the federal government, which delegate powers to the states, who in turn, pass power on to the local boards of education (Kowalski and Reitzug, 1993, p. 113-126). We still have a strong educational focus in the state of Iowa which lends us to believe that we can stand alone. That might not be the case in the future. Our state, communities, school districts, parents, teachers and students must keep striving to be the best and not rest on its laurels. We can not afford to let a generation of our youth slip, while we entertain a policy of isolation. I believe that the state of Iowa will take the step into the next millennium and lead the nation with the development of a strong set of standards and

benchmarks that give all students a chance to learn.

I want to begin with the assumption that everyone is talented, motivated, and shares the same goals, similar to a "Lake Wobegon" approach, where everyone is above average. I feel that the ability to collaborate with the entire community and give ownership to them in developing their educational system is a powerful tool. The building of a system of education, which is formed by all parties having interest in the same goal, producing adults that contribute in a positive manner to our society.

Starting with McGregors's Y Theory (Blanchard and Hersey, 1982, p.48-49), I would give people a chance to prove themselves. I believe that if you give people a chance to show their abilities, they can be more productive than if you assume what their capabilities are. The top of Maslow's pyramid in his Hierarchy of Needs (Kowalski and Reitzug, 1993, p. 209) is the goal of everyone. We all appreciate operating on that higher level of needs.

To reach that level of collaboration, I would need to improve the Hygiene (dissatisfiers) that gives people a chance to work on Motivation (satisfiers),(Kowalski and Reitzug, 1993, p. 209-211). Herzberg and Maslow both have the basic needs of people being met before a higher plateau of contributing to the overall needs of one's self and the collaboration of groups can be reached.

I believe that the freedom of allowing decision making to be entrusted to those that are involved with the result of the decision, will be a powerful tool. If I can trust people to arrive at a workable solution, that gives everyone a chance to contribute and more problems will be solved with less intervention from me as an administrator. When people know that I will give them that power, they will work harder to make sure they succeed in reaching common goals. Even the weakest link learns to work hard if they know that their contribution, no matter how small, will be a part of the solution. The weak become strong by associating with other leaders and emulating their styles and approaches to improving education and the community surrounding it (Speck, 1999, p. 58-59).

I also believe that by giving people power, I must be able to redirect them when needed. I must guard against redirecting towards my own agenda and focus upon the goals and needs of the district. Because I have a preconceived notion of how some objective should be met, it should not affect the collaboration of others.

I know that as an administrator, I will be held accountable for many different facets of the school's operation. I know that as much as I want to allow my faculty and community to contribute to the process of establishing a sound educational system for their children, there will be pitfalls. I must be able to recognize those issues which require me to act as a leader on my own and those that allow the

input and collaboration of others. I feel that I can make sound decisions regarding issues, but to be informed and listen to input from others, will make those decisions easier to stand behind. I need to listen with the intent of understanding what other people are saying, rather than thinking about what I am going to say or do (Daft, 2001, p.253). I understand, and I would hope that others in my building realize, people will follow decisions they disagree with when they know a direction was taken with purpose and consistency.

Hersey and Goldsmith proposed that there were seven basis of power (Blanchard and Hersey, 1982, p.178-179) that compel individuals to follow a leader's direction. Two of those, position and personal power, are both vital in leading a school to its vision. Even though legitimate power may result in tasks being accomplished, it is the referent and expert power bases that will create a shared learning environment.

#### Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes Gained

One part of my preparation as an administrator comes from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Council of Chief State School Leaders, 1996, p. 1-7) for administrators. They have developed six standards that encompass many of the fundamental leadership qualities needed to be an effective administrator. The responsibilities of administrative work can

be organized into several categories. (Kowalski and Reitzug, 1993, p. 31-37) These eight categories are: Evaluating, Representing, Planning, Organizing, Leading, Managing, Facilitating, and Mediating. These eight factors are also emphasized in the ISLLC standards.

#### Facilitating.

As a principal, I will be called upon to lead my school district in the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community. To bring a community, staff, students, and parents together in sharing the same vision will be an important goal of mine. This implementation of a vision to learn within everyone will be no small task. I believe that I can lead people in that direction, but I will need some help in developing the skills to accomplish that goal.

I mention leadership because I believe that trait is essential in developing a school's vision. All of the other components are required, but I feel that this quality stands out. Planning and managing can be accomplished by one person, but without the help of others, it is top down. To mediate and facilitate, an administrator must give people a chance to be heard. A leader understands the

importance of everyone being heard and having respect for their beliefs.

To begin this process, inquiry-based information must be assembled from all involved(Lambert, 1998, p. 18-20). That could mean the staff, the students, the parents, and the community in parts or as a whole. That information is gathered through several meetings of small groups that relay information, informal and formal, back to the larger groups for more interaction. By mixing these groups with individuals from different areas, ideas can be brought forward for discussion without a polarization of larger groups developing. This communication within the groups requires quality. That means listening respectfully and asking questions that generate feedback. The principal's role as a leader is more in facilitating and mediating these groups. If one becomes sidetracked, the principals' role is to guide that group back on track with a sense of direction. The principal has evolved into a transformational leader (Speck, 1999, p. 131-133).

Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

As a teacher, I have been adding to my knowledge on student learning since I left college. That growth of new theories and techniques will need to continue as a principal. On a higher level, it

will also necessitate the implementation and evaluation of different learning theories. Curriculum will change along with assessment to determine if student needs are being met. My belief that all students can learn in a variety of ways will be fundamental in preparing all of our students as valuable members of our society. Gardner describes seven intelligences that can be related to learning-styles ( Gunter and Estes and Schwab, 1999, p. 5) These different intelligences respond better to different instructional approaches.

As my staff and students are encouraged to reach for these goals, they will need encouragement along the way. That is part of a standard of nurturing their education. The educational climate in a school will be determined by my evaluation and refinement of all programs taking place within the school setting. Curricular, co-curricular, and extra- curricular activities are all part of the educational program that can allow students and staff to meet individual needs. One approach to this evaluation involves assessing the three elements : of the “what” of teaching, the “how” of teaching, and my capability as an evaluator of assessing performance based on procedures ( Danielson, 2000, p.21).

I can not think, that I will have enough content knowledge in every discipline, to evaluate teachers on subject matter. My leadership will point me towards facilitating them to reach their full potential. By listening to people respond to their own questions, I feel

I can learn more about them and their needs. This knowledge gives me the ability to help them in reaching more students and working with staff members towards a common goal.

Managing of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective environment.

Management skills become a large part of an administrators job. The day to day operation of a school must function without chaos. This aspect of a principal's duties consumes much of his time. Student behavior and discipline is unfortunately a demanding part of the job. Administering policies, scheduling, and keeping the physical plant in proper maintenance, all require time from the administrator. The ability to lead and share leadership, gives power to more people and more time for the administrator to attend to other concerns. With shared decision making assuming some of the responsibility of management, a principal can turn towards educational goals of the students.

A quote that I remembered from one class went like this, "Children are unable to walk away from chaos when they have grown up that way. Their brain is wired for chaos and that is how they respond". I did not get the person's name to give credit for that quote but it stuck in my mind. When there is no one at home to give children the tools to get out of this poverty, everyone looks towards the

schools. That is where we have our work cut out for us. Before we can begin to educate our students they must feel safe in the environment. Once we have established this basic need, nutrition and proper health are next on the list. If we can overcome these basic needs, we then must work to establish norms and the language of our hidden rules for success.

I am presently using several aspects of technology in my personal and professional life. As I work towards my goal of becoming a secondary administrator, I am expanding my knowledge of current skills and acquiring new skills which will enable me to become a more effective principal. This acquisition of skills is a two-fold gain for myself. Not only do I gain professional skills to be utilized, but at the same time by being more effective in my use of time, I have more personal time to balance both my family and professional commitments. I have established several goals to help me in my professional career and personal life. I will utilize my present technology skills to a higher degree and acquire new skills in communicating with staff and my family. This will include e-mail, spreadsheets, and the internet. Better communication with family, teachers, and parents will allow me to become a more effective principal. As I advance to a higher leadership position, I realize that communication will be a key in facilitating and collaborating with staff,

students, parents, and community members. The channels that I choose to communicate messages with the learning community need to be appropriate in richness (Daft, 2001, p. 330-333) as determined by the situation.

Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

My collaboration with families and patrons of the community will be a key in reaching this goal. This is one standard that I feel comfortable in my abilities as a leader. I was raised in a small community, graduated from a small college, and enjoyed teaching in a small community for over twenty years. That has allowed me to know and feel the concerns of many different members of this communities. This is an asset I feel will be of benefit to me no matter what size of district employs me. The skill of working with people follows me and can be utilized with anyone in any district. I follow the coaching philosophy that you are only as strong as your weakest player. That concept has taught me to work as hard with the weakest member on the team as I would with the best player. That carries over to my educational philosophy. The school is only as strong as its weakest teacher, weakest student, or weakest program.

With that in mind, I believe that everyone can learn and improve

themselves. Everyone includes students, teachers, administrators, and community members. When this vision is shared by everyone, pride is instilled within the district knowing that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential.

With that goal in mind, I feel it is important to reach out to all members of the community. No one is too small or too big to be overlooked in education. We can not be afraid to stop and reach out to those that are cast aside by factions in our community. In fact, it will be our duty to see that those students are included as part of our family of education. We also need to convince the strong members of our community that it is part of their commitment to education to reach out to those that are in need.

#### Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

As an active member of the community, my integrity and ethics will be judged by my actions in the school setting and the community as a whole. The school community needs to know that I stand for what is right. It might mean making an unpopular decision, for the benefit of only a few. When students and parents know that they are going to get fair and impartial replies to their concerns, they question your responses less. Students and staff need to trust in your fairness when they come to you for help in resolving conflicts. Without that trust, they will question your decisions as being biased. My integrity

and ethics will be on constant display for all to judge. Knowing that, I must always keep in mind what and who I represent. Moral leadership requires courage to do do what is best for others even when there is pain and anger (Daft, 2001, p.224-225).

With standards so high, it would be foolish for me to think that I would not make a mistake. The key is to realize a mistake was made and move forward. If we ask our students to admit their wrongs and accept responsibility, we must also be a role model in that sense. I can deal with making a mistake, knowing that I did what I thought was right at the time. After acknowledging my error, it is important to make sure I learn from the experience and try to avoid the same mistake twice.

Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

In the same light, a standard that reaches out to the next level of communication involves understanding the political, legal, and social structure and how it effects the local school community. From our first class and its readings, I have begun to understand some of the legal tests on education that have formed our guidelines in administration of schools.

Separation of church and state is one area that has been tested in the courts This small part of education and government has

many social, political, and cultural implications on our school systems. When making a decision involving the issue of separation of church and state, we need to consider how it compares to previous cases. I can follow the case law of previous decisions, but I must be able to apply such precedent correctly. The culture of our society has evolved for over two hundred years. In that time, we have become a nation of many religious, cultural, and global values. Since September 11, 2001, the United States has been involved in a cultural and ethnical war that has presented our current society and students with many questions. The Middle East has involved us in many issues that have been ignored for decades. I must be aware that our Constitution guarantees the same rights to every citizen and it will be a part of my administrative role to insure those rights are not infringed upon.

The funding of public education is a complex process. It has evolved to include public and private dollars, local, state, and federal funds, property and income tax, and any other means possible of funding the process of educating our youth. I believe that as time passes, more funding will be available with "strings" attached for accountability.

The three largest funds in most schools budgets are the General Fund, the PPEL Fund, and the new Instructional Support Levy. The General Fund accounts for most of the dollars and reflects

that in what it can be used to purchase. The PPEL Fund is a discretionary fund brought to the voters for a majority vote. It can be use for building and ground maintenance. It has been freed up to include transportation equipment in the last few years. Many of the line items in a budget will come from these two accounts. The third fund is also a board initiated fund. The Instructional Support Levy can be implemented by a board vote for five years. If petitioned by eligible voters in the district, it can be brought to a vote of the school district patrons. If that vote passes it can be instituted for a period of ten years. That funding comes from a mix of three sources. The board can decide on the proportion of property tax and income surtax that mixes with state dollars. It is used to supplement the general fund and in many cases technology improvements (Iowa Association of School Boards, 1999, p.1-17).

No matter if these funds are implemented on the federal, state, or local level, the ramifications of increasing taxes or implementing new taxes involves many people politically. The larger issue will be leading more people towards the shared vision of the importance of education to our society as a whole. When a budget is set for a learning community, it must correspond and be prioritized to the vision, goals, and needs as determined by the learning community (Speck, 1999, p. 73-74).

### Personal Professional Vision for Administrative Practice

In attending graduate classes during the Summer of 2000, I became aware of the many expectations an administrator is required to wear. In listening to Dr. Else's class presentations and reviewing my Life Styles Inventories (Human Synergistics International, 1989,p.7-12), I selected two categories to strengthen my abilities as an administrator and a person. The two Life Styles areas I selected to work on improving myself in are the Humanistic-Encouraging section,(Human Synergistics International,p.13-17) and the Perfectionistic section (Human Synergistics International,p.51-55). I have an unrecognized strength and a blind spot, respectively, to work on.

In the Humanistic-Encouraging section of my Life Styles Inventory, I rated myself low. I want to emphasize this style more in my thinking and use the complimentary styles from the constructive group to become a more effective person as an administrator and a person at home. I sometimes become more preoccupied with my own problems and fail to listen to other people's concerns. If I make sure that I take an extra moment to listen to other's concerns at school and home, I know I will be a better person and administrator. I can become a "rag picker" as Mandino brought to life ( Mandino, 1977). I do feel that I take time to help people and give them input in solving problems more than what I give myself credit. I believe that working with my

constructive styles and thinking about the problems and ideas of others will strengthen my skills.

The second area of my growth is in the Perfectionistic style of leadership. My score has indications of a blind spot in my leadership style. I know that I sometimes try to do too much myself, rather than delegate a responsibility to another person. I sometimes feel that they can not do a job the way that I would like to see it completed. This actually is associated with some of my Humanistic-Encouraging skills that need strengthening. I know that there are several areas around school that I have not turned over responsibility to others because I do not feel they can handle the job. I need to give them this power to accomplish a goal without worrying about how I would have handled the responsibility.

I believe that I have the skills and family support to become an administrator in the next three years. I know that I have gained a great deal of experiences over the last three years through my classes at the University of Northern Iowa and my experiences in the practicum hours with my mentor. I am nervous to think that I am about to become an administrator and leader of a community's shared vision of education and learning. I equate that feeling to my family commitment and athletic background. When committing to a marriage and raising a family, I could only promise to try my best. My training and experiences came from my family and the values that were

developed. Likewise, my administrative experiences have come from my cohort experiences and mentor leadership.

The minutes before an athletic contest, I would be nervous with anticipation, not knowing what would be required of me to excel. The moment the game or match began, it all faded and the skills that I had practiced took over in a sub-conscious state of execution. That same nervous anticipation is present with me now as I look forward to my first administrative position. I trust likewise that once I become involved in the learning environment of the school, my training will take over.

Without a doubt, the support of my cohort has helped me acquire this professional goal. I also know that I can count on many of these same peers for guidance and support as a principal. The strong bond that was developed by our professors through-out the program has created a pool of qualified leaders to move our schools into the next millennium.

I imagine that education will see many new changes in the next decade. Technology, national standards, world affairs, social issues and school funding are just a few of the many challenges schools and administrators will face, as we begin our new profession. I am confident that I am prepared to accept these challenges as a leader in education.

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