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A preferred vision for leading secondary schools : a reflective essay

Jon T. Flynn

University of Northern Iowa

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A preferred vision for leading secondary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

Educational leadership is a calling that encompasses many responsibilities and numerous obstacles to overcome. The rewards associated with this profession, however, overshadow the potential challenges. Every child that finds success by way of a meaningful educational experience is a tribute to the work of an educational leader. Although a large portion of the educational leader's work is not performed directly in front of a classroom of students, the ramifications of his/her work can be seen throughout a building.

Like an orchestral conductor, the educational leader is responsible for synchronizing separate sections into one meaningful, fluid collection. This person is responsible for monitoring effectiveness and detecting errors. S/he must be able to motivate the group. The educational leader must have a toolbox full of alternative strategies for the employees to use. S/he must be able to create a sense of what the final product should look like, keeping all members of the school community on the same page.

A Preferred Vision for Leading 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

Jon T. Flynn

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Dr. Dianna Englebrecht

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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3|30|04
_____
Date Approved

Dianna Engelbrecht
_____
Advisor/Director of Research Paper

3|31|04
_____
Date Approved

Gregory A. Reed
_____
Second Reader of Research Paper

3 31-04
_____
Date Received

William P. Callahan
_____
Head, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

My interest in education began at an early age. Both of my parents worked in the field of education, and I saw how much of an impact one person could have on students. I admired both of them for serving as mentors, role models, and friends. The relationships they formed with students attracted me to the field of education, as did the esteem and respect which they received from students. These rewards far outweighed my need to pursue money. As I grew up, I knew that I would become an educator.

Throughout my college years, I realized how much I enjoyed working with young people. I was afforded opportunities to coach at the high school level. As I "got my feet wet" coaching, I realized that I had made the correct career choice. I loved the fact that these young people looked up to me, wanted my input, and trusted me with improving their athletic performances. My coaching experiences helped me realize how much I enjoyed motivating people, pushing them to become better than they thought was possible in both sports and life.

My teaching career began in a behavior disorders (B.D.) classroom. The five years that I spent in this environment were trying, rewarding, fun, tragic, exciting, and depressing—many times within the same day. I was able to test many strategies and techniques with my students. They also were able to teach me as much as I taught them. They pushed me well beyond my initial comfort level, and I became a better teacher and, more importantly, a better person from this experience. I feel that I am more compassionate, more empathetic, and have higher standards for my students than I would have without my B.D. teaching experiences.

Beliefs

Throughout my career, I have come to firmly believe in a number of concepts about educating students. First, students want and need to feel important. They deserve to be respected and should be treated in a manner that enhances their self-concepts. I have always strived to make students feel better leaving my class than they did when entering it. By being positive and taking an interest in children, a level of trust is established. Relationships with students built on positive interactions create a classroom where students are more inclined to listen and perform in my classroom.

The second conclusion I have reached is a productive work ethic needs to be stressed and role modeled at all times. Great work habits can overcome many shortfalls and difficulties, and students need to understand this concept. Our country was founded on the premise that people will work to provide for themselves, to better their lots in life, and to find their own happiness. Life does not slow down for people; we all need to adopt and push ourselves to become better. Students need to realize that the chips are not always going to fall their way, but by working hard and persevering, they will succeed more often than they will fail.

Another conclusion I have come to is that students long for structure. Certainly students complain about rules and deadlines, but it is a false front. Students long for security and appreciate knowing where the boundaries are. Without an understanding for where they are going and the conditions under which they will get there, students drift off in many directions. Some become troublesome, pushing at every soft spot, while others curl up in a ball, looking to avoid the unexpected. In any case, a lack of structure impedes progress and is contrary to what education is all about.

The last conclusion—and perhaps the most important—is that educators need to help students' families understand their importance as partners in the educational process. Attempting to work without parental support is much like trying to make a right-hand turn from the left-hand lane—it is difficult, dangerous, and unwise. As educators, we need to stress parental roles, invite them to actively participate, and celebrate our successes. An honest, open relationship should be a continuation of the climate we build in our classrooms. Working together provides multiple perspectives, limitless ideas, and an educational experience that benefits all involved parties.

Rationale For Becoming a Principal

My motivation for becoming an administrator has blossomed from all of these experiences and beliefs. I feel that as an administrator, I can positively influence a large number of students by providing a safe, structured environment where creative thinking is encouraged. One of my strengths is that I believe in students and know how to "push their buttons" positively. I enjoy motivating them. The most gratifying aspect of education is pushing students beyond their expectations and seeing them grow. I feel that I can create a successful learning environment bringing out the creative best in both students and teachers.

I am also drawn toward educational leadership because of my strength in forming open, honest lines of communication. I feel that I am a good listener; I genuinely care about the thoughts and concerns of others, and I make decisions based on what is in the best interests of all involved. Building a positive rapport with parents and the community is of the utmost importance to me. I enjoy the process of building relationships. Building

relationships honestly, openly, and with a sense of humor leads to progress. Even when the chips are down, people gain trust in a focused, hard-working leader who is intent on creating positive change through the involvement of others. I feel that my skills in this area would be an asset to the students and to a school.

In summary, I want to become an educational leader because I care. I want students to succeed. I want staff members to feel valued and appreciated. I want parents to feel empowered. I want the community to trust the educational system. In general, I want our schools to be the cornerstone of the American Dream. My goal is to provide the best possible education for each student. That is what our community expects, and that is what our children deserve.

The first step in providing an educational environment that leads to increased student achievement is to involve all stakeholders. This process begins with developing relationship between the home and the school.

Developing Relationships Between Home and the School

Students spend less than one-third of their day in an educational setting. While in school, they are expected to adhere to certain rules. Students are expected to exert effort to become more intelligent and more productive future citizens. Students are encouraged to aim high! Hard work and positive attitudes are seen as the keys to success. Educators care about what the students are doing, and they go to great lengths to help the students reach their goals.

Unfortunately, many of these concepts and practices are forgotten as soon as the school doors open at the end of the day. As students shift into their lives outside of

school, the rules and expectations change. The expectations are inherently different at home, with friends, in the neighborhood, and so on. Many of the behaviors that schools try to advocate become unimportant. A day's work in the classroom can be lost in a very short period of time.

In order for students to be successful, the lines of communication between the school and home need to be open and strong. This process is initiated and made a priority by the principal. "Principals set the tone for the school by modeling practices they want their teachers to employ, encouraging teachers and staff to communicate with parents, and recognizing family strengths and potential rather than deficits" (Kreider & Lopez, 1999, p. 16). Although the principal has many jobs, getting and keeping parents involved is one of the most important tasks s/he must perform. Without parental support, input, and encouragement, student success becomes more difficult.

Barriers to Productive Communication

Many barriers stand in the way of good school-home communication. A lack of trust may be present, either from the home or the school. Work schedules, day care issues, or lack of transportation may keep parents from interacting with the schools. A prior lack of positive communication from the school may have strained this relationship. Many parents feel uncomfortable in the school setting based on their own school experiences or a perception of not feeling welcomed by teachers (Ramirez, 2001).

Misperceptions by school staff members also hinder positive relationships. Stereotypes regarding people from certain socio-economic levels obviously interfere with the process of effective communication. The lack of positive home-school relations may

also happen with single parents or at-risk families (Ramirez, 2001). A lack of respect for a family's ideas or offers of assistance may strain the relationship. Refusing to reach out to parents, ignoring their strengths and concerns, and keeping them "out of the loop" further alienates them from being partners in educating their children.

Opening the Lines of Communication

A principal must work tirelessly to build positive, open lines of communication. As cited in an article by Gonzalez (2002), "studies show parental involvement to be positively related to high school students' academic achievement, time spent on homework, favorable attitudes toward school, likelihood of staying in school, and educational aspirations beyond the high school level" (p. 132). A principal must reach out and invite the whole school community to become involved in the educational process. Communication with parents needs to be modeled by the principal. S/he must foster the building of bridges between the school and the homes of the students.

A principal can employ many strategies to involve parents in the education of their children. The most important thing a principal can do is prepare his/her staff to establish positive lines of communication. The principal is responsible for hiring teachers and s/he can attempt to hire candidates who will effectively relate with and communicate with parents. Staff development can be designed to give teachers the strategies and resources needed to involve the students' families in the school community. An attitude of mutual respect and trust between the home and the school needs to be fostered by every staff member.

Numerous opportunities need to be offered to parents to get them involved—especially early in the school year (Baker, 2000). A principal can schedule parent-teacher conferences and meetings to meet the needs of the community. To accommodate parents with transportation problems, conferences can be held at neutral locations, or transportation can be provided to the school. A principal can provide families newsletters and calendars to keep them up to date with school events. Another method of involving parents elicits the use of the media to promote the school. Utilizing the newspaper, radio, and television along with distributing flyers and newsletters would guarantee that information was being presented to the greatest number of student households.

A principal also needs to work to provide services that will benefit families. Partnerships can be formed with agencies around the community to provide classes, health services, and social services. Programs can be started to teach parents about child development and how to help their children with their academic work. After school programs can be used to help parents keep track of their children, as well as with helping the students academically and socially. As a school offers more opportunities for family involvement, it opens the door for support and cooperation.

Conclusions About Developing Home-School Relationships

A school cannot occupy students' attention for every hour of the day. Many people outside the school walls influence students' thoughts and behaviors. Schools need to develop strong relationships with as many of these people as possible—starting with the students' families. Studies have shown that parental involvement can be as important as any teaching activity, and parents' high aspirations for academic success lead to

increased achievement (Fan, 2001). A principal must set high expectations for students and actively recruit the involvement of families to increase the chances of success.

The critical element of establishing positive relationships between the home and the school is reflective of Standard 4 of the Iowa Standards of School Leaders (ISSL). Relationship building is absolutely essential for the successful principal. Regardless of how great a visionary leader a principal is, s/he needs to have the support of the students' families. A principal may be a brilliant instructional leader, but without support from home, often strategies will be rendered useless. A principal may have great organizational skills, but without family support and input, plans will fall short of their intended goals. Building relationships with students' families is one of the highest priorities a principal should have. Without family support, education is a ship at sea, without sail or paddle. With family support, any voyage is possible.

Developing a Positive School Climate

Many factors influence how students achieve in the classroom. Each student enters the classroom with a different mindset every day, the result of the myriad of activities and happenings that take place outside of the school. A student's home life might be extremely complicated. A boyfriend or girlfriend may have just ended a relationship. A beloved family member might have passed away. Whatever the circumstances, each child has the right to feel safe and welcome in our schools. The responsibility for creating this atmosphere lies with every educator; however, this responsibility falls even more squarely on the principal who must ensure that the staff realizes how important a positive school climate is.

Definition

School climate has been defined by Wilmore as, "the spirit or the 'feel' of the school" (p. 33). The climate of the school is set and modeled by the principal. The principal is in a position to facilitate the vision of the school—either directly or indirectly—to the greatest number of people. S/he is responsible for the well being of each student. The principal is also responsible for creating a learning environment that is free from threat, violence, or negative peer pressure. This responsibility is a tall order, but one that must be fulfilled to ensure optimal student achievement and educational satisfaction.

Recent tragedies in places such as Columbine, Colorado have cast a new light on some of the problems that today's students face. Behaviors such as bullying, violent confrontations, and drug and alcohol abuse present serious safety concerns. These types of behaviors produce frightened students who are uncomfortable at school. School safety is more than physical safety—it is also emotional and intellectual (Clarksean & Pelton, 2002). Students need to feel free to express themselves, to ask questions, to seek guidance, and to grow without being condemned by their peers. Growth cannot occur without a structured environment in which all of the students, faculty, and staff know the behavioral expectations and the consequences for not following them. A positive school climate cannot exist without this type of structure.

Many of the behaviors that threaten students and are detrimental to school climate are not of the magnitude of the Columbine incident. Snickers from the back of the room following a question to the teacher may force students to shut down. Expectations of a certain peer group may hinder active classroom involvement. The influence of peers not

only shapes classroom interactions, but school climate as well. Teachers and the educational leader need to be aware of the effects of peer pressure, and they need to use it to promote positive behaviors and expectations. Many of the "small" distractions or insults can be prevented by actively advocating respect, tolerance, and excellence.

Suggestions for Improving School Climate

A school's climate can be improved in many ways. Students must feel that they are a part of the school in a special, meaningful way. This feeling of involvement might include being actively involved in classroom activities or being involved in extra-curricular activities. A principal must be in touch with the needs of the students in the school and provide options that are attractive to the greatest number of students. Students who are involved in extra-curricular activities are more engaged in school life, take more pride in the institution and enjoy their educational experience more. It is important to note that involvement needs to be modeled by teachers and administrators. When students see excited adults spending extra time at an activity, they will emulate the excitement.

The presence of respect for all students will also improve a school's climate. Students want to feel important and necessary. Sadly, many students feel as if nobody cares about them as. As was stated earlier, the principal is in a position of power. If the principal takes the time to get to know students—to talk with them—the students start to feel wanted and important. This type of communication can take place in numerous environments, including the hallways, the cafeteria, at after school events, and so on. In addition, the principal should expect the same types of interactions from his/her staff

members. The more time a principal spends building positive relations, the greater the effect on the school's climate.

A principal can also promote a positive school climate by, "treating students fairly and equally" (Harris & Lowery, 2002, p. 65). Students, parents, and staff should understand the school's behavior expectations, the reasoning for each expectation, and the consequences for not meeting the expectations. By presenting these expectations and fervently promoting students to live by them, the principal creates an environment in which there are no surprises and no cries of favoritism. Dealing with violations quickly and fairly promotes a positive environment in which students feel safe.

A principal must also encourage his/her staff to celebrate any and all student successes. Students should be proud of their achievements, and teachers should use individual successes to model and showcase desired outcomes. Student work should adorn hallways and classrooms. Recognition should be given to students who are excelling in different academic and extra-curricular fields. School newsletters can be used to highlight the great achievements taking place at a school. A principal must be creative, using any possible means to promote positive happenings. In addition, the principal should encourage as much family involvement as possible. When the school and the family work together, education seems more important in the eyes of the student.

Another means of improving a school's climate is to use peer influence to pursue positive goals. In many schools, there are students who display appropriate behaviors and excel in multiple areas. The school staff should attempt to use these people as models for the rest of the populace. According to Burns and Darling (2002), many of the fears and trepidations that students have are more in their own minds than in the minds of

their peers. Therefore, when students see their peers acting in opposition to their personal interpretations, they come to see that the behavior is acceptable to their peers . The use of peer influence can be positive and as powerful as any other tool an administrator could use.

Concluding Remarks About School Climate

A school's climate directly affects student achievement and the mindset of the whole school community. When a school's climate is poor, the students and staff are unhappy, and less than optimal effort is put forth. When a school has a positive climate, students and staff are happy to be at school, are excited about what they are doing, and are striving to become better every day. The principal is ultimately responsible for promoting the school's climate. S/he is in a position to increase the levels of respect and excitement inside a school and is responsible for making the building a place where people want to be. In nurturing a positive school climate, the principal will promote achievement, a sense of belonging, and an appreciation for learning that will remain with students long after their school careers are over.

Instructional Leadership

A principal is asked to wear many different hats during a typical school day. Responsibilities such as parent conferences, phone calls, teacher requests, returning e-mail, and student discipline eat up a great deal of a principal's time. All of these items play a role in the education of the students. Unfortunately for the students, a principal's time could be used more effectively, making quality education a greater priority than

management. Certain tasks such as discipline and attendance could be delegated to procure time for instructional purpose.

The need for strong instructional leadership has never been more evident. When legislators approved No Child Left Behind, the message was loud and clear—improvements in education were expected, and no excuses would be tolerated. These expectations have been placed squarely in the laps of educational leaders. Time is no longer available for principals to sit in their offices, taking care of the nuts and bolts of the school day. Principals need to be in the classroom, assessing instruction, providing feedback, and organizing staff development that will result in optimal student achievement.

Skills and Qualities of Instructional Leaders

An instructional leader needs to formulate and articulate a vision that inspires each stakeholder to reach beyond what is considered possible. A principal must develop a vision that encompasses what the school desires to achieve. This vision needs to embrace the thoughts and opinions of all stakeholders. The vision should also guide every action taken and every decision made by the staff. According to Lambert (2002), "shared vision leads to program cohesiveness" (p. 38). As people buy into the vision, the educational ship begins picking up speed. The entire school knows the destination, and only practices that will increase the pace will be adopted.

An instructional leader also needs to optimally utilize staff strengths. Even the most knowledgeable principals lack instructional strategies in certain curricular areas. Leaders must be willing to tap into the vast and diverse knowledge base that is the

backbone of any teaching staff. The instructional leader needs to know where to go to find the assistance that is needed. In addition, the principal needs to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the staff members. Teacher strengths can be partnered with teacher weaknesses, creating dialogue in the pursuit of increase student achievement. Strategies can be shared and ideas can be exchanged. Teachers from one department might lend effective pedagogy to members of another department. Cross-curricular units can be employed to further strengthen student understanding. By empowering the entire staff, a school can stay on the cutting edge in every curricular area.

In order to effectively use a staff, a principal must be able to "reinvent relationships" (Doyle & Rice, 2002, p. 50). Reinvention requires fostering inclusiveness, respect, open communication, responsibility, and accountability among staff members (p. 50). Simply stated, this means that each staff member needs to feel accepted, important, and as though s/he is moving toward a common goal. Each teacher must trust his/her peers. The staff needs to be willing to take risks while seeking improved student achievement. At the same time, an instructional leader needs to make the staff aware that they will be held accountable for their actions. The underlying need is improvement through the provision of strategies and opportunities that are in the best interests of the students.

To ensure shared leadership and constant improvement, an instructional leader must provide meaningful, practical, and timely staff development. A principal must perform certain tasks to ensure that a staff is progressing at an acceptable rate. According to King (2002), these tasks include modeling the desired behavior by continually learning, focusing on achievement at all times, developing every staff member's

leadership potential, and providing numerous opportunities for teachers to collaborate on teaching and learning issues. Instructional leaders should provide opportunities for staff growth in the same manner that the staff educates the students. Staff development needs to be continuous; it cannot be a one-hour piece here and another hour somewhere down the road. Development should be structured to last over a period of time and be a continual process. Using concepts such as mentoring and study groups further underscores a building's commitment to improvement. A principal's job has to be focused on being a coach and a mentor to the staff. As with every other facet of the school, staff development should be shaped by the vision, focusing on areas that are in need of improvement.

An effective instructional leader must be able to use data effectively. As standards and assessment data have become inherently related to the educational process, a principal must be adept at studying data, identifying trends, and articulating results in a manner that ensures comprehension by all stakeholders. Data from numerous sources can be used to explain, "what students are learning, areas that need improvement, and plans for improvement efforts" (King, 2002, p. 63). Every decision should be data-driven, and every strategy or intervention should be data-supported. An instructional leader should know where to find the data, how to interpret the data, and what direction to take after studying it.

In addition, an instructional leader needs to be an effective evaluator. A principal must understand educational standards and how instruction must be structured around them. Quinn (2002) states that, "outcomes for every grade and curriculum area are essential," and that these outcomes should be posted around the building (p. 17).

Teachers need to understand how these standards will be measured. Once again, responsibility for this ultimately falls on the building principal. A principal must also be adept at evaluating staff members based on teaching standards. An instructional leader needs to know what best practice looks like and how the brain works. S/he must then be able to apply this knowledge to what is happening in the classroom. This process potentially includes rearranging or terminating staff members, based on data and what is in the students' best interests. Lastly, an effective principal must be able to evaluate the different programs and strategies that are being used in the school. Based on data, an instructional leader needs to make decisions concerning adjustments, continuances, and terminations of instructional practices.

Conclusions Concerning Instructional Leadership

Many of the hats long donned by educational leaders need to be placed on the shelf. Responsibilities need to be shifted so instructional leadership becomes the primary focus of a principal's day. Time needs to be set aside for the principal to be in the classroom, seeking possibilities, developing shared leadership, and striving for improvements. Instructional leadership must become a priority. One would not scratch his ankle if his nose itched. If policymakers and common sense are demanding increased achievement, educational leaders need to understand where the itch really lies and why.

The Importance of Shared Decision-Making

In order for a school to be successful, relationships with all stakeholders need to be established. Parents need to feel welcome in the school and involved in the

educational process, area business resources need to be tapped to provide needed resources, and the larger community needs to be included in matters regarding public education. In addition, a very important group of people need to feel that they are major contributors to the school's efforts—the teachers and staff. These individuals bring a wide array of talents and perspectives to the table; they are resources that must be nurtured, trained, and utilized to the fullest extent possible to achieve optimal levels of success.

Definition

An educational leader must involve the teachers and staff in the collaborative process of shared decision-making. The process of shared decision-making is being used ever more frequently to empower teachers, create more involvement from the community, and, most importantly, to improve the quality of the education that is being provided for America's children (Brost, 2000). Shared decision-making involves fostering teacher input, using collaboration to make decisions concerning issues ranging from the school budget to the school dress code. The important aspect of shared decision-making is that teachers, administrators, parents, and the community—all stakeholders—share the responsibility of creating a path for the school that will provide the most benefit for all students.

Fostering the Shared Decision-Making Process

The educational leader must first work to establish a shared vision for the school that all stakeholders will support. The vision must take the views of all stakeholders into

account and must paint a clear picture of what the school will look like when the goal is reached. By providing a clear vision, all stakeholders will better understand where the road to success is heading. In addition, this will help people conceptualize how their talents and passions will bring the vision to life.

Once the vision for the school has been established, the educational leader must seek out staff members who are willing to share their talents in certain capacities. Teachers need to be sought for different roles in shared decision-making based on their interests and beliefs. By placing these stakeholders in such positions, the educational leader is increasing the likelihood that people will be committed to the work that they are doing. This will also increase the chances that the teachers involved will make decisions based on the best interests of the students they are serving. According to Enderlin-Lampe (2002), teachers will believe in their abilities to make decisions when they believe that "their behaviors can effect the education of their students" (p. 142).

The educational leader must also ensure that staff members feel competent in performing the tasks they are assigned. Teachers who feel uncomfortable will not perform well. They may not feel that they have the knowledge necessary to make important decisions. If teachers are placed on decision-making teams that do not fit their skills or interests, they will rarely put the time or effort necessary for the completion of their work. People must be placed in situations where they can experience success. Being given this type of responsibility should energize people, giving them something exciting, challenging, and worthwhile to focus on.

Additionally, teachers that are involved in shared decision-making must feel that they are being empowered to make decisions that will make a difference in the

educational process. According to Enderlin-Lampe (1997), "the leader must embrace and promote the concept of empowerment and teacher efficacy by providing the opportunity for teachers to mutually determine the direction of the organization" (p. 154). Educators will not be interested in spending vast amounts of time on committees that make decisions that have little impact on their students. If the vision has been clearly set and genuine responsibility has been delegated, people will buy in to the work and push for positive results.

To ensure that teachers feel empowered and competent in the shared decision-making process, the educational leader must ensure that ample amounts of staff development time are devoted to this process. As Meadows and Saltzman (2002) stated, to be successful in shared decision-making, "the principal must ensure that teachers have the appropriate skills and abundant opportunities to practice them" (p. 47). The educational leader needs to provide training on issues such as group dynamics, group problem solving, conflict resolution, and group decision-making (Bucci, 2000). Teachers need to be comfortable with the groups that they are working with; maintaining positive relationships while focusing on improvement are critical to success in shared decision-making. By providing staff development that enhances this decision-making process, the educational leader is underscoring its importance.

Concluding Thoughts About Shared Decision-Making

An educational leader must realize that the transformation from the traditional decision-making process to shared decision-making may be a slow, awkward journey. Certain people will be gung-ho about the transformation, while others will long for a

more authoritarian style of leadership. The leader must continue to promote the positive aspects of this process while searching for ways to increase stakeholder support and involvement. The educational leader must also be cautious about throwing too many of the decisions to the stakeholders too soon—some may see this as the administrator "passing the buck." The educational leader needs to be constantly involved in this process, working side by side with the other stakeholders to reach the school's goals.

As educational demands change, so must the manner with which schools operate. The days of top-down management are beyond numbered—top-down management is obsolete. The process of education is far too broad and complex for one person to manage effectively. Different viewpoints, experiences, backgrounds, and areas of expertise are necessary in making the decisions that will affect student success. Teachers should be provided time to discuss ideas, concerns, and successes. Creating dialogue will lead to new ideas and growth, which will in turn better the odds of increased student achievement. Shared decision-making can take advantage of the plethora of knowledge contained within a staff and community while strengthening their commitment to the educational process and the well-being of the students.

Conclusions

Educational leadership is a calling that encompasses many responsibilities and numerous obstacles to overcome. The rewards associated with this profession, however, overshadow the potential challenges. Every child that finds success by way of a meaningful educational experience is a tribute to the work of an educational leader. Although a large portion of the educational leader's work is not performed directly in

front of a classroom of students, the ramifications of his/her work can be seen throughout a building.

Like an orchestral conductor, the educational leader is responsible for synchronizing separate sections into one meaningful, fluid collection. This person is responsible for monitoring effectiveness and detecting errors. S/he must be able to motivate the group. The educational leader must have a toolbox full of alternative strategies for the employees to use. S/he must be able to create a sense of what the final product should look like, keeping all members of the school community on the same page.

As previously stated, an educational leader must have the ability to wear many different hats at the same time. Each job responsibility has to be attacked with a sense of what fits with the school's vision and will lead to increased achievement. Performing the multitude of tasks that accompany this occupation with enthusiasm is necessary for the creation of a successful school environment. Without the multi-faceted dedication of the educational leader, a school is doomed.

Educational leaders must focus on those areas that will improve student learning. Parental support must be fostered at all times. Without support from the home, the educational process will malfunction. Nurturing a school climate that is safe and accepting is critical to student achievement. Instructional leadership is the most important job of the educational leader. If s/he cannot help the staff find answers to achievement problems, they will not be found. Lastly, an educational leader must be able to mobilize the school staff, using their expertise and passion to collectively create a successful educational experience for all students.

I am anxious to put theory to practice, placing my beliefs and thoughts to the test of creating and fostering positive school change My passion for helping students reach their goals will guide me on this journey, and my belief in students' abilities will light the path. With hard work, we will get where we want to go.

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