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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

The desire to have beauty around me translates to the development of climate as a school leader. It is important for the physical surroundings to make the school family (staff, administration, parents, community members, and students) feel comfortable and at home. Efficient and tasteful use of space help create an environment that produces a feeling of security, and therefore enhances learning. The values of love, family, and beauty all tie together to the creation of a healthy climate in an educational setting.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Debrah J. Fordice

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During my course work in the Educational Leadership program, I have deeply reflected upon my values and beliefs. Through the values clarification process, I have identified family, love, beauty, faith, and excellence in my work as my top five values. My beliefs about what I need to do to make the most out of life are based mainly on these values, and my actions reflect my values and beliefs. I have discovered how my values and beliefs relate to successful educational leadership.

It became very clear to me in the summer of 1999 that our values drive our actions. In order to complete the summer on-campus portion of the Educational Leadership program, I stayed with a young couple from Waterloo for eight weeks. They live in a house much smaller and less adorned than mine. They have a tiny yard with minimal foliage. However, they have a large entertainment system in their living room, including a big screen television and a high-quality sound system.

During one of my evenings there, they purchased a new Harley-Davidson motorcycle. They were so proud to show it to me, and though I was impressed, I simply could not relate to their excitement. As they were basking in the glow of their new motorcycle, they admitted that they spend over half of their annual income on what they call "toys." They have no children, nor do they intend to have any. Neither of them have any job-related responsibilities after work hours. In a way, I envied their seemingly carefree lifestyle, yet I knew it was not for me.

Why could I or do I not live that way? Why do I care so much about coming home to a beautiful place in which to spend an evening with my family and to finish my daily work interests, while my ex-landlords view their home as a

place to store their belongings while they are out and about? Why does our family spend time and money on church-related endeavors rather than expensive "toys?" It must be because of how I was raised, and the experiences I have had with which I am comfortable. I believe that all five of my values began their development when I was a child.

On approximately my tenth birthday, my mother and father divorced. I was the oldest of three children, and assumed much of the responsibility for helping raise my younger brother and sister. Though our main income was a meager weekly child support check from my father, my mother chose to keep only part time work so she could be home when we were home. I remember feeling very loved, and being able to love freely in return. I also remember how I enjoyed coming home at the end of every school day, knowing the family would be together there in our humble little apartment. Though we had a very limited income, I never felt "poor." I felt loved. I am now able to freely extend love to the children whom I teach and the friends with which I work. My ability to empathize with at-risk children and their families is related to my financially limited upbringing as well. My critical role as the oldest child in a single-parent family also probably contributed to my desire to become a teacher and help children grow.

My experiences of growing up with my mother, brother, and sister, in a context which required mutual understanding and support, created my values of love and family. I grew up to believe that it is important to give and receive love freely, and I act upon that belief by focusing primarily within the context of my

"new" family comprised of my husband, our son and daughter, and myself. Many people have commented on what a warm and loving family we are.

My mother's warmth extended to the making of our home. Though it was a small, one-level apartment in an old house, it was decorated simply and tastefully. I can remember being in awe of my friends' big and elaborate houses, yet never feeling embarrassed about mine. I also remember adults commenting about our "cute and cozy" home during Bible studies hosted by my mother. The beauty in our home came from an efficient and aesthetic use of space, and an emphasis on orderliness. Mom expected us to keep our bedroom neat, but allowed us some decorating freedom. Because we were forced to maintain order within a small space, I learned to appreciate beauty in terms of spatial order, simplicity, and attractiveness to the eye. My husband and I have expanded those definitions of beauty to include an appreciation for architecture and landscaping, and now live in a beautiful, historic home built in the arts and crafts style. It is this simplicity and order within the setting of beautiful architectural surroundings that makes me feel comfortable and beckons me home.

The desire to have beauty around me translates to the development of climate as a school leader. It is important for the physical surroundings to make the school family (staff, administration, parents, community members, and students) feel comfortable and at home. Efficient and tasteful use of space help create an environment that produces a feeling of security, and therefore enhances learning. The values of love, family, and beauty all tie together to the creation of a healthy climate in an educational setting.

My value of faith began as a child, but matured through challenges I have faced as an adult. As I grew up, I attended Sunday School, went through Confirmation classes, participated in church choirs and youth groups, and attended Bible camps during summer vacations. These experiences, along with the modeling through family worship and prayer, laid the foundation for my faith. However, by surviving a potentially fatal disease as an adolescent, and by having a daughter with Down Syndrome and severe heart defects, my faith has been tested and strengthened. The values of love and family are intertwined with the value of faith, because as we experience these trying times together, we grow together in love and faith. In return, I want to give to those in need. My character is stronger as I grow through faith-strengthening experiences, and I am able to better understand others. I also have a greater desire to serve others because of my strong faith in God, and education is a field of service. As I become a stronger educator, I want to take on the most influential role that I can, while maintaining a lifestyle that reflects and nourishes my values.

The desire for excellence in my work is a value that probably comes from my strong German roots, and more from my father's side of the family. My father was and still is "addicted" to his work, and I believe I have inherited this mixed blessing. I call it such because I am proud of my good work, but I have a hard time pulling away from it. I want to do the best job possible, and I do not mind working long, hard hours. Even in high school, I spent hours doing homework every evening, being almost a perfectionist in the quality of my work. When I visited my father on occasional weekends, I never saw him do anything but work and sleep. Although I know he loves his children, his relationship with

us lacks depth because we have never spent much time together. I also fear for his retirement because I do not know what he will do with his free time. In efforts to learn from what I have observed about my father, and to find a more healthy balance in my life, part of my personal and professional growth plan is to spend more time with my family and on myself.

All of my identified values are related to beliefs which drive my actions. My childhood family taught me to love, and since I believe it is important to spend time with one's family and grow in love through shared experiences, I spend my time this way. As an educational leader, I will have the opportunity to love students and staff in a nurturing sense, and they will be my second family. My faith has been planted and has grown enough to withstand great challenges, and I will draw upon that faith in times of stress and doubt as an educational leader. My value of beauty will be important as I retreat to my home, and as I strive to develop a secure and inviting climate in an educational setting. My value of excellence in work will help me become a successful leader, and combined with my value of family, I will work to maintain a healthy balance between school and home.

Components of Successful School Leadership

I believe that successful leadership is rooted in modeling behaviors upon which the school community agrees are important for learning to occur. School administrators must model what they expect of their teachers, parents, and community leaders, and in turn, those adults must model what they want the students to do and to be like. These behaviors include sharing a vision, having a culture of quality, being reflective, asking questions, and serving others. These

are the main components I believe are necessary both for successful leadership and for successful learning.

Having a Shared Vision

The first step to successful school leadership is to develop with school staff, parents, community leaders and organizations, and students (in other words, all who have a stake in the success of the school and community) a shared vision. This shared vision should include the school's mission, culture, structures, and assessment practices, based upon what the stakeholders believe and value.

I believe that it is not enough for the school administrator to have a vision, no matter how great the vision is. That vision must be shared with other school leaders and blended with their visions. Linda Lambert (1998) supports this belief and describes it as "broad-based leadership."

> When we equate the powerful concept of leadership with the behaviors of one person, we are limiting the achievement of broad-based participation by a community or a society. School leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole. Such a broadening of the concept of leadership suggests responsibility for a shared purpose of community. (p.5)

Schools alone cannot educate children. Henceforth, administrators alone cannot make the decisions for how education happens in their schools. Children need support from home and community organizations as well as from school. School administrators need to seek out community resources that could have a positive impact on children's education, have them partake in the development of the school's vision, and celebrate successes with them. As changes in family

structures and economics place more and more demands on parents and schools, churches, neighborhood associations, and businesses need to work together to form strong partnerships with schools and mentorships with students in order to maximize services for children (Coontz, 1997).

When a school community shares the same philosophy and dreams the same dreams, the work of accomplishing those goals will be done with desire and anticipation. When the team believes there is a need for change or that a decision must be made to solve a problem, based upon its own questions and answers found in collected data, it will support the change or policy. On the contrary, if a school administrator simply lays out a plan for school improvement or policy change with minimal input from others, the work may be done begrudgingly at best because the workers have limited ownership in the plan.

It is the same with children. If students are allowed to direct their learning based on what they see is interesting and important, they will approach the learning tasks with excitement. If children are allowed to help form rules which arise out of need, they will be more likely to follow them. When children understand and believe in the expectations for behavior and academics, they will meet or exceed the expectations. Vivian Paley, a kindergarten teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, conducted a year-long project focusing on classroom development of a rule, "You can't say you can't play." In her book, entitled the same as the rule, she describes the childrens' discussions and discoveries as they decide for themselves that this rule, though sometimes hard to follow, makes for a happier classroom (Paley, 1992). This feeling of ownership over expectations, developed through the "broad-based participation"

endorsed by Lambert (1998), is essential to the support and maintenance of school decisions both at the classroom and school-wide level.

How can one develop this broad-based participation to truly benefit schools? Lambert (1998) describes a four-step process starting with bringing out the community values, then inquiring into practice, constructing meaning based upon the results of the inquiry, and creating implementation plans rooted in those community conversations. Because I endorse reflection, critique, and constructivist education, I would put Lambert's process into action as a school administrator, constantly striving to model the behaviors I would expect of the school leaders.

It takes many meetings of different mixtures of people to accomplish the clarification of values needed to develop a vision. Large-group work as well as small-group conversations are necessary to allow every stakeholder to share their own beliefs, values, and assumptions. Once these foundational conversations have taken place, there is a culture born of open communication in which everyone's ideas are respected. The administrator models this validation of others' ideas and open sharing of his/her own thoughts.

Once this accepting culture is established, stakeholders need to take a look at school data and artifacts to ask questions of the school's instructional practices. During this process, the administrator must again be a positive role model by being nonjudgmental. Staff members, parents, and community members may feel accountable for the results of the data. The point of the inquiry process is to examine the past as support for future action. I believe that failures should be viewed as learning experiences from which to grow, and successes should be

celebrated, yet not viewed as ending points. The goal should be continuous growth, no matter what the current status is.

After the data has been examined, the team must figure out what it means in terms of future needs. Perhaps the results can be summed up in a few categories that can then become the basis for goal-setting and action plans. At this point, the administrator must work with the team to critically analyze the data and prioritize the needs, verbalizing the thought process that connects data to action. Especially for parents and community leaders who may not be accustomed to assessment, I believe this data-action connection must be made explicit.

When the leaders agree on the goals, specific action plans must be made. Since a shared leadership model represents many different roles and viewpoints, there is potential for greater quality and quantity of implementation ideas than there would be in an authoritarian model. The school administrator should demonstrate excitement and appreciation for the creativity of each team member. The administrator should also share anticipation for meeting and exceeding the goals that the team has established, and arrange for a celebration of the working process that has culminated in a plan of action. It is important for the school leader to maintain regular and frequent communication with the leadership team to share progress on the plan, revising the course as necessary.

Stephen Covey (1989) expresses the thrill produced when people feel ownership in a problem and its solution.

> As a result, new goals, shared goals, are created, and the
> whole enterprise moves upward, often in ways that no one

> could have anticipated. And the excitement contained within
> that movement creates a new culture. The people involved in
> it are enmeshed in each other's humanity and empowered by
> new, fresh thinking, by new creative alternatives and
> opportunities. (p. 280)

This kind of enthusiasm is what I believe can make school leadership successful as well as rewarding.

<u>A Culture of Quality</u>

I believe that successful educational leadership is evident when all stakeholders emphasize a culture of quality within the school. What do I mean by a "culture of quality?" I mean that there are high expectations for both academics and character development by both the adults and the children who are responsible for the learning. With successful leadership, the school environment is safe. Students and staff are allowed to express their opinions without fear of ridicule, free to be creative knowing support will override judgment, and free to give and receive constructive feedback which in turn elevates the quality of instruction. A culture of quality promotes perseverance and responsibility at both the classroom and building levels.

When the administrator models acceptance and makes the staff, parents, and community leaders feel needed and safe, expecting great things given sufficient support, those adults, in turn, can model this to the students. The end result is a culture of high quality in both behavioral and academic realms. I believe that the leadership line from administrator to adults to students ends where the business of schools ultimately should be: in high student achievement. Character and academics drive each other. When a student produces a work of quality, his/her self-concept elevates, which in turn inspires the child to do well

again and to support others in the same process. When the culture consistently

and explicity demands quality, the children will rise to the occasion.

Ron Berger (1996), a veteran teacher and writer for the Annenberg

Institute for School Reform, believes strongly that many of the initiatives taken by

schools in efforts to reform, though noble, are ineffective. He places great weight

on the culture within a school, and particularly emphasizes a culture of quality:

> The quality of a school lies in its culture. Particular aspects of the
> school--budget, curriculum, teaching roles, decision making,
> assessment, physical layout--are elements of this culture but do
> not define it. The only way to understand a school culture is to
> understand what students experience in being part of it...How safe
> do students feel, physically and emotionally?˙ What kind of pride
> and intensity is encouraged for work? What values, what sense of
> courtesy and responsibility are modeled? (p. 21)

These questions are ones which school administrators need to ask themselves and

pose to the staff, parents, and community leadership members, using Lambert's

(1998) process to dialogue, review evidence, and seek ways to attain and maintain

a quality of culture.

Phillip Schlechty (1997), a national leader in school reform, defines

quality schoolwork as "work through which the student develops skills, attitudes,

understandings, and habits of mind that are valued by adult members of the

society" (p. 56). Schlechty, like Berger, believes that quality schoolwork must be

the focus of school reform.

> Until restructuring is coupled with the quality of work provided
> to students and curriculum reform is coupled with providing
> students access to profound knowledge through work that is
> engaging, compelling,and satisfying, there is little chance that
> either restructuring or 'recurriculuming' the schools will produce

the results for students, teachers, parents, or communities that
they promise to deliver. (Schlechty, 1997, p. 168)

So how does a school leader provide the means for the development of
this culture of quality? Berger (1996) believes the answer lies in staff
development with a shared vision.

> Staff development is the cornerstone of building a culture of
> quality in schools. But such staff development cannot be
> purchased with a single mandate or structure imposed from
> above. Because it is ultimately a way of thinking, good staff
> development can only be purchased with respect for what
> teachers can accomplish together. There must be a wide range
> of opportunities and structures that allow and compel staff
> members to emerge from their fortresses of their classrooms
> and take responsibility to learn in different ways. Staff members
> must begin to work in teams to make important decisions; they
> must forge changes in school culture together. (Berger, 1996,
> pp. 45-46)

I agree that a culture of quality can truly exist only if the culture is molded within
the framework of a shared vision. With common beliefs and goals, the culture
can become internalized, and the expectations for quality can be consistent
building-wide: from adult to adult, adult to student, student to student, and grade
level to grade level.

Growth Through Reflection

In order to achieve a culture of quality, the entire school community must
embrace a habit of reflection. Unfortunately, administrators, teachers, and
students are too often preparing for something or catching up from something else
to take time to reflect upon their practices. Educators and students who do not
practice reflection reduce their potential to connect their experiences to future
learning.

In order to increase our reflective capacity, we need to develop our "spiritual centers," as Bolman and Deal (1995) describe in their book, Leading With Soul.

> How will we develop the seekers that we need? To begin with, we need a revolution in how we think about leadership and how we develop leaders. Most management and leadership development programs ignore or demean spirit. They desperately need an infusion of poetry, literature, music, art, theater, history, philosophy, dance, and other forms that are full of spirit. Even that would still leave us far short of the cadre of leaders of spirit that we require. Learners learn most from their experiences--especially from their failures. Too often though, they miss the lessons. They lack the reflective capacity to learn on their own and have not been fortunate enough to find a spiritual guide...who can help them find their spiritual centers. (pp. 167-168)

If a school leader can be a spiritual guide for the school community and emphasize time for reflection, the entire school culture will improve. Teachers will think more deeply and share more freely about what is and is not working in their classrooms. Parents will take time to notice what their children feel and experience. Business partners can determine whether they are impacting student achievement and look for more ways to continue to do so. Students will process their experiences, deepening their learning connections and strengthening their foundations for future inquiry.

Teachers are the middle level of reflection within a school, needing modeling from administration and being the models for the students. From the administrative end, school leaders who model reflection upon school improvement progress, for example, make clear to the staff how and why decisions are made and actions are taken. When administrators and teaching staff

work together to reflect upon the business of teaching, based upon their shared vision, teachers feel support and therefore take risks as they question their practices.

> But in order to improve their practice and push their students
> to higher achievement, teachers must be open to doubt. This
> work, with its doubt and self-reflection, can be lonely. But in the
> company of colleagues and within a forum structured to provide
> support as well as feedback, doubt and self-reflection can be
> dynamic and motivating. (Rugen, p. 140, cited in Mednick &
> Cousins, 1996)

From the learner end, therefore, teacher reflection will result in improved teaching practice, culminating in higher student achievement.

In order to deeply instill a habit of reflection within a school culture, I believe reflection must be at the heart of both group and individual staff development. Staff meetings should include readings (read aloud so all ears hear simultaneously, thereby strengthening the community), and the responsibility for selecting and delivering those readings should be rotated amongst staff members. The selection of a worthwhile reading is, in itself, a reflective process. Then, the majority of staff meeting time should be spent sharing classroom experiences, tribulations as well as celebrations, and making connections between those experiences and staff development needs. Those speaking have the opportunity to reflect verbally as they share, and those listening may reflect upon their colleagues' experiences, preparing to give constructive feedback and support.

Elizabeth Hebert, principal of Crow Island School in Winnetka, Illinois, has established a "rugtime" format for faculty meetings, modeled after the classroom meetings of young children. The staff members propose ideas for

conversation which she then turns into organizing questions. Each week prior to the faculty meeting, Elizabeth puts the organizing question into the teachers' mailboxes so the teachers have time to reflect upon the question. Ms. Hebert notes that this reflective faculty meeting format has affected the teaching in her school.

> In all our discussions it is abundantly clear that who we are as people deeply affects our classroom practice. We listen to one another to affirm our thoughts, to challenge our thinking, to think new thoughts...When the meeting ends we take those refined skills back to the classroom and gather our children on the rug, ready now to transform the insights we've gained in our teacher rugtime into the process of building a positive community four our students. (Hebert, November 1999, p. 222)

Students will become more reflective when the teachers see the benefits of reflection and model it for the students.

This habit of reflection can also be instilled in teachers by centering their evaluations around self-improvement. Teachers should journal regularly about their daily classroom experiences, and the principal should model a passion for reflection. I plan to give each teacher the gift of a reflection journal, share something from my own journal at staff meetings, and encourage them to share something from theirs. I will encourage teachers to implement a daily classroom reflection time which will provide them the opportunity to model authentic written reflection with their students. This journal will also provide a basis for individual staff development needs for teacher evaluation.

> While many districts identify minimum competency standards or 'effective teacher behaviors,' few have the capacity or a process to assist teachers in improving their practice. Yet a number of studies have shown that accountability systems

> must do more than identify minimum competence; they need
> to foster a climate of improvement through reflection
> (recognition of potential areas of growth) and the motivation
> to change...to confront the complexities of their craft through
> observing, analyzing, and discussing among themselves and
> with their supervisors. (Mednick & Cousins, 1996, p. 148)

Through a combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal reflection, where one

type of reflection boosts the depths of thinking in the other, the school culture can

become one of constant growth toward a higher quality of teaching and learning.

A Questioning Culture

    If administrators understand and implement the practice of reflection, they

become engaged in leading and teaching. Rather than simply going through

managerial motions or teaching tasks, they are self-motivated to ask themselves,

"What next?" and "What do I need to do to make this work?" These reflective

questions are closely linked to the process of learning through inquiry.

    In too many American schools, students are disengaged, and therefore not

learning. Lessons and assignments are ineffective when students are disengaged.

Phillip Schlechty (1997) identifies these eleven qualities of schoolwork as

necessary for engagement: a focus on a product or performance, standards made

clear and compelling to the students, an absence of fear or embarrassment,

affirmation of performance, work done for people who matter in students' lives,

affiliation with others, novelty and variety, choice, authenticity, coherent

organization of content, and richness and profundity of knowledge. He quotes, "It

is time educators committed themselves to inventing work that is engaging to all

students, not just those who were born with a predisposition to the kinds of work

that schools now require them to do" (p. 159).

Laurence Steinberg (1996) supports Schlechty's (1997) viewpoint and blames extrinsic motivation for student disengagement.

> We know that early on--in preschool, for example--children are highly intrinsically motivated and naturally curious, and that they need little in the way of extrinsic rewards to motivate them to participate energetically in classroom activities. We also know, however, that it is possible to undermine children's intrinsic motivation by giving them rewards for things they had previously found intrinsically interesting. (p.73)

In order for students to remain intrinsically interested in their learning, they need to be allowed to ask questions, explore, hypothesize, and reflect upon their experiences. As Steinberg (1996) notes, preschool children are "naturally curious." Does this mean that once children leave preschool they are no longer curious? I believe not. Neither does Eleanor Duckworth (1996), professor of education in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard and worker with Jean Piaget for over two decades. Duckworth believes that "intellectual breakthroughs come to be less and less valued" and "the effect is to discourage children from exploring their own ideas and to make them feel that they have no important ideas of their own" (p. 6).

With each passing grade level, schools provide less opportunities for children to employ their curiosity--to ask questions--by gradually becoming more content and subject-driven. Award-winning teacher Steven Levy (1996), in his book <u>Starting from Scratch</u>, suggests that teachers should instead pose guiding questions to students and explore them through project-based learning. These questions encompass all subject areas while focusing the learning in a natural context. Levy poses questions such as:

What is there to count and measure?...What are the variables?...
Have others ever had this experience, and what did they say
about it?...What do I want to communicate to others about my
experience?...How does this experience resemble other
experiences I have had?...What does this experience teach me
about myself, my responsibility, and my place in the world?
(pp. 20-21)

These questions address math, science, reading, writing, the arts, and social

studies. Within the context of these questions, students can build upon prior

knowledge by asking further questions of their own. Levy (1996) believes that

one goal of teachers should be to help the students learn to "ask questions of

themselves to explore and develop their own thinking" (p. 36). Duckworth (1996)

strongly advocates student inquiry, believing that "children can raise the right

question for themselves if the setting is right" and that "once the right question is

raised, they are moved to tax themselves to the fullest to find an answer" (p. 5).

This kind of teaching and learning makes school an exciting place to be

for both students and teachers, and breathes new life into education.

Too often we think our role as teachers is to fill up. The empty
children come before us and it is our job to fill them up with
knowledge and understanding...This kind of learning environment
not only bores the children but also robs them of the opportunity to
discover meaning and build understanding for themselves. The
excitement and joy of learning for the student is in the chase, the
discovery. For the teacher, it is in bringing out the experiences
that will shed light on the path and illuminate the treasure. (Levy,
1996, p.12)

It is the administrator's role, then, to encourage teachers to establish a

questioning culture in their classrooms. School leaders can support time for

classroom reflection which motivates students to find answers and helps them

find direction in their ventures. Teachers need to know that it will take time to allow children to explore concepts in depth through inquiry, but that the time is well spent and supported by administration. Principals must work with community resources and technology and media specialists to secure a large pool of resources including textbooks, tradebooks, software, experts, and places to visit. By doing so, teachers will have an abundant supply of research options available. Administrators need to support and celebrate with teachers as they risk veering away from the dispensing of prepackaged curriculum in order to let student inquiry drive the learning. Finally, school leaders must allow teachers to feel open to ask questions of the administration, so that the culture of questioning is modeled from the top down.

Service to Others

Another responsibility of schools which school leaders need to model and support is to instill in students an awareness for and sensitivity to the needs of society. Children need to see that their learning has a purpose as well as a way to allow them to contribute positively to their community. Learning should involve service to others, with an emphasis on building significant relationships over time. In this manner, students gain a sense of fulfillment and strive to do the best work they can because they care about the results of their endeavors. Academic studies become meaningful when they are immediately applicable to a project which benefits something or someone they care about. Additionally, if schools become a community of learners who use the knowledge and skills they acquire to serve their community, the status of education and schools is elevated.

Young children who have not yet become materialistic or self-serving possess a natural ability to give and receive love freely. I believe that school should be a place where children can learn to use this quality for the good of society. By discovering problems, seeking and becoming a part of the solutions, and celebrating their successes, children can make meaning of their learning. Jonathan Kozol (1995), author of several books related to social and educational injustice, has spent much of his life interviewing children. He believes that children are society's hope for a better future. "It is, above all, the very young whose luminous capacity for tenderness and love and a transcendent sense of faith in human decency give me reason for hope" (pp. xiv-xv).

I believe we must teach our children the joy of serving others by helping them discover societal needs. Too many adults who grew up in the traditional departmentalized subject and lecture format missed the opportunity to go out into the community with their schoolmates and make a difference in someone else's life. Children can benefit themselves and society by learning to be aware of others' needs as well as their own.

> I think that we'd be asking questions all the time. 'Where does my money come from? Who pays for all the fun I have? Who is left out? Do I need this bottle of expensive perfume more than a child needs a doctor or a decent school? (Kozol, 1995, p.233)

I think schools must be environments where students ask themselves and each other significant questions such as these. Kozol (1995), during an interview with a poverty-stricken mother in the Bronx, expressed his hope that children who are surrounded by media and politicians that blame society's problems on the less

fortunate will someday rebel. I share Kozol's hope that the next generation will not be indifferent.

An emphasis on service can positively impact a school's culture. "Surely, this is one of the best side effects of fostering a culture of service in a whole school: the students and the adults become more caring people" (Mednick & Cousins, 1999, p. 2). Expeditionary Learning, a recent school reform based on the service-rooted philosophy of Outward Bound, supported the publication of a collection of teachers' writings that describe significant, long-term projects in which some type of service drives the students' learning (Mednick & Cousins, 1999). Testimonies by teacher after teacher describe the warmth which pervades their classrooms as students, working together to learn through service, become more sensitive human beings.

In service learning, along with a caring culture comes high student achievement. Greg Farrell, president of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, writes that

> ...starting with service, putting service at the center, enhances
> rather than sacrifices academic rigor, motivates both teachers
> and students to go beyond what they can do, connects learning
> to life, and provides the powerful learning experiences that
> teachers and students remember for the rest of their lives.
> (Farrell cited in Mednick & Cousins, 1999, p. ix)

For example, students who write biographies of nursing home residents read intently about twentieth century events, wrote multiple drafts of biography chapters, and revised their residents' portraits several times. They were intrinsically motivated to learn and to improve their crafts because the quality of

their final product mattered to the residents and their families. On a district writing assessment late in the school year, the students from this at-risk school who were involved in this service project scored nearly twice as high as the district average for their grade level (Mednick & Cousins, 1999).

How can service become a school focus? Children need to value service as an important and fulfilling part of life. This must be modeled by the adults around them. School leaders should take an active role of service within their community and their schools. For example, principals that are active members of fraternal service organizations set an example for their staff members. Principals can model service to parents by making every effort possible to find necessary resources and help problem-solve for their children. Principals can also model service to their staff and students by helping in the classrooms. School leaders who work with children to hold school-wide benefit activities where profits go to organizations for people in need model intergenerational collaboration for the good of society. Principals can support staff development for teachers to learn about structuring academics around a service focus. Community media can support service learning with front-page coverage which documents and celebrates children making meaning of their learning by making a difference in their community.

Summary

Upon synthesizing my thoughts to make a connection between my values and beliefs to what components I believe are necessary for successful school leadership, I learned some important things about how I came to believe what I do about education. I discovered that the advantages I had during my upbringing

have been instrumental in determining my values and beliefs, and in turn, my values and beliefs set the criteria for what, in my mind, constitutes a good school. My values of beauty, family, faith, and love, products of my upbringing, explain my desire to have a warm school culture of quality, reflection, and service, rooted in a shared vision. Some of these values directly relate to the successful school components (i.e. faith and reflection, love and service, family and shared vision), yet as the elements of school culture are intertwined, so are the relationships between my values and beliefs.

One disadvantage of my childhood has also influenced my educational beliefs. Throughout my schooling, I did not question as I learned; I compliantly memorized material and tested well. I worked to get good grades that would please my parents and my teachers. It was not until I began questioning my teaching practice as an adult that I really wanted to learn in order to improve my skills and affirm my educational philosophy. Because I missed this intrinsic motivation as a child, and have derived great satisfaction from it as an adult, I believe a culture of questioning in school, from preschool to college, is extremely important.

A final discovery I have made through this reflective exercise is the importance of modeling as an administrator what one believes and values to be important. It seems that it will be very natural for me to model the elements I have discussed because I truly believe in and value them. The school culture cannot help but demonstrate quality, reflection, questioning, and service, because they are a part of me, and as a school leader, I will model them. As I strive for excellence in my work, I will model that desire to the entire school community,

which will set a high standard for excellence in our school. The vision shared between the other school and community leaders and myself will determine how and to what extent each of these components is emphasized. My leadership capabilities can only grow stronger as I work to incorporate the beliefs and values of others, with my own, for the good of the entire school community.

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