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# My vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

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# My vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

## **Abstract**

I believe the most profound experiences have been watching my mentor in her administrative style and comparing that to the style of my current and past administrators. Somewhere along the way I have taken elements from each one of their administrative styles, and shaped it into a style of my own. I believe I will be an excellent leader, largely due to the tremendous experiences along the way. I am excited to think about the successes and challenges I will encounter as I guide leadership capacity, and shape the culture of the people I lead.

This paper will be a great tool in focusing my energy as I begin my administrative journey. It will guide my vision as I have established those components I feel are essential in creating a superior school: structure of learning, student achievement, and parental involvement. As I see it, these three components encompass a wide array of other leadership roles that I will fulfill for the school I lead.

**MY 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**

**University of Northern Iowa**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirement for the Degree**

**Master of Arts in Education**

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**by**

**Angela J. Fowler**

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This Research Paper by: Angela J. Fowler

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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In beginning my journey toward educational enlightenment, I started spending countless hours not only in my undergraduate classes, but in various school buildings as well. Even years before I began this journey I was filled with an internal drive and determination to pursue a higher degree in the principalship. I have always had a great admiration for two of the most influential people in my life, my parents, who are both elementary principals. I was raised in a home where strong values were instilled in my brother and me. We had countless opportunities to learn about creating positive relationships with people who were different than us. My mother, who was a facilitator at a high minority school, took every chance to involve us with the children from her school. We even spent time delivering Christmas baskets to the families in need at her school. By creating these opportunities to see differences I believe that my brother and I both gained great knowledge in our ability to analyze many diverse perspectives on life, which as I think now, will be crucial to analyzing the many diverse perspectives of staff, parents and students at a building I lead.

Not only did we learn diversity but we also learned a great deal about perseverance. My father came from a family environment that provided very little academic support, due to financial constraints. However, he worked diligently at wrestling in high school, so that he received the opportunity to join the University of Iowa as a member of their wrestling team. He graduated after working as a full time athlete at a Big Ten school, a full time student, and an

employee of the work-study program through the college. My brother exemplified the very meaning of perseverance as he struggled all through school with learning disabilities in writing and reading. What would take the average student one hour to read, would take my brother double the time, at least. His disabilities did not discourage him, but rather motivated him to achieve even higher goals. He graduated high school, with two sports letters, several academic letters, a GPA of close to 3.60, and was recruited by the University of Northern Iowa to be a kicker for the football team. These achievements were attained all while persevering with his learning disabilities. Lastly, my mother conveyed a strong sense of perseverance as she completed her Ph.D. two Decembers ago. She worked as a full time principal, an ad-junc professor, and raised two children, all while finalizing her dissertation. The perseverance that has been modeled to me throughout my life has been a key factor in my ability to strive for this degree.

Over the past seven years I have witnessed the inner workings of a complex system and the profession that I am eager to learn more about. As I think about all the challenges and triumphs my future holds I feel certain of which road to choose as I travel along my journey. I believe that William Arthur Ward said it best, "If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it." (as cited in Teen Esteem, 1998, p. 264). My dream has been to work with colleagues and peers to create a school environment which will support and produce productive, enthusiastic members of society. The best way that I can

follow my dream is by continuing on my journey to become an administrator.

The role of the administrator has the most wide spread impact on the future of our educational system.

### Structure of Learning

I believe there are several components that will aid in the creation of a solid, exciting, and productive learning structure; brain compatible learning, integrated curriculum, community building process and a multiage structure. The first of these components is creating a brain compatible learning environment. Teachers for years have been incorporating instructional strategies that they feel are best practice. David Sousa, author of brain based learning stated,(as cited in Chance, 2001) “Teachers try to change the brain every day. The more they know about how it learns, the more successful they can be” (p. 72). I feel that this statement is accurate. When I continued reading I was impressed with the wealth of information available to support the idea of creating a school that is brain compatible. Each of our students and teachers comes to school with a variety of academic strengths. By embracing the concepts of brain compatible learning both students and staff will flourish. Howard Gardner (as cited in Weiss, 1999) suggested that each learner has a combination of several intelligences: interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, linguistic, naturalist, and existentialist. Research done by Gardner supports the notion of creating environments that teach to each child’s

individual needs. In an interview with Gardner, Checkly (1997) discussed the rationale behind understanding the multiple intelligences. Gardner stated, "If we treat everybody as if they are the same, we're catering to one profile of intelligence, the language-logic profile. It's great if you have that profile, but it's not great for the vast majority of human beings who do not have that particular profile of intelligence" [on-line]. Fara Green (1999) summarized this interview in her article, *Brain and Learning Research: Implications for Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*, by saying,

Each person is unique in his particular combination of intelligences. Making the case for the plurality of intellect. Gardner asserts the purpose of an education should be tied to an understanding of how minds differ from each other and calls for individual-centered schools geared to optimal development of each student's cognitive profile. (¶ 6)

What I know about the brain is that each brain is comprised of billions of neurons, nerve cells within the brain, which have different connections to one another. These connections are made by each child's unique experiences, stimuli and behaviors. Therefore, each child's, or adult's brain for that matter is wired with connections that are unique to that individual. The best way to meet the needs of each uniquely wired brain is through identifying the intelligence combinations and teaching to the child. By engaging children's various intelligences throughout the day, the brain is able to make meaningful connections. It is well known that the brain also needs challenge and variety to create new connections. Combining variety and challenge with opportunities to

utilize strong intelligences leads to the more complete development of neural connections. Jensen (1998) suggested that engaging the brain in activities, or with material that is already known will provide further myelination, or fatty coating, for the neural pathways, which makes those connections more automatic. Due to this recurrence the brain becomes less active completing those tasks, or when presented with those materials. In a school setting I would like to strive to ensure students are completing certain automatic tasks, such as behavioral and academic procedures that guide children as they figure out what to do and how to do it. Conversely, I will encourage teachers to vary their instruction and materials through the use of the multiple intelligences, which will activate different areas of the brain, and foster the creation of new neural pathways. My vision for staff development will be to engage teachers in many opportunities to read about the intelligences, discuss the intelligences used in their classrooms, visit model classrooms and also by leading staff meetings or assemblies in such a way that many intelligences are utilized.

### *Integrated Curriculum*

Coupled with the brain compatible component of creating a solid, exciting, productive learning structure is the idea of establishing an integrated way to look at curriculum, as grade levels, and school wide. As I analyzed more brain research and considered its countless implications for education I made many

connections to the works of Susan Kovalik and Karen Olsen (1993), authors of *ITI: The Model*. ITI stands for Integrated Thematic Instruction, which is a foundation block for creating learning experiences that are connected by a common theme. The brain is constantly making neural pathways, or connections based on information and experience coming into the brain. As the new information or experiences come into the brain they are filtered and compared with other prior connections. Integrated, thematic curriculum allows the brain to make connections with reading, math, or various content areas based on the common theme. Meaningful experiences create stronger neural connections. Caine, (as cited in Poole, 1997) described a language teacher's classroom as she transformed it into a coffeehouse and had poetry readings. The idea was to help children gain an understanding for poetry by being immersed in a setting where poetry was found. The goal of implementing ITI is to immerse the students in curricular experiences that relate directly to a common theme. Through immersion, the curricular connections are made stronger due to their meaningful nature. ITI is based on three major principles: curriculum development, brain research, and teaching strategies. Without any one of these principles the structure of ITI is not complete (Kovalik, 1993). Kovalik suggests eight elements are needed to create a brain compatible learning environment: mastery, immediate feedback, choice, enriched environment, novelty, meaningful content,

collaboration, and absence of threat. The last of those elements, absence of threat, leads me into the third component to guide the structure of learning.

### *Community Building*

The community building, or character education program that I feel best exemplifies the principles of ITI and brain research is the TRIBES process. TRIBES is a process that focuses on building community with several steps. These steps are inclusion, influence, and finally community. The ultimate goal is to create a classroom community, which is attained by building and maintaining a positive climate where all children feel valued. Gibbs (1995) reflected on prior teaching practices where students were the receivers of information, rather than creators of their own learning. In traditional schooling children were given minute amounts of time to discuss curriculum and learning. Divergent from traditional schooling, the TRIBES process will emphasize collaborative work times that engage children in creating their own learning while also helping them acquire valuable social skills.

The TRIBES theory of creating a positive climate connects directly with physiological aspects of brain compatible learning. Wolfe (2003) refers to the amygdala as the starting point for the fight or flight responses that stem from any type of threatening situation. Based on information that negative emotions can decrease the cognitive abilities of the brain Wolfe stated, "The environment must

be physically and psychologically safe for learning to occur” (p. 13). Jensen (1998) referred to a similar concept called “downshifting” (p. 24 ). Downshifting requires knowledge of a particular area of the brain and the response it has to true or perceived threats. The brainstem is located at the base of the brain and is connected directly to the spinal cord, which fires messages between the body and the brain. In situations where an individual feels threatened the blood from the brain flows to the brainstem. The brainstem is often referred to as the triune brain, where simple functions, like basic survival take place. “New research reveals that threatening environments can even trigger chemical imbalances....When serotonin levels fall, violence often rises”(Jensen, 1998, p. 20). As I reflect on this statement I see how implications of this piece of physiology are crucial to all educators trying to create a classroom that has a positive climate like described in TRIBES. The most profound statement made within the Jensen text may be, “In the classroom, it (threat) could be a rude classmate or an unknowing teacher who threatens a student with humiliation, detention, or embarrassment before peers. Any of these events, and a thousand others, can put the brain on alert” (p. 57).

So, what can be done to create a classroom environment that is free from threats? One approach is to implement TRIBES as not only a classroom process, but also as a school wide expectation. All of the activities and ideas in TRIBES can be transferred into any setting within the school, from lunchrooms that allow for social skills practice, to music classes that allow children to learn

collaboratively for a musical performance. Kovalik and Olsen (2002) discussed several instructional strategies that deter threats in classrooms. The easiest strategy to implement would be the Lifeskills and Lifelong Guidelines, core character traits addressed daily to foster and develop positive relationships. The Lifeskills: Trust, Truth, Personal Best, Active Listening, and No Put Downs serve as behavioral expectations for students to model their behavior after. The nineteen Lifeskills, for example integrity, sharing, perseverance, are skills students develop to accomplish their personal best in everything they do. Other strategies included a focus on building community, which is a perfect match to the TRIBES process, creating predictable agendas for the day, eliminating pullout programs and finally incorporating movement frequently during the day to refocus. Each of the three structural components, brain compatible learning, ITI, and TRIBES form an interdependent relationship. I will incorporate these structures starting with discussions about what we want for children, and by creating a knowledge base of these structures through guest speakers, readings, videos and personal experiences. As teachers and parents build their knowledge base, we will reflect on our discussions about what we want for children, and examine how these structures can help meet our expectations for the school. The TRIBES process is an indisputable way to ensure that classrooms are free from threats, and more brain compatible. Working with TRIBES and ITI supports brain compatible classrooms, through the use of meaningful content and its focus

on Lifeskills and Lifelong Guidelines to create an absence of threat. Creating a classroom situation where children, parents and teacher have the opportunity to create a solid bond as a community and team can further support all of these components. One such structure is multiage.

### *Multiage Structure*

A final component in the structure of learning is the concept of multiage classrooms. Multiage examines how students are arranged in a school. Children from various ages, for example ages six through eight, can be contained in one classroom. There are many advantages to creating multiage classrooms. In multiage classrooms children, parents and teacher benefit by having a long-term connection with each other. This long-term connection allows teachers to fully understand each child, their learning strengths, and their learning needs. Stone (1994) states, "Successful multiage classrooms require teachers to shift attention from teaching curriculum to teaching children. A multiage class requires teachers to consider children as individuals, each with his or her own continuum of learning" (p. 1). Because of the age spread in a multiage classroom the range of skill competencies and academic levels are much greater. Consequently the teacher must make adjustments to the curriculum and teaching strategies to meet the needs of all children.

One way teachers adjust their curriculum is through integrated thematic instruction (ITI). The reasoning behind ITI in a multiage setting is that it fosters the developmental growth of students. While working within one theme children at various academic levels can be completing many meaningful experiences at their own stage of development (Stone,1994).

The variation in curriculum does not stop with ITI, but continues into basic daily classroom teaching strategies, such as centers based instruction combined with small group instruction. In centers, children are able to work with others in a cooperative setting, picking up social cues and new learning. At the same time they are also given instruction in a small group setting that meets their academic needs. Allowing children to work in centers gives them the opportunity to learn along side a heterogeneous group of learners. A sense of safety is acquired by immersing children in a learning environment where every child learns at a different level.

The ability for the brain to sense safety is vital in the learning process. “In same grade classrooms, children are retained if they do not master content by the end of the year. In mixed-age classrooms, children have more time to master content, and this removes their fear of being retained in schools” (Reese, 1998, p. 1). The fear of retention alone can be one major factor in creating a brain antagonistic classroom. Multiage classrooms allow children to focus on learning

at their own rate, rather than focusing on the content they have not mastered. Due to the fact that children will remain with the same teacher for two or more years in a multiage classroom, the students also become comfortable and build a trusting relationship with classmates, as well as the teacher.

As previously discussed, one essential element in creating a classroom that is brain compatible is creating a positive, trusting community, which is absent of threat, both physically and psychologically. Multiage creates an ideal setup for creating this type of classroom environment. It also facilitates positive academic commitments between teachers and the particular families and group of students.

#### *Implications for Administrative Practices*

The particular notion of brain compatible schools ties directly into the instructional leadership standard. My job as an administrator in this standard is to not only have knowledge of these theories and practices from theorists such as Howard Gardner (as cited in Checkly, 1997) and Eric Jensen (1998), but also to promote the implementation of these practices and theories in each classroom and throughout the building. Administrators assume the role of helping staff members become lifelong learners searching for ways to promote student success. When the administrator can instill the qualities needed for lifelong learning among staff, the students will feel a natural progression toward becoming lifelong learners themselves.

I plan to address and foster these structures of learning by engaging staff members slowly into staff development opportunities that relate to where our vision for the structure of learning is. As I have experienced working in a school that is brand new this year, I have learned that a principal has only the power of influence in making a change happen. One of the most significant areas for me as a principal will be shaping the school's culture. Willower (as cited in Short & Greer, 2002) defines school's culture as its essence comprised of beliefs, traditions, norms and policies. I believe change is best instituted when leading by example, and with the support of your teaching staff. When we think about the power inside a school, it is evident to me that the majority of democratic power lies within the classrooms. If you can influence one teacher, his or her enthusiasm can effectively promote change among colleagues. Marzano's (2001) statement captures the tremendous power of teachers on beginning a change in a building.

... a small group of educators within a school who are enthusiastic about a particular innovation can "infect" an entire staff with that enthusiasm. Quite literally, on occasion, we have seen a single individual in a school be the primary catalyst for substantive change. (p. 158)

Change will happen as a condition of the culture that is built within a school. For a school to be capable of change it must have a culture that permeates trust, collaboration, and perseverance. I will be successful in using the Visionary leadership standard, by allowing time for staff to get to know me, and each other as people and as professionals before we begin looking at making the structural

changes that I feel would exemplify the vision I have for a school's structure for learning.

### Student Achievement

A critical administrative role for principals is collecting, recording, analyzing data and increasing student achievement. As I have been exposed to a growing number of administrative styles I have seen a variety of ways to look at student achievement. In all cases increasing student achievement is the ultimate goal, however, the pieces of data used to assess student achievement have varied at every building I have encountered. Two of the schools that I worked with truly stood out in their perspectives on student achievement, due to the conditions many of the children dealt with every day. Marzano (2003) refers to The Coleman Report that claimed,

Taking all of these results together, one implication stands above all; that schools bring little to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront life at the end of school.  
(p. 2)

As I read this piece of information in the Marzano text I was really taken aback. My hopes and experiences with impoverished students' achievement led me to believe that every student's potential can be increased given a nurturing, supportive, environment. When I read the excerpt from the Coleman Report I was truly sad, because I do believe teachers and schools make a difference in the

achievement of all students regardless of socio-economic or ethnic status. As I continued reading Marzano further analyzed this report, and others and made the following conclusion, "...effective schools can have a profound impact on student achievement" (p.8) This caused me to reflect on the student achievement experiences I've had to this point.

### *Use of Achievement Data*

Every May after college classes ended, I spent several weeks working in the Cedar Rapids Schools, primarily at my mother's school as an associate. One of the major roles that I played was to help teachers finish their end of the year reading assessments. The two assessments that I gave were the District Level Language Arts Primary Observation (LAPO), for grades K-2, and the school-based Quantitative Reading Inventory (QRI), for grades 3-5. Both the district level and the school based assessments were similar in format as students were asked to read passages and then answer comprehension questions, without rereading the text. These assessments were extremely time consuming, sometimes up to thirty minutes per child, in a one-on-one setting. The assessments did provide an accurate, clear depiction of each child's reading level, as well as an idea of the roadblocks each child was meeting in their reading performance. The assessments also did a superb job of allowing us to look at reading fluency as well.

The data collection for student achievement at this school focused on portfolios, LAPO scores, and QRI scores. My mother then analyzed data based on the child's growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Her particular school had a high free and reduced lunch rate and many children came to school very delayed in the language skills, which affected their assessment scores. She reported data to staff, and parents by looking to see if each child had made at least one-year's worth of growth throughout the school year. This did not address whether or not the student was on grade level, but if he or she had made one year of growth. Data was also analyzed and compared based on which children were at, above, or below grade level.

As I began teaching, I found myself at a school, quite similar to my mothers, but with a much greater percentage of impoverished students. The principal at my school, focused primarily on the district level, LAPO, as well as portfolios to show student achievement. The way in which data was recorded at this school focused on analyzing the percentage of students at, above, or below grade level. As you can imagine the picture painted through this data analysis was much more grim than the data analysis at my mother's school. Teachers were less positive about student growth for the year focusing only on the percentage of students below grade level. My goal the following year was to adopt the QRI which I would give three to four times a year, as well as some weekly running records during Guided Reading to document student achievement throughout the

year. I then could share this information at conferences to encourage parents that their children were learning. In some cases they were going to need additional work to get them to grade level. I found that students really responded to the growth they made from one QRI testing period to the next.

As I reflect on the growth that students in my class made that year, regardless of their background I began to understand what Marzano (2003) implied when he said effective schools do impact student achievement. I knew that obviously that had happened, but I wondered what exactly I had done right. Marzano identifies five factors, which enhance school effectiveness positioning the school for higher student achievement.

1. Guaranteed and viable curriculum, which is a combination of two factors, providing children the opportunity to learn by outlining clear objectives, and allowing time for the guaranteed curriculum objectives to be taught.
2. Challenging goals and effective feedback, which are holding high expectations for students and providing feedback based on the extent to which the expectations are met.
3. Parent and community involvement, which focuses on how the community and parents are supporting the school through their involvement.

4. Safe and orderly environment means providing an environment where children are both psychologically and physically safe through the use of behavioral procedures and consequences for not following those procedures.
5. Collegiality and professionalism, focuses on how staff interact and the to the extent they interact to meet their work related duties. This factor deals with how the staff works collaboratively as professionals.

#### *Implications for Administrative Practices*

From this information I have gained a deeper understanding of what is necessary for student achievement. I can more accurately plan what type of data I will collect, how I will record and analyze it, and how I will use what I know about effective schools to increase student achievement. The organizational leadership standard emphasizes keeping your organization running smoothly and effectively. I believe that I will do this by following those factors presented by Marzano (2003). Many of these factors will be addressed in how I structure learning in the school I lead. For example the guaranteed viable curriculum will come from the use of brain compatible practices, and integrated curriculum. The safe and orderly environment will be addressed by the implementation of TRIBES, as a tool for building a trusting, safe, community. The collegiality and

professionalism will be addressed as we look at our school culture and vision for student achievement.

Also I will be an advocate for utilizing portfolios to display student growth, from grade to grade. Teachers receive training in the use of LAPO and QRI so they may supplement this with our district level LAPO. Teachers will collaborate as we analyze data in more than one way, so they can see each child's growth for a year, and where each child is in comparison with other children in his or her grade. Once the assessment data is gathered it will be put in a teacher made spread sheet form by class, and by grade level. I will take a representative from each grade level to create the spreadsheet so that it will contain the information the teachers need for maximum effectiveness at each grade level. Some key pieces of the spreadsheet will be an area where teachers can record the area of need for each child, whether it is decoding, fluency or comprehension. We will also use this spreadsheet and assessment data to identify students who are not making expected growth. One program that I would like to try with these at-risk readers would be to set up some peer coaching or tutoring. In addition I think parent volunteers could play a tremendous role in providing additional support for these students. I believe a key to accurately increasing student achievement is to utilize the assessments that we have to guide our instruction. I believe the tools such as LAPO, QRI, running records, and portfolios are excellent references for teachers as they analyze what each child needs to achieve success.

## Parental Involvement

One final, yet highly significant role for me as an administrator will be to build community and parent partnerships. It is crucial in this time of such high stakes in accountability to employ all resources in increasing student achievement. Parents can be wonderful assets to a school, by providing one-on-one reading practices, assisting with math, helping with clerical duties, or contributing in other ways. While the parents are providing services for our school we are also providing them with positive relationships, and opportunities to be involved in their own child's education. The American Association of School Administrators (1998), cites examples of the six roles that parents fill in working with schools. The first is the role of the Change Agent, who advocates for students' needs and helps with decisions. Second, is the Communicator, who communicates to other parents about what is happening at school. Third, is the Tutor, who helps small groups of children with academic tasks. Fourth, is the Program Coordinator, who organizes programs or benefits for the school, similar to PTA committee members. Fifth, is the Front-Line Assistant, who does clerical work for the office or classrooms, or is a volunteer for field trips. The last is Community Liaison, who locates and organizes community resources to meet school and student needs. Each of these roles can be filled by a number of parents.

### *Benefits of Parent Involvement*

The benefits of parent involvement are enormous for students, school, and parents. I have observed increased levels of pride in students whose parents are involved in school, as their parents are in the school to watch their accomplishments. One of my largest classroom goals this past year was to provide opportunities, every four to six weeks, for parents to come and observe the growth of their child, by attending portfolio celebrations, which are celebrations for children to showcase work and projects they have completed as part of the current unit of study. The portfolio celebrations also serve as a kickoff for our next unit of study. As parents attended more portfolio celebrations, they became more involved in our classroom, and our school in a variety of ways. Parents also had a much more positive view of what learning was taking place in our school, and classroom. As I began the school year, many families were apprehensive of the multi-age structure. However, as the parents became more involved in the classroom, either through volunteering, field trips, or through portfolio celebrations, they began to feel much more comfortable with multiage classrooms and my practices as a multiage classroom teacher. They were also much more likely to communicate with me to discuss their child's learning. Iowa Department of Education (1998), found the following benefits of parent involvement for students:

1. Positive attitudes toward school.
2. Higher achievement in reading
3. Higher quality of work
4. Observing similarities between family and school. The benefit of this is that families could connect conversations and activities at home to what was going on at school (as cited in Epstein, 1991).

The benefits for parents were:

1. More supportive of children
2. Confidence in ways to aid in learning
3. Greater knowledge of how schools work and other educational programs
4. Gain ideas about how to help children
5. More positive views of teachers.

The benefits of parent involvement spread throughout the school and classroom, effecting every staff member, child, or member of the school. It is crucial that administrators are tapping into this rich resource to improve the quality of education in our schools. Along with the positive benefits of parent involvement can come some challenges, as parents become overly confident or comfortable sharing decisions made for the school.

### *Challenges of Parent Involvement*

One other factor to address when looking at parent involvement is maintaining a collaborative approach, while still allowing educators to make decisions based on their professional training and knowledge. As indicated, this year I was involved in opening a brand new school, where many decision needed to be made. From the beginning we had a great number of parents who were very comfortable working in the school and helping to make decisions. As the school year went on parents began to rationalize that their input was needed in almost every educational decision made at our school. This caused some difficulties among parents, as many felt they were not a part of the decision-making group. The Iowa Department of Education (1998) addresses the barriers for parent involvement in schools. One of those barriers is the concept of an in-group and out-group. "In almost every group there is an in-group-the group that usually hold offices, is highly involved and is accepted, and the out-group-the group that does not get involved or hold office" (p. 6).

Another problem we have encountered at our school are concerns with teachers about the amount of decision-making parents are involved in. Many of our students come from extremely successful homes, where one parent or both parents may be serving in a high power position. Teachers have felt threatened when parents come to school wanting to influence every decision we make, from

the way we run a school store, to selecting their child's teacher for the next year. As an administrator it will be my job to defuse situations like this and create acceptable roles for parent involvement. Marzano (2003) states, "Not all types of parental or community involvement are beneficial to the effective running of a school" (p. 47).

Marzano (2003) defines three factors involved in gaining effective, appropriate parental involvement: communication, participation, and governance. He encourages administrators to provide communication to and with parents, allow for parental participation as they are able, and to establish some systems to govern the involvement parents have in schools.

#### *Implications for Administrative Practices*

It will be important to create many opportunities for parent communication. I believe that newsletters from individual teachers that go out weekly will provide parents with an idea of what is happening at school for a given week. The use of a monthly school-wide newsletter will be important as well. One idea I have for the monthly newsletter is rotating responsibilities to a different grade level team and that team's parents, to develop the articles for a particular section of the newsletter. In addition to one-way communication, which I feel serves a very informative purpose, I will provide opportunities for parents to respond to our communication. I would like to conduct a survey that is

sent out to parents at the end of each school year, that looks at what the school is doing well, and what suggestions they have for improvements. These surveys will be done at the beginning of the year for parents to communicate their goals for that school year, as well as in the spring for feedback and reflection purposes. In the survey I would like to include a space for parents to sign up for ways in which they could be involved in the school. An example would be if they would like to be involved in helping to shelve books in our Guided Reading Room, or if they would like to come and be a guest reader during Building a Community of Readers week, a week each March where community members from our city read to our classes and share the importance of reading in their jobs. Starting the year with an opportunity for parents to communicate with the school will foster a place where they feel their opinions are valued.

In addition to getting parent feedback I would like to create, or help to maintain a volunteer program, where parent coordinators can monitor and provide activities for other parents to be involved. I would like to have our volunteer program be a place where the data from the beginning of the year survey can be utilized. The volunteer program would be a wonderful use of the leadership capacity within my building. By involving the parents in leadership roles they would have a stronger interest in supporting our school, and my decisions. I believe this volunteer program would also provide many opportunities for two-way communication through way of conversations about student and community

needs in our building. Ideally, I would establish a monthly time where I could meet with these parent coordinators to discuss our goals for the volunteer program.

Along with the communication piece I will implement a system where participation in the school is shared between all interested parties, to avoid the concept of the “in-group”. I believe that the PTA at school will be a valuable resource in presenting these opportunities, while facilitating shared involvement among all parents. My goal would be to have a calendar available at the first PTA meeting, where parents could sign up for events or activities they would be interested in supporting. With the help of the PTA secretary we could organize a database of parents who expressed an interest. To cater to the parents who were not available for the meeting I would send out a similar invitation in our first newsletter. By creating this list of parent volunteers we can distribute the help so that all parents feel included in school activities and events throughout the year. For those parents who want additional time in the building they can schedule time with individual teachers. This system will not only provide opportunities for many parents to participate, but it will be a sound governing structure where expectations for parent involvement are made known.

## Summary

As I think back to my first draft of this paper during the spring of 2000 I had a clear vision of which road I would follow. But not surprisingly that vision has changed as I have completed two more years of teaching, and two more years of classes. I believe the most profound experiences have been watching my mentor in her administrative style and comparing that to the style of my current and past administrators. Somewhere along the way I have taken elements from each one of their administrative styles, and shaped it into a style of my own. I believe I will be an excellent leader, largely due to the tremendous experiences along the way. I am excited to think about the successes and challenges I will encounter as I guide leadership capacity, and shape the culture of the people I lead. This paper will be a great tool in focusing my energy as I begin my administrative journey. It will guide my vision as I have established those components I feel are essential in creating a superior school: structure of learning, student achievement, and parental involvement. As I see it these three components encompass a wide array of other leadership roles that I will fulfill for the school I lead.

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