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Reflections of administration

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Reflections of administration

Abstract
A principal as an instructional leader perceivably means providing the necessary knowledge so that the school’s academic goals can be met. Information is a key factor in education leadership. Possessing expert knowledge and skill in curriculum so that teachers perceive that their interaction with the principal leads directly to the classroom practice. Communication skills in one-on-one, small group, large group, settings move the staff forward in creating a vision that is visible and real so that curriculum goals can be attained for the welfare of all students (Smith & Andrews, 1989). This reflective paper discusses a variety of issues facing educational leadership and provides insight on vision of effective performance in an administrative role.
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As I reflect upon the path of becoming an administrator, I can trace my directional roots to my father and family. Connected to my family have been teachers, personal friends, and coaches who have shared in forming values and vision in my personal and professional life. Having experienced working in sales and political arenas my family along with three people nearing retirement talked with me over a period of months and guided me to the field of education. Their insight and knowledge directed me in becoming an educator. It was my personal desire to become an administrator. Throughout my life I have tried to emulate effective teachers who I considered outstanding role models. My family beliefs of tolerance, acceptance, and caring have had an impact on my teaching career. Not only have these people been educators but citizens, community leaders, and business related professionals.

My feelings about education and my role as an administrator have a foundation deeply rooted in life experiences, family values, and an overall appreciation for people. This I believe has been the key to my success and will remain my base for years to come. I believe the pillars of my strength are formulated from
a strong family base that has given confidence and motivation to pursue a career in administration. The Master of Arts in Education courses has helped me formulate a personal vision of how my leadership qualities can make a positive impact in education.

In reflecting about family, my grandfathers, in particular, have emphasized the importance of work ethic and promoted successful positive social interactions. Their expectations were transformed from their working class values stemming from factories to farms each of whom had a significant impact on my life. Their ideas of work were often balanced with relaxation and family unity. They offered guidance in the simplest forms of modeling tolerance and appreciation for their neighbors. My grandparents ideas of fun were often educational taking my cousins and I on long rides throughout Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin visiting historical points of reference. Time was taken to enjoy the banks of the Mississippi, often to picnic with family. As I reflect, this was truly a formidable childhood experience as I now recall the simplest and purest forms of living.

My grandmothers have given me nurturing and the necessary patience needed during the tough years of my life especially when at the age of seven my mother died.
I was soon transitioned on what life was about and was blessed with the understanding that nothing remains the same. Each grandparent contributed to the intricate web of family life. The emphasis on love and my father’s remarriage helped me with the understanding that flexibility is necessary for everyone to live and love in this society. Each of my family members walk the path they preach. I consider them the purist role model and I have been fortunate.

When I reflect upon my parents they mirrored their own parents. My father an educator, and mother an investment manager love their three children unconditionally. My father reinforced the belief that education is a necessity in today’s world. His strong fatherly stature has been a pillar of my success breading patience with insight in dealing with diverse human perspectives.

My mother’s tolerance and empathy has fueled my need to work with people regardless of background or social status. My parents placed emphasis on athletics because it provided experience, confidence and the understanding of failure. Team work was reinforced on the athletic field and follow through at home with each
member participating in family duties. Family team work was the support frame for my brother, sister, and me.

My parents still provide direction and support when asked for by their children. My brother is in his second year of medical school and my sister is finishing her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Iowa. This is proven testimony for my parents success in parenting children capable of approaching the world and life. My parent’s values in communal support has sparked my interest as an adult in community related affairs as well a political dreams. The experiences and modeling has succored a solid platform from which I can operate. I feel this platform has given me the necessary base of operation so I can efficiently and effectively approach my job as a principal.

Vision

My role as a principal will by no means be a simple one. In identifying the factors that influence how principals perform is equally as complex. A principal as an instructional leader perceivably means providing the necessary knowledge so that the school’s academic goals can be met. Information is a key factor in education leadership. Possessing expert knowledge and skill in curriculum so that teachers perceive that their
interaction with the principal leads directly to the classroom practice. Communication skills in one-on-one, small group, large group, settings move the staff forward in creating a vision that is visible and real so that curriculum goals can be attained for the welfare of all students (Smith & Andrews, 1989). This reflective paper discusses a variety of issues facing educational leadership and provides insight on vision of effective performance in an administrative role.

Leadership

One of the most important tasks of the principal is to communicate a vision that inspires others. Administrators must take an active role in the restructuring process. A role that involves risk taking or even failure. Leadership skills that include strong communication with staff is imperative for transformation to take place. Quick-fix solutions are not the answers to running and moving schools in a positive direction. Important factors in restructuring are, changing organizational structure, changing the roles of teachers and students, creating autonomy among the staff, and including parents in the education process and decision making. Emphasis is placed on the entire building or system. An administrative role
is significant in the transformation process. Administrators must actively campaign and work with staff to assure the implemented process is carried out. Nurtured trust and encouragement allow participants to take risks and not be afraid to violate the status quo (Mercado & Peeler, 1993).

As in most areas in life, leadership too evolves with time and experience. According to some newer theories leadership has taken on a more sensitive, humanized approach. Clover and Goens (1991) have described some specific traits found in successful leaders. They include decisiveness, dominate, energetic, alert to social environment, assertive, ambitious, cooperative, dependable, persistent, self-confident, adaptable to situations, tolerant of stress, and willing to assume responsibility. However, there is no guarantee these traits are present in every leader. The authors touch upon the fact there are many situations and factors that influence leaderships traits. Over time, leaders experience a full realm of situations adding to their effectiveness an administrator.

As Smith and Scott (1989) note, the principals' role in shaping school norms is important. They must
take responsibility for school climate and for outcomes of productivity and satisfaction attained by students and staff members. In observation, it is how people respond, directly or indirectly, to what a principal does well to what he or she does not do.

According to Roberts, (1987) leadership is defined as a privilege to have the responsibility to direct the actions of others for the cause of the organization. However, no model of leadership can define the circumstances, situations, and conditions a leader inherits upon appointment. Environmental conditions in an organization are ever evolving and developing and the game plan is forever being restructured for betterment of the cause. This is ever so true in education with reform movements and restructuring demands placed upon the system. I believe a delicate transformation is required to balance visions with goals.

As I perused the information on leadership style, I came away with bits and pieces of many theories. Leadership by definition includes action, any theory of leadership is helpful only if it can be used to guide action. As an administrator I will strive to model the collegial approach. It is my belief that teachers are true professionals and should be treated as such.
I feel the collegial model creates a more professional environment. D. R. Jackson (personal communication, June, 1996) indicated that collegial model uses the professional expertise of all members, and teachers, to reach a dynamic consensus. It is my belief that success hinges on team work and family values. I feel dynamic consensus is reached by incorporating as many people as possible.

My personal leadership style integrates many styles of leadership, one that combines task-oriented behavior with relationship-oriented behavior. Hersey and Blanchard's (1979) situational leadership model, resembles what I feel is important for any leader. As a principal certain situations related to curriculum, staff development, or discipline policies involving staff may require administrator impute. Incorporating ideas or new visions with staff must be carried out by administrative example. It is my belief that identifying the maturity level of the staff is key to an administrator's success. Flexibility is significant in allowing growth in maturity and task orientation per individual staff member. It be necessary for a principal to draw upon his/her base of expertise in situations when practical experience is required.
One can assume a situation will arise and needed information must be disseminated to staff in order to move forward in a positive manner so that growth is achieved.

In applying McGregor's (1960) theory X and Y, too often administrators embrace an authoritarian model of leadership, theory X. I support theory Y on leadership because of the humanitarian component. The humanitarian component assumes the utility of participatory decision making and democratic principles. By applying the principals aforementioned, an administrator can extend credit to his/her staff, thus benefiting as an educational leader providing staff implicit responsibility by recognizing their professional integrity.

In combination with the theories aforementioned, I feel it is important to address staff needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in theory provides necessary higher order of needs relating to teacher self-esteem and self-actualization (D. R. Jackson, personal communication, July 1996). I believe instructional leaders can achieve this by allowing staff more responsibility through collaboration. Administrators can provide inclusion in participatory decision making, provide opportunities for
professional development and promote a positive school climate. By creating a participatory environment, teacher feelings of belonging are enhanced and manifested by which higher needs may be met. Imperative to any effective leader is to allow teachers to feel good about themselves as well as their job. By providing staff involvement, teacher moral, and desire for achievement, teacher esteem should increase creating an enriched school environment.

I also feel it is ever so important for young administrators to identify old leadership styles and steer clear from them. I feel as administrator I must identify the climate in a district, the personalities, and the institution itself before accepting a job. This is important for any administrator in an instructional leadership role. In looking at school districts one can associate old leadership styles to Model I in looking at administrative behavior. Clearly, low freedom of choice and direct application designed to manage environment encompasses the old narratives of administrative philosophy. I subscribe to implement Model II in my administrative portfolio equaling free and informed choice. Model II may infact challenge the ways of the old and directly challenge authority base. An
educational leader must communicate with staff and incorporate collaboration in the communication process. The transformation and communication process can not be left out (Argyris & Schon, 1974). The world today is too complex to leave staff out of the process. Information is key to any organization. I intend to promote communication, team work and a family atmosphere.

Another part of educational leadership involves conflict. I believe too much time is dedicated to conflict and conflict resolution in education. The public school administrator is the focal point of conflict by the very nature of their role as a leader. I am able to recognizing that conflict management is a major responsibility as an educational leader. I have come to realize that as an administrator, it will be necessary for me to reflect upon each situational conflict. This is needed so future incidents may be avoided before a conflict arises.

Aquila and Petzke (1994), provide insight by maintaining an administrator’s role and duty is to maintain discipline. Along with this duty is the required responsibility to establish and enforce disciplinary regulations upon students who exhibit
inappropriate behaviors toward school policies or other children. If misconduct occurs the building administrator is bound to follow a procedure designed to insure the discipline is fundamentally fair. In the court case *Goss v. Lopez*, the courts were concerned with the due process guaranteed to those who had been disciplined. What is generally called into question by the court is the validity of disciplinary regulations and the severity of the punishments imposed on students.

An administrator must have a solid understanding of the law in order to protect the student and avoid possible public embarrassment with legal judgments. Over the past several years, the balance between state authority, parental involvement, and children's autonomy has generated a great deal of uncertainty over the Supreme Court's ability to influence societal values, and to develop a consistent foundation on issues revolving children and their position in the law (Davis & Schwartz, 1987).

The theories mentioned have assisted me in identifying organizational structures in an organization and has been helpful for future reference. Transformational leadership and leadership behavior is crucial to the effectiveness with which followers,
groups, and schools perform their tasks. This reflective experience has provided practical information so that theories can be applied to everyday experiences in education.

School and Community Relations

In the past, public relations efforts often have been unorganized, uncoordinated, and relatively ineffective within school districts. As a principal I will emphasize the importance of keeping a focus on significant issues involving school-community relations in the 21st Century. I feel as the world we live in becomes more complex, increased emphasis placed upon limited resources, and a complex effort to address needs of every child will challenge educators well into the next century. First and foremost, educators need to continually provide support for all students. Demographics and economic changes have increasingly challenged educators in this state, nation, and world. Limited resources have made it difficult to offer comprehensive services to all students (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

Wherry (1986), explains that every school staff member, not just teachers and administrators, plays a critical role in disseminating accurate information
about schools. Teachers feel good about their school and speak positively if they feel good about themselves and the environment they work in. I believe that positive community relations is a practice of social responsibility, a matter of first serving the best interests of the public by doing a good job and then, and only then, make sure people know about it.

In today's educational environment, administrators are needed to facilitate educational programs using innovative ways encompassing a variety of diversified groups. Shrinkage of resources and increase demand placed upon school systems may potentially lead to stressing relations between school and communities. Special interest demands necessitate action from schools and society taxing the system for resources. Promotion of special interest agendas' will inhibit other groups within the community, meaning at the expense of everyone else. Special interests have influenced school policy in the past and will continue to press school administrators until their demands are acted upon. In the future special interest groups representing a small number of individuals will prosper with little understanding of the whole picture (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Special interest represent a challenge. Throughout my
life I have welcomed challenges. I enjoy meeting a challenge head on. As an administrator I will welcome obstacles as challenges. My understanding and patience along with my education and experience will be called upon to address and resolve challenges so everyone will benefit.

The future for administrators will deal with varied social stresses and that tax limited resources. Drugs, violence, gangs and decline of the traditional American family will challenge everyone. Schools cannot be the sole provider or social reform, but can provide a base and inquiry, support, and public awareness. Societal challenges and demands will force communities to re-think the traditional boundaries of their community. Cooperative community efforts are necessary for everyone to meet the challenge and prepare our youth for the future.

It will be part of my job as an educational leader to tap avenues of public and private resources. This I feel necessary in combination to foster a sense of communal pride and obligation. Emphasis on diversity can benefit society as a whole. Tolerance of societal differences can promote community involvement fostering individual pride and ownership. If ownership is
nurtured, than positive communal pride will reflect back to the community by means of support.

Support is key to any administrator’s survival as an educational leader. Blanchard (1938), focused on community support through cooperation with governmental agencies and public schools. His focal audience were parents and the American communities emphasizing the importance of education, the overall purpose and function. People acquired skills through education that improved attitudes and self worth. Blanchard also emphasized community belonging which symbolized the importance of education connected by teamwork assisted by the government to benefit the community. I support government and community corporation and will strive to support projects that will benefit children.

For any principal it is imperative to have communication between school and parent open. A school’s public relations must be a concerted and well-orchestrated, two-way communication system. Public relations is designed to bring about public awareness and understanding of school related issues (Guthrie & Reed, 1991). However, educators who have had a long history through training and experience have opted with a not so friendly approach to community relations.
Educators have been hesitant to incorporate parents into the communication process, developing a less than comfortable environment in school buildings. Despite recent demands placed on educators by reform movements, educators seldom are trained nor have the administrative skills necessary to achieve a school and parent blending. Community relation skills are not part of the ready-repertoire of most practitioners (Crowson, 1992). I believe the responsibility to bridge the gap is that of an administrator.

Duncan (1992) emphasizes the need for parental involvement in education. Schools must continue to engage parents even if it means assistance from outside organizations. Neighborhood organizations can provide support for families who may be experiencing a family crisis. Organizations are designed to assist families as an early crisis prevention intervention before the state department of human services is used. Organizational networks can provide support in times of need. Staff involvement may include referrals for families who have been identified as needing assistance. The organizations are indeed unique and can effectively promote community pride through community volunteerism fostering positive community school relations.
As an administrator I will continue to pursue innovative ideas to best suit the population of students. School personnel must continue to monitor themselves in a positive fashion when dealing with the community and in various community settings. Staff has a significant part in this effort because they have an active role in the public relations to foster and continue positive community dialogue. Schools have undergone change for betterment of all people, but more importantly the students.

Since student growth is key, our focus needs to continue along the road of finding ways to encourage involvement in our public schools and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for our students. An informed pro-active public can be the support base needed to foster student learning and nurturing diverse learning opportunities.

As a principal, I will measure the success of positive pro-active community relations with school-community relations which foster broad-based community support. A way for me to measure community support is the percentage of parental participation during conferences, and the number of volunteers during school sponsored events. Another example of wide community
support is a focus on business partnerships. I will strive to maintain and seek to acquire new business partnerships, in cooperation with the school district's volunteer office, to enhance programs at the school. This will foster support for students, staff and community enrichment. I will promote events like career day when community members participate in addressing the student body about careers that interest students.

Education from now in to the future will require everyone working together in a positive pro-active manner. Challenges mean opportunity. Opportunities through school programs with emphasis placed upon school-community relations can benefit society in the 21st Century.

Reform

Educational leadership and reform are important areas of concern for anyone in pursuit of an administrative job. Millions of dollars continue to be allocated to curriculum change within the last twenty years this has not brought about major changes in what students learn and how teachers teach. The first reason for this failure is that curriculum changes have not been related to organizational structure and school administration. Often school districts spend
money on curriculum changes without considering the administrative sub system. Such concerns as budgetary, emotional, and collegial support are missing and the administrative process is left unchanged. Second, teachers have not been allowed a meaningful role in decisions regarding staff development. The teacher is ultimately the one who controls the rate and degree of change of any curriculum. Teachers are seldom allowed the input, time, and resource necessary for successful staff development or program implementation. Third, teachers feel isolated. Inadequate resources, the feeling that they can have little impact on the total system, and non-involvement in the decision-making process have reinforced this unfortunate situation (Scott, 1994).

According to Fullen and Miles (1992) change involves learning and all change involves having the understanding to be good at something new. Teachers are more likely to learn from trial and error in their classrooms than they are from abstract instructional inservices. The similar holds true for student learning as well. Evidence of learning is demonstrated by student outcomes in the classroom. Teachers have direct feedback on students' learning. Teachers, along with
students, need feedback from sources they trust. Teachers should observe other professionals performing innovative classroom tasks. Not only does important learning occur but valuable input from teachers can help improve both the instructional process and professional development. Less time is needed in meetings and more is required participating in learning.

Sykes (1996), states the key to reform is participation by all. Next, teacher learning must be at the heart of any effort in improving education in our society. He believes the process of reform itself needs reforming to achieve better ongoing teacher learning. The problem resides in staff development. Teachers are often the focus of reform but seldom are they consulted. Teachers exert relatively little control over professional development. Sykes believes more teacher participation can serve as a source of insight and wisdom about problems of practice. I believe it is the job of an administrator to facilitate this process.

Educational reform has begun a new phase of open communication. The document, A Nation at Risk, 1983, has forced American educators to change their methods and offer new ways to meet and attack low educational performance. One complaint regarding the educational
system was the barriers built between educators and the public. Educators were reluctant and unavailable to outside intrusions. Crowson (1992) contends declining public perceptions, lack of confidence, and a lessening faith in the inviolability of professional expertise have led to a reform movement that has currently rejuvenated the power of the parent.

Parental groups, through state legislatures, have requested communication reforms which has forced school districts to develop school-improvement plans addressing them. Parental involvement is just one set of initiatives inacted by state legislatures. Many educators themselves have requested reforms in the nation's schools. Reforms have enhanced teacher autonomy, tightened teacher-preparation, created state mandated testing, initiated school-site management, and teacher evaluation standards. Education is ever evolving and changing. This is a small example of initiatives to reform education (Crowson, 1992).

Elmer (1996) suggests the central problem of United States education is the lack of incorporating good ideas into learning and teaching practices. The reason points at systemic incapacity of United States' schools, the people who work in them, and their
inability to develop and incorporate new ideas into the classroom. Elmer believes new incentives may substantially change curriculum and organization because teachers tend to follow the status quo. He explains the problem resides in deeply rooted incentives in cultural norms of institutional organizations, and change has to take place slowly. He argues without fundamental changes within incentive structures, schools will continue to fail to implement progressive curriculum reforms with little or no impact on instructional approaches or student learning outcomes. Drastic reforms will constitute changing school and teacher core beliefs and values. I believe core beliefs and values are changing.

According to Clover and Goens (1992) transformation must occur from the inside out. I believe the principal is at the forefront having the responsibility in transforming schools. This can only occur when schools begin changing their context dramatically, restructuring their organization, and reassessing their values and principles. A transformational school must integrate all components of the school utilizing its working people. Schools must gain an understanding of community values and incorporate them into the school.
Boyer (1987) contends if schools do not become a national priority, the promise of education excellence will remain a dream if we continue to neglect schools. Changing demographics in America, the education system has become full of poorer, more ethnically diverse children than ever before in history. In overcoming the problems faced in urban areas, schools must provide a curriculum that will promote brain growth in preschool aged children. Schools must aggressively attack young children emphasizing language in basic reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Class sizes must be reduced at the lower grade levels to give teachers the opportunity to spend quality time with each student. It is important to take in account today's family and the schedules they keep. School calendars may be modified to meet the changing family structures that we experience today.

Arredondo and Brody (1995) explain the impetus by administrators to demonstrate and apply adult learning principles to staff so teachers and adult learners can respond to teaching and supervision is a manner that is necessary and personally meaningful to them. Collaboration is necessary between administrators
and teachers so everyone takes into account both cognitive and affective factors in the transformational process.

Hartoonian and Van Scotter, (1996), embrace the concept that active scholarship, citizenship, and artisanship are the fundamental purposes to maintaining cultural heritage and to improving both society and the individual. Promoting community involvement should relate to community pride with hopes of being an investment in society. Active learning benefits the learner and engages them into the work place with the goal of intrinsic desires that prepare students for productive and rewarding careers.

Brandt (1988) declares that curriculum changes are necessary in order for students to develop an understanding of real life situations. The focus on practical experience fosters students to integrate knowledge and apply it to the world. Curriculum changes must foster independent relevant experiences and this will promote learning beyond core classes. Administrators must be pro-active to future trends. Administrators need to identify and take curriculum risks to guide education in the vision of the institution.
Many schools in America must meet this challenge through innovative and non-traditional means. Schools with the aid of administrators, staff, and community can challenge future education by establishing and implementing school improvement plans to address school reforms. School committees have been established to promote innovative initiatives encompassing diverse student populations offering opportunities for personal enrichment, promoting a sound base of skills and knowledge, development of life skills, exploring careers, and a thrust for continual growth in opening communication pathways with parents and community. This is a way to future education.

Conclusion

Through my educational experience, I can positively reflect upon the transformational process by learning and understanding educational leadership. I have gained valuable insight through lecture, knowledge through books, and practical experience through classroom simulations. The experience has helped me focus my thoughts and feelings regarding educational leadership. My educational experience has confronted me with change, reform, and enlightenment on vision and theory. This foundation will help me forge new
ideas through theories and help me create new visions on education. Finally, this experience has given me a knowledge base and an appreciation for both administrators and teachers. My experience has provided me with confidence and flexibility necessary in any leadership role. Leadership is a transformation process that involves community, staff, personal beliefs, and governmental influences. I believe part of the learning process involves exploring new information. Not only has research helped me self examine, but it has assisted me in my philosophy on leadership and my administrative vision.

The significance of this reflection paper has proved its worth by exposing me to multiple view points. My employment journey over the years has provided me several job experiences and has made me versed when dealing with people. The reflection process has done the same for me. In the future, I will strive to support students, staff, and the community for everyone’s welfare.
References


