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A preferred vision for leading secondary schools: a reflective essay

Gerald W. Hatfield

University of Northern Iowa

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A preferred vision for leading secondary schools: a reflective essay

Abstract

Educational administration is an appealing career opportunity for me because it will allow me to put into action two core values that I learned in my early years - we all deserve the chance to succeed and that hard work toward a lofty goal is what leads to cherished success. I believe that if I continue to develop four personal characteristics, my chances of being an effective administrator will be greatly enhanced. First and foremost, I must act with integrity at all times. Second, I must present an organized approach to my school activities. Third, I must be a flexible problem-solver and be willing to think outside the box. Fourth, I must work collaboratively with others when attempting to better the school.

Continual development of these characteristics will allow me to lead a school in a way that brings respect and honor to all students, faculty and parents. I will strive to create a school whose culture supports highly motivated teachers who seek out the hard to reach students. I will help all students recognize their near limitless potential and give them the tools to chase the realization of that potential.

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A PREFERRED VISION FOR LEADING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

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Gerald W. Hatfield

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Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Dianna K. Engelbrecht

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Second Reader of Research Paper

William P. Callahan

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Head, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Postsecondary Education
I remember when I was a child a teacher asked me a very thought provoking question. “If you could do anything that you want with your life, what would it be?” She said that if I knew the answer to that question, I would lead a happy life. I believe this to be true. So many people in the world are unhappy with their situations but do not really know what they want. They simply know that something is missing. I do not know what enables you to hear your life’s calling. Some people hear it early, some late, some never. I heard it early.

I was raised in a large family with four brothers and two sisters. Two of my sisters are adopted from Korea, one brother from India and another brother from Bolivia making my family very racially diverse. My adopted brothers both had polio as infants and are paralyzed from the waist down. They are able to walk with crutches and orthotic braces. One adopted sister had a cleft lip and palate that required repeated surgeries. Other children, including myself, were physically strong and excelled in athletic competition. We were quite physically diverse. Academically, we also varied widely – everything from graduating as valedictorian of the high school class to struggling through school with significant learning disabilities.

My early family life was a blessing. I was taught many things, but perhaps the most important is that our similarities outweigh our differences. Our society attempts to split its population into many groups based on superficialities. We are divided by race, by gender, by religion and by physical/mental abilities. Many in our society fail to see what unifies us. We all have hopes and dreams of success. We all want to give and receive love. We all want to feel that we make a difference. Long before I decided to become an educator, I already knew that all people deserve a chance. All people should be treated fairly and all people need to be given the help necessary for them to succeed. These beliefs would weigh heavily on the development of my educational philosophy in later years.
Conquering difficult tasks was another family value that greatly impacted my future attitude toward my career. The more difficult the task, the more we could sit back and feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when it was completed well. From a very young age, I always loved to build things. I was always constructing forts or models. I would dig holes in the back yard, mow the lawn or even shovel snow. In each case, what I liked most about these activities was being able to look back and feel proud about what I had accomplished.

As I grew older, many of my interests shifted toward competition. It did not matter what kind of competition it was, I just wanted to try difficult things. I was not so much concerned with beating others as I was with bettering my own skills. I liked to be able to say that something, that was once difficult, was now easy. Athletically, academically and artistically, I was driven to succeed and master new skills. Late in each school year, I used to look back at the early chapters of my textbooks. I remember feeling pride that the concepts that used to be so difficult now seemed trivial.

My sophomore year in high school is when I decided to teach. I had a friend who was struggling mightily with his Spanish class. I felt comfortable with the subject and offered to help him with his studies. I felt good about helping him, but also found that I really started to enjoy this “project.” I soon found that I was realigning my schedule in order to allow more tutoring time. We worked very hard for about four weeks. When the test came, my friend felt very confident about his chances of doing well. He earned a B letter grade. I received more satisfaction from this grade than from the A on my own test. I was proud – proud of him that he had worked so hard and proud of myself that I was able to teach him something that he thought he could not learn. In hindsight, I was exemplifying the two core family values discussed earlier. I was making sure that my friend was given the opportunity to succeed and I was taking pride in
accomplishing a difficult task. I decided that anything that made me feel so good and also helped others was a win-win situation. I had started down the road to becoming an educator.

Now, I am a teacher. I still enjoy the thrill of seeing kids learn and knowing that I had a hand in that success. I enjoy working with the kids who are hard to teach. It offers me a challenge and supplies them with a motivated teacher who pushes them to stretch themselves. I feel that I have a lot invested in my students. I want them to do well. When the students succeed, we all feel pride and celebrate our accomplishments. When we fail, we look back at why the failure occurred in hopes of avoiding future failures. I continually try to strengthen my skills as a teacher as well as my understanding of the middle school child. A veteran teacher once told me that each year if you are not a better teacher than you were the year before, you are not doing your job.

So that brings me to my choice to pursue administration. I am enticed by the challenge of building a school community of motivated learners. I look forward to collaborating with a group of talented teachers in order to build something very special. I feel that I could lead in a way that would minimize distractions and let us get great things done. In many ways, my decision to pursue administration represents another attempt to live out values that I was taught as a child. First, every child deserves a chance to succeed. As an administrator, I would be placed in a better position to make sure that happens. Second, one must have the courage to see a difficult task through to success. We all know that school administration is challenging. I look forward to that challenge and all the joys and sorrows that it will bring.

A crucial step toward becoming a successful leader is clarifying ones values and beliefs. Leaders need to know what they stand for. They need to have clear defined principles and a well-developed pattern of conduct. I believe that there are four major components to quality
leadership. Leaders must be flexible problem-solvers who can work collaboratively with others in an organized way while maintaining a high level of integrity.

INTEGRITY

What is integrity? "Integrity is a character trait. It is the willingness to do what is right even when no one is looking. It is the 'moral compass' — the inner voice; the voice of self-control; the basis for the trust imperative in today's military" (U.S Air Force, 1997, p. 5). No group of any type can function toward a common goal without integrity. To be a successful leader in today's educational system one must tell the truth, follow moral principles, be ethical, conform to accepted professional standards of conduct and do the right thing (Cohen, 1998, p. 13). In short, one must have integrity.

American society values integrity among its leaders above all other qualities. Current research he has found that integrity rates as the most crucial characteristic of good leadership. In fact, studies have shown the trait of integrity (truthfulness, trustworthiness, character, adhering to convictions) was ranked higher than competence (Kouzes, 1993, p. 12). It would seem that Americans feel a greater need to trust a leader's word than to trust his plan of action. "Someone possessing integrity will be forgiven other less important attributes he or she may lack. But lack of integrity will never be forgiven" (Cohen, 1998, p. 13-14).

Educational administrators must make the development of their integrity a fundamental goal of their professional lives. First and foremost, the development of integrity creates a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. Integrity simply makes one a better person. Second, if an administrator is viewed as a person of high character, of high integrity, others will trust his leadership. Integrity simply makes one a better leader.
There are several ways to develop integrity. First, keep your word (Cohen, 1998, p. 24). If you make a promise, you must follow through. Even commitments less “binding” than a promise are very important. Even simple procedures can get leaders into trouble. Consider the following example. An administrator circumvents the district’s hiring practices in order to hire a particular candidate. The community becomes outraged, not necessarily because they do not like the choice, but because the administrator agreed to follow a set of rules and then disregarded those same rules when he found it convenient. The community is left with doubting the sincerity of his promises, not a good place for a leader to be.

Guiliani goes one step further regarding promises and keeping his word. He makes it a practice to “underpromise and overdeliver”. This is to say that he never makes a commitment that he is not sure he can meet. His constituents would much rather be surprised by an unexpected success than disappointed by an unmet goal. Guiliani believes that “a leader must manage not only results but expectations” (Guiliani, 2002, p. 156). A simple illustration of this idea is waiting for a table at a restaurant. If the greeter tells you it will be a twenty-minute wait and you are seated in fifteen minutes, you say to yourself, “That was quick.” Your mood is good and you are seated without incident. If instead the greeter informs you of a ten-minute wait and then seats you after fifteen minutes, you say to yourself, “What is taking so long? What is wrong with the service here?” You are seated in a disgusted mood just looking for something else to go wrong. In both cases, you were seated in fifteen minutes, but because the expectations were managed differently, the results were viewed differently.

A second way to develop your integrity is to always choose the harder right over the easier wrong (Cohen, 1998, p. 24). This requires a great deal of self-discipline. Athletic coaches find themselves facing this choice all the time. For example, a team is just entering the
basketball playoffs. The community has been following this group of kids for years. Now they are seniors and expectations are high, a state championship and no less. The night before the first playoff game, two starters break team rules by attending a party with alcohol present. The team rules state that such an infraction results in immediate suspension from the team for six games. Does the coach suspend the players and face the disappointment of the community? Does such a suspension place him in the perceived role of a coach against his own team? Does he delay the execution of the penalties until after the tournament? Does he feign ignorance and look the other way altogether? A coach with integrity hates the decision that he has to make, but makes it anyway. The players are suspended, and the team loses their first playoff game. The team is denied the chance for a state championship, but is taught a greater lesson in integrity.

A third way to develop integrity is to guard your principles (Cohen, 1998, p. 24). This means that you must evaluate what you view as important, your principles, and then ensure that your actions support those principles. Leaders often state that they are taking a course of action that goes against their principles, but claim they have no other choice. This shows weakness of character. One always has choices. To throw away one’s principles while claiming lack of choice shows unimaginativeness and a degree of moral cowardice. A strong leader with integrity would search for the course of action that will preserve honor for all involved.

Committing to always doing the right thing is a fourth way to develop integrity (Cohen, 1998, p. 24). This concept is listed last because knowing the right thing is sometimes tricky. Often we can sense it. We know what we must do, but we struggle with the commitment to do it. At other times, we do not see a right and a wrong. “Decision-making would be easy if it were always a choice between good and evil or right and wrong. In the real world, leaders have to make decisions that are multidimensional, usually between two or more imperfect remedies, on
criteria that encompass long-range goals and plausibility” (Guiliani, 2002, p. 126). This gray area is often the uncomfortable place where we find ourselves. This gray area is the place where true leadership is tested. In these times, leaders are required to rely on their past experiences, their principles and their beliefs to make the best choice possible. Will leaders sometimes be wrong? Yes. If they show integrity in the decision, will they be respected? Usually. If they show a lack of integrity, will they be condemned? Most assuredly.

As a future administrator, I hope to lead my school with integrity. I believe that I have the inner strength to make the tough decisions that must be made, and I hope that I have the wisdom to traverse the gray area that will inevitably appear. I hope that when I retire people will say, “I did not always agree with Hatfield, but I trusted him. He was a straight-shooter and always had the best interest of children in mind when he made his decisions.” I can think of no higher praise.

ORGANIZATION

“Successful actions are not results of accidents or luck, but rather of an analysis of the situation and the preparation and proper execution of plans... planning will maximize your successes and minimize your failures” (Cohen, 1990, p. iv). In a time when schools face a great deal of uncertainty and change, administrators must provide sound organizational leadership. Once an administrator has proven himself to be capable of developing a plan and seeing it through to completion, school personnel and community leaders will be more willing to accept the administrator’s leadership in other aspects of school reform.

People often speak of leadership and management as being synonymous. They are not. Both are very important skills for administrators to possess, but true leadership requires much
more than just managerial skills. Management and leadership have their similarities. Managers and leaders must work well with other people. Both must be able to influence situations and personnel in a positive way. Both must also be effective and efficient at goal accomplishment. (Northouse, 2001)

These similarities are important, but the differences between managers and leaders are striking. Managers provide order and consistency for their organizations. Their goal is stability. Leaders, on the other hand, seek change and movement. Their goal is adaptive and constructive change. Their work is more focused on a vision (Northouse, 2001). Leaders must be willing to objectively look at a situation, evaluate its effectiveness and make needed changes. Courage comes into play when these changes go against the status quo. “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 221). An administrator must find a balance between his managerial side and the side that hopes to lead change. He must ensure that any change is constructive, adaptive and based on evidence. He must push for that change, but he must also use his managerial skills to make sure that change is orderly. An effective administrator should reject chaotic or reactive change as well as change for change’s sake. Under the guidance of an effective leader, change will be organized, proactive and based on objective evidence.

Being an organizational leader requires an administrator to fully analyze a situation or problem. “A leader is one who sees more than others see, who sees farther than others see, and who sees before others do.” (Leroy Eims) Each piece of this statement is essential. First, a leader must see the whole picture. He must understand how decisions affect others and how they will affect future decisions he will have to make. Special interest groups are just that – special interest. They have a limited agenda and are focused on their own best interests. A leader must
do more. He must take into account the views of all special interest groups that have a stake in an issue, evaluate the issue objectively and make a decision based on what is best for all.

Second, a leader must be concerned with how present decisions will affect the future. He must be able to look past the turn in order to see the road ahead. Often a popular decision in the present can lead to trouble in the future. Administrators must be willing to make hard choices now in order to save their districts turmoil later. And third, an effective leader must see problems before others do. He must be proactive. He must be able to deal with controversial issues before they become controversial. An administrator that spends a majority of his time putting out fires will not be effective. The “fires” must not be allowed to start. These three requirements are essential for good organizational leadership because they enable an administrator to put together an effective plan.

Maxwell (1998) in his book The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership discusses many aspects of what is required of an effective leader. One entire law is devoted to the idea of organizational leadership. Maxwell’s Law of Navigation states, “Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course” (p. 33). Maxwell is again making the distinction between just being a manager and being a leader. Leaders must possess all the organizational skills of a manager plus much more.

Maxwell goes on to detail what exactly is required for developing an effective plan and seeing the plan to its completion. First, every good plan requires its developer to see the trip ahead. The matter must be explored thoroughly and thoughtfully. Second, effective leaders rely on their own past experience as well as listening to the advice of others when developing their plan. They make sure to examine all conditions before making any commitments. Third, good leadership requires that decisions be based on both faith and fact (p. 33). This is to say that one
must not abandon his plan too early. He must give the plan the time it requires to succeed. But also, one must not abandon his plan too late. Leaders cannot deny the facts. If the facts suggest that a plan or course of action has failed, an effective leader will recognize that failure and take steps to remedy the situation.

The current thinking in educational leadership tends to agree; administrators must be strong organizational leaders (Shipman, 1996). They must possess the necessary skills to manage their time effectively. They must choose good advisors and subordinates. They must be good communicators that help all stakeholders remain in the loop. On top of all these skills, administrators must have the vision to push the edge with their plans for reform. They must be willing to lead in the broader sense of the word. Schools have always been institutions of constant change. An administrator must be able to manage that change, focus it and direct it in a way that produces meaningful results.

Organizational leadership serves as a practical foundation for the rest of an administrator's responsibilities. A major criticism of many administrators is “He has great ideas but no follow-through”. Once an administrator has earned this label, it is very difficult for him to energize the teaching faculty and parents about a new project. They simply will not want to invest the time and effort in a project that will most likely fail apart and never reach completion. Conversely, when an administrator creates a reputation as a “get-it-done” individual, people will rally to his call. They will even be more willing to accept unconventional or experimental ideas. The administrator has earned their trust due to his past performance and that trust will pay off when the next controversial situation arises. The public will be more likely to give a good organizational leader the benefit of the doubt. They’ll say, “When we trusted him before, the results were excellent. Let’s see how his ideas play out.”
FLEXIBLE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Nothing ever goes as planned. Anything that can go wrong will go wrong. Realizing this fact does not make one a pessimist, but rather a realist. It is how we deal with unforeseen problems that determines our level of optimism. Optimists see difficulties as challenges to be met and conquered whereas pessimists view the same situations as problems to be endured. Any good administrator must be a flexible problem-solver. He needs to be able to take a situation in hand, work with others and formulate the best solution possible.

A great deal about flexible problem-solving can be learned from America's military. The military teaches its troops to be problem-solvers. A well-know marine slogan is “Improvise, Adapt, Overcome!” The military realizes that in any conflict, situations will arise that need creative problem-solving often in short amounts of time. As stated by a Navy Seal, “Nothing is absolute, and you must be ready to adjust when the need arises. It is when you leave the confines of archaic and restrictive thinking that you recognize hidden potential in both your subordinates and yourself” (Anonymous, p. 67). This statement pinpoints one of the most essential components of flexible problem-solving, the ability to think outside the box. If we keep tackling the same old problems with the same old strategies, we will produce the same old results. If we hope to produce better results, we have to formulate better strategies. The same Navy Seal adds, “Although I advocate, flexibility, this in no way means that you should ever compromise your standards; that is where it pays to be inflexible” (Anonymous p. 67).

Schools can also learn a lot from the military when it comes to contingency plans. Schools must plan ahead; they must make all attempts to anticipate problems before they arise and make a plan for dealing with them. Schools have come a long way from where they once were. Emergency drills and procedures are evidence of this progress. However, schools must
have contingency plans for the education of children also. What plans have been put into place for the students who fall behind? Currently, most schools curricula are very sequential in nature. Students who fall behind in reading or mathematics often have great difficulty keeping pace with other students. Traditionally, they fall further and further behind as the years pass. This is a situation that cannot be allowed to persist. The school administrator, as the instructional leader and the main advocate for children in his school, must take the lead in solving this problem. Is it a tough problem? Yes. Is it unsolvable? No. What makes this situation most difficult is that the solution will vary from school to school. If any solution to this situation could be generalized, the problem of underperforming students would have disappeared long ago.

Another component of flexible problem-solving is maintaining uncommon commitment to the solution process. Once a problem has been identified and targeted for intervention, a school must commit to finding a productive solution. A school cannot just give up, throw its arms in the air and say “It is too hard.” Keeping the school energized and focused on a particular problem is the job of the administrator. Aside from the benefit of solving the problem, showing uncommon commitment also has benefits for the administrator’s credibility. First, it verifies that the goal was worthwhile and important. Second, it proves that the administrator is not going to quit when the going gets rough (Cohen p. 113). Faculty will be much more willing to put effort into a process that they feel will reach a conclusion. They feel that any investment they make will pay dividends. This is a point that is vital for an administrator to understand. Once the initiative is taken to attack a problem, the process must be seen through to its completion. This is not to say that the plan may not be altered along the way or that the administrator should push blindly ahead. Rather, it is to suggest that the administrator must
provide the motivation to keep after a solution even when setbacks are experienced and success is elusive. As John F. Kennedy once said, “We do these things because they are hard.”

A final component of being a flexible problem-solver is the willingness to bring others’ ideas and opinions into the discussion. Often others can offer a perspective that you had never considered. “Restricting your choices to the confines of your own knowledge is self-limiting. This is especially so when others possess knowledge and ideas that will allow you to improve upon your course of action” (Roberts, p. 209). Some poor administrators fear that allowing others to put forth ideas or suggestions will result in a loss of authority for themselves. They have the mistaken idea that they must be the one who comes up with the solution and that their solution has to be the best. In fact, they often resent someone who comes up with a better idea. This style of thinking is completely upside-down and backwards.

Administrators who attempt to solve problems within a vacuum are just kidding themselves. We live in a complex world that demands complex solutions. At times, the administrator will be required to go it alone and make an independent decision, but when he is offered the chance to bring more heads to the table, he should take it. John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach once said, “It’s amazing how much can be accomplished when no one cares who gets the credit” (Biro, p. 197).

This collaborative approach to problem-solving also has a powerful effect on the faculty. Some of the faculty will be natural problem-solvers, but the rest will need some help. “To be a leader who stimulates true flexibility of approach among your teammates, you must believe that improvement and innovations are constantly available. It is not enough to logically know this in your head. You must feel it in your heart” (Biro, p. 176). Most faculty members will find the
process of problem-solving to be empowering. It helps them to see the solutions instead of just
the problems.

By thinking outside the box, having contingency plans, showing uncommon commitment
and fostering a collaborative approach, administrators can show true problem-solving leadership
for their buildings. The administrator can change the climate of the building from one that
accepts shortcomings to one that constantly challenges the status quo, ever seeking a better way.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

"None of us is as smart as all of us" (Blanchard, 1990, p. 25). Rarely do we find wisdom
so succinctly packaged as in this short quote. Today's complex problems require working
collaboratively with others. Educational leaders can no longer micromanage every aspect of
their schools. They must rely on the expertise of others. Any administrator that feels he does not
need the advice or counsel of others is an administrator doomed to failure. I have always been
amazed at how individuals can each look at the same problem and have such unique and diverse
perspectives on its solution. Often variables are brought forth that any lone individual would
never have considered. This is the power of collaboration.

In addition, collaboration allows administrators to bring in a wide variety of groups into
the school improvement process. This has a two-fold effect. First, giving people or groups a
voice in the decision-making process of a school empowers them. They have a personal stake in
what happens (or does not happen) at that school. They want the school to succeed; they are
invested. Schools must learn to be proactive in their commitment to collaborative work with the
community. If they build a strong foundation in the good times, they will be better able to work
through the bad times, the times that controversy arises.
There is general agreement among educational professionals that collaborative skills are essential for competent administrators. Standard Four of the ISSL/ISLLC Standards states "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaboration with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources" (Wilmore, 2002, pg. 66). The question is no longer whether or not we need to build collaborative groups, but rather how to make those groups effective.

Blanchard’s PERFORM model is an excellent way of building collaborative groups. The seven parts of PERFORM are purpose, empowerment, relationships/communication, flexibility, optimal performance, recognition/appreciation and morale. Having purpose means that the group knows what their goals are and have defined roles within the group. Empowerment refers to group members feeling a sense of personal and group worth. Open, honest communication and valuing differences of opinion are vital pieces of building relationships. Flexibility requires groups to be adaptive to changing situations. Optimal performance refers to the group’s quality of output. Quality must be excellent for a group to continue to function well. Recognition and appreciation go hand-in-hand with the last requirement of morale. Group members must feel that they are valued. If they do, group morale will be high (Blanchard, 1990).

Chrislip and Larson (1994) echo many of the ideas put forth by Blanchard. However, their discussion of collaborative leadership is more focused on guiding collaborative groups through controversial issues or opposition by other groups. They set collaborative groups amid all the turmoil of the political landscape and demonstrate great insight in how to navigate through tough times. Chrislip and Larson assert that credibility and openness of process for collaborative groups are essential. Outsiders must feel that the group has actual power to affect
change while also ensuring that no one subset of that group has an unfair amount of power.

They also put forth the idea that enlisting the support of influential and visible community leaders is essential. At the very least, the collaborative group should work to keep community leaders neutral.

Every administrator must have a working knowledge of how to effectively manage collaborative groups. An administrator must be able to help the group function positively and productively. He must understand when to help the group redirect and when to let it explore new ground. And in some situations, the administrator should rely almost entirely on the leadership skills of others. A perfect example is a school's parent teacher association. Obviously a collaborative group, the PTA provides many services to the school ranging from voluntary hours to monetary assistance. The principal must be able and willing to give the PTA a large amount of latitude in how it chooses to give of itself to the school. He should provide himself as a resource for the PTA and should support the PTA in any way he can, but the PTA president should “run the show”.

Administrators can only be successful as collaborative leaders if they have strong interpersonal skills. Most of the “management” discussed to this point has really referred to the building of relationships. If a leader can build those trusting relationships, that teamwork, the group will succeed. If not, the group will be nothing more than a group of individuals.

The best tool an administrator has for building relationships is his listening skills. Listening is something that we do more than almost every other activity. The general population is estimated to spend over 50% of their day listening to other people or the mass media.

Individuals in managerial positions spend as much as 70% of their typical day listening to others
(Kratz and Kratz, 1995). Good listening requires one basic commitment described as the “Golden Rule of Listening – Listen to others as you would like others to listen to you” (pg. vi).

Strong collaborative leaders give others the respect they deserve when speaking. Good administrators view the voicing of opposing opinions as something that is important rather than something to be tolerated. A speaker should never feel that the listener is just waiting for his next chance to speak. Listening should be an interactive process. The listener should show interest. He must view the conversation as an opportunity to learn new information, not a contest to be won. Finally, the listener must ensure that he understands the speaker’s perspective. Paraphrasing the speaker remarks is a great way to do this. This does two things; it verifies that you really have been listening and it makes a quick check for understanding. If your paraphrasing is incorrect, it gives the speaker a chance to clarify their explanation or argument (Kratz and Kratz, 1995).

Building collaborative groups is no small task, but it is an essential one. The ability to achieve this goal develops over time and through experience. Every administrator must strive to make this skill one of his strengths.

VISION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE

Effective administrators are able to help their communities form positive school cultures. This task is one of the most vital responsibilities of a principal. Since a principal cannot be in each class each period of each day, he must rely on the individual teachers to reinforce the ideas and values that the school hopes to promote. This assumes that all the staff is in agreement as to what type of classroom culture the school values. The principal must be the primary spokesperson and leader of the school community as all stakeholders work to define and
articulate the school’s vision of what it should be. I hope to influence the culture of my school with two core values that I think are essential to making a successful school.

First, teachers must be motivated to take up the many challenges that face us today. They must see difficult tasks as opportunities instead of problems. Second, teachers must believe in success for all students. And I do mean ALL students. Everyone can teach the highly motivated, intelligent, energetic kid who always brings the teacher an apple. What about the kid in the back row who hates school, does not see its value and has never felt success with learning? That is precisely the child who needs our help the most. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The same can be said of a community. We must encourage academic success and skill development in all of our students.

If we fail to educate a student, two things usually happen. One, the student grows to be an adult who lacks the capability to support him/herself and becomes a social and financial burden upon the community. Two, that student often has no choice but to stay in the community and a few years later, we have a second generation of kids who feel that the educational system is irrelevant to them. This creates a vicious cycle of apathy and failure. Many large cities are struggling with this problem. They have families that have failed to succeed for three or four generations and have no understanding that an independent life exists outside of the government welfare system.

I think that the two core values I have discussed interact nicely. Bringing about a quality education for all is challenging. However, if we have challenge-seeking teachers we will succeed. There are many ways for teachers to ensure success for everyone. One of my jobs as an administrator would be to encourage teachers to be innovative in their approaches for the low-achieving students and to give the teachers the support they need to make their plans reality.
To summarize, what draws me to school administration is my belief that all students must succeed and the challenge of making that happen. I want to be part of a team that builds a school, helps it to flourish and solves the problems that threaten its continued success. I want a school that instills pride in the community that supports it.

CONCLUSION

Educational administration is an appealing career opportunity for me because it will allow me to put into action two core values that I learned in my early years – we all deserve the chance to succeed and that hard work toward a lofty goal is what leads to cherished success. I believe that if I continue to develop four personal characteristics, my chances of being an effective administrator will be greatly enhanced. First and foremost, I must act with integrity at all times. Second, I must present an organized approach to my school activities. Third, I must be a flexible problem-solver and be willing to think outside the box. Fourth, I must work collaboratively with others when attempting to better the school.

Continual development of these characteristics will allow me to lead a school in a way that brings respect and honor to all students, faculty and parents. I will strive to create a school whose culture supports highly motivated teachers who seek out the hard to reach students. I will help all students recognize their near limitless potential and give them the tools to chase the realization of that potential.
REFERENCES


