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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

A visionary leader must have an awareness of the past, a feel for the present and a clear picture of the future. Perhaps the greatest skill that tomorrow's educational leader can possess is the ability to enact change. While many people fear change, Spencer Johnson (1998) clearly, and humorously, illustrates the importance of accepting change through *Who Moved My Cheese?* While the author warns, "If you do not change, you can become extinct" (p.46), he also suggests smelling the cheese (your current situation) often, "so you know when it is getting old (and change is needed)" (p.52). I prefer looking in new directions, and towards positive change, because "movement in a new direction helps you find new cheese" (p.56).

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,
and Postsecondary Education
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Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by

Michael J. Herdliska
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As I have contemplated my philosophical stand on educational administration, I have reflected upon my core beliefs. It does not matter if I am acting as an administrator, classroom teacher, coach, parent, colleague, or friend, I believe that my core values will help me make the most of any position. I believe my attitude about my profession, the pride I have in what I do, my commitment to education, my philosophy of leadership, and my ability to effectively communicate and develop relationships, will enable me to become an effective educational leader.

Professional Beliefs

I believe that the most important role of a building principal is that of instructional leadership. The ability to empower and motivate teachers to improve their classroom performance is the greatest way I will have an impact on the students in our building. By organizing my day in a manner that prioritizes instructional leadership, I will establish trusting and professional relationships with members of our school community through open and honest

communication. I will consistently demonstrate reliability and dependability to staff members by following through with commitments and promises. As an effective leader, I will strive to be visionary while guiding our building in a positive direction.

I believe that the backbone of an effective school is quality teaching. I envision surrounding myself with educators who approach teaching with flexibility and an appreciation for the changing needs of children. I believe effective teachers are willing to take risks while using a variety of teaching strategies to develop the whole child. I desire working beside teachers who are passionate about education and their profession. As an instructional leader, I will work to develop a team of educators who view both their personal and professional growth as vital aspects of lifelong learning.

I believe that all children have the capacity to learn. They do this at their own rate, with differing styles, and interests, and to various levels. I feel it is the responsibility of all staff members,

regardless of their role in the building, to "get the job done," doing whatever it takes to meet the social, emotional and learning needs of each child in our school building. As building principal, the best way to assist in overall student development is to put a strong emphasis on instructional leadership. It is only by motivating and empowering teachers, that I will be able to provide children with a safe and structured learning environment where they can develop citizenship while acquiring lifelong learning skills.

Personal Beliefs

Regardless of my position, the core of my belief system has always focused on commitment, attitude, loyalty and pride. I believe that my continued concentration on these four areas will allow me to pursue excellence in all areas of my personal and professional life.

I have chosen the field of education because I am committed to children, learning and the future. I believe that educators have a responsibility that extends beyond their job description and contract

hours. Whether I am a classroom teacher, coach, or administrator, I believe in showing a high level of commitment to my profession and its importance in my life.

As an individual, I approach each day with an attitude of excellence. To me, excellence means doing my best at all times. In order to do my best, I must be self-motivated and attack problems proactively.

I entered the field of education with the attitude that children are naturally good, and that I can make a positive difference in the lives of young people. As I make the transition from teacher to principal, I feel confident that educational administration will be equally rewarding, as it will allow me to continue working closely with the children of our community.

Loyalty means "caring in a serious way about your relationships with others and being willing to show it through your actions" (Bennett, 1997, p.283). In order to be an effective building administrator, I must be loyal to all staff members, honestly caring

about them as people and professionals. Likewise, I expect to develop loyalty among staff members so that they see me as a person, friend and colleague, in addition to the building leader.

I believe that pride is a very powerful emotion. I will take great pride in our school as I work to insure that it is a safe learning environment for all children. My goal will be for the overall quality of our school to aid in the development of pride in the students, staff, parents and community.

It is my belief that everyone should take pride in what they do. I take pride in my job and profession, as I see a great deal of integrity in the field of education. I take pride in the fact that so many parents have entrusted schools with the lives of their children. Likewise, as building principal, I will take pride in developing a quality learning environment while communicating my commitment to life long learning.

The Principal

The position of building principal includes many roles and responsibilities. Among the professional qualities required is a healthy balance between an efficient manager and an effective leader. A building leader must develop effective habits, model appropriate conduct, and be committed to life long learning, while possessing quality communication skills. It is essential that the principal develop trust and rapport with other staff members and develop a high degree of knowledge and understanding regarding topics such as teaching strategies, curriculum, instruction and assessment issues, school law and technology.

Leadership

The building principal of the future must have a balance of managerial and leadership abilities. While the definitions of leadership and management are quite similar, Stephen Covey (1989) differentiates between the two by explaining that "effective management is putting first things first (and) leadership decides

what 'first things' are" (p. 148). In order to demonstrate strong leadership capacity, I will prioritize my personal and professional life, identify which things are first, and establish effective and efficient habits. I will lead and manage with enthusiasm as I circulate among all members of our learning community in order to develop alliances based on trust and rapport. By fostering both teacher and student empowerment, I will constantly work to enhance these relationships.

I believe that as a leader, it is important to establish habits that will enable me to meet both managerial and leadership goals. By efficiently completing the managerial tasks of a building principal, I will develop the trust and confidence of our teachers, students and parents. Likewise, I will effectively prioritize my day by being proactive and not procrastinating. By demonstrating ability, showing compassion, and acting with consistency as I deal with the leadership aspects of my position, I

will gain the respect and loyalty of those with whom I work.

As the building principal, I will be the most visible member of our staff. Therefore, it is critically important for me to conduct myself in an ethical and professional manner in all aspects of my life. I know that my actions as building principal will reveal my true character, beliefs, and values. While I must be "ferociously persistent" (Pitino, 1997, p. 191) as I strive to meet my personal and professional goals and the goals of our building, above all else I must consistently act with dignity and integrity.

As the school leader, it is important to verbalize my vision and communicate my philosophies and beliefs through my daily actions. Things which matter most get paid attention to (Williamson, 1998) and the "things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least" (Covey, 1989, p. 146). Therefore, through my actions and attention, others will see my strong commitment to both

organizational and instructional leadership, quality teaching, teacher empowerment, and my respect for our learning community and its vision, mission, rules and expectations.

In my opinion, one of the most important elements in building relationships is developing trust and rapport. As a leader, it will be crucial to attend to the needs of others while keeping promises and following through with commitments. By acting with personal and professional integrity, modeling strong character, and lending an empathetic ear, I can develop the trust and rapport needed in my personal and professional relationships.

A building principal is also a leader in many other areas. In addition to being an instructional leader, I will be viewed as a personal ally and confidant, professional resource and advisor, as well as a district and community leader. Therefore, it is important to realize that I take my character and ethics with me as I leave the building each night. I will always be the chief representative of our school,

its teachers and students, and therefore must conduct myself in a manner congruent with my philosophies and the beliefs of our building.

Communication

The ability to communicate effectively with others is critical to the success of a leader. Covey (1989) notes that "communication is the most important skill in life" (p.237). Pitino (1997) would suggest that the keys to mastering the art of communication require me to "communicate my goals and needs" (p.125) and "confront problems immediately" (p.128). As building principal, it will be vital that I realize the importance of effective, proactive, informative, and humanistic communication as I use multiple modes of communication, and a common language to lead our school.

There are many advantages to proactive communication. By actively seeking and dispensing information, I will be communicating my values and vision that all members of our learning community are advocates in the education of our children. However,

I must use the information I gather to make decisions that are in the genuine best interest of our school. Because good leaders are passionate about being a part of a learning organization that focuses on shared talents of everyone (Cash, 1997), I will ensure that others have a voice in our school community. In addition, by proactively confronting problems that arise, and seeking win-win situations, I can demonstrate that I value their position and have their best interest at heart.

Humanistic communication with members of the learning community can be a great tool for any building principal. As the principal, I am committed to working alongside staff members as a fellow colleague. In my eyes, a quality principal-teacher relationship is one based on mutual respect and in which both parties are learners and teachers. Empathetic listening, "listening with the intent to understand" (Covey, 1989, p. 240), not with the intent to reply, control or manipulate, can help me to communicate my compassion to others. Seeking first to

understand, rather than to be understood (Covey, 1989), will demonstrate that I truly want to hear other perspectives. Abraham Lincoln, many years ago, illustrated the importance of such humanistic communication, in his belief that loyalty is won through private conversations (Phillips, 1992). Furthermore, by respectfully treating teachers as colleagues, I can boost teacher morale and help develop a more positive overall school climate.

As the principal, I will be the chief spokesperson for our building. While a great deal of my communication will be quite informal and personal, a large portion of my communication will be technical and formal. It will be important for me to articulate my vision and continually verbalize it to others. I will also be responsible for clearly and effectively communicating with the public on matters such as student expectations and achievement through parent meetings and board presentations. Again, in these situations it is important to communicate proactively, seeking input on what the community wants to know

regarding such issues through interviews, surveys, public forums and interactive websites (Strike, 2000). In addition, such information should be communicated effectively by preparing reports, keeping them simple, explaining them clearly, and relating results to the school improvement plan (Bartusek, 1999).

Personal and Professional Growth

I believe that it is my level of commitment to my goals that will determine my eventual successes and failures in life. As an unknown author said, "Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality. It is the words that speak boldly of your intentions, and the intentions that speak louder than the words." Thus, it is my actions as well as my words, which will illustrate my personal and professional commitments. I view each new day with a positive attitude and as an opportunity for improvement. I realize that I cannot change the past. However, I must do the best I can each day to prepare our children for an ever changing tomorrow.

Along with the education of many young people, and the leadership of a building of educators, comes a great deal of responsibility. My flexibility and willingness to change, as well as my commitment to lifelong learning, are vital elements to my success in school administration. As the times and the needs of education change, the significance of staying abreast of school reform will become increasingly more important. In order to attack the profession of educational leadership with the passion it requires, I must set demanding personal and professional goals and proactively enact change within our school and myself.

To be a successful leader I must first be a successful person. By emphasizing continual personal and professional growth, I will communicate to others my commitment to lifelong learning and the development of the whole person. As a lifelong learner, I must be actively involved in the learning process as both an educator and student of life. As I model the value of continued learning, I will encourage staff members to find ways to better themselves personally and

professionally. I must continually remind myself and others that the best leaders never stop learning (Phillips, 1992).

A major component of my long-term commitment to personal and professional growth includes literature and reflective thinking. By developing an awareness of current practices, visualizing alternative possibilities, and professional journaling, I critically analyze the past, present and future. I will continue to utilize the availability of current literature as I broaden my knowledge base, reminding myself that "the person who doesn't read is no better off than the person who can't read" (Covey, 1989, p.296). Constant reflection upon my performance is also essential as "leaders learn most from their experiences - especially from their failures" (Bolman & Deal, 1995, p.167-168). In addition to looking at myself, observing and reflecting upon the practices of others can provide positive models for my personal and professional growth.

School Law

An educational leader has many legal responsibilities to students, staff and parents. As a building principal, it will be important for me to stay abreast of current legal issues, mandates and court rulings that may affect our learning community. I will stay updated on issues such as sexual harassment and weapons policies designed to ensure the safety of students and staff alike. In addition, it will be important to stay informed about policies aimed at providing equal opportunities for all children, such as special education regulations and procedures. Furthermore, I will pay special attention to legal issues that may affect the specific age group of our clientele, as well as the adults working in our building.

Legal decisions are meant to protect our children. As the leader of our school, I will make sure that my actions, and the actions of other staff members, are appropriate and fit well within the law. Being well informed and keeping up on current issues

will help me to avoid any potential legal problems. When I am confronted with a legal crisis, I will remain patient, think clearly and carefully before acting. I will further research the topic, consult colleagues such as other building principals or superintendent, and possibly seek legal advice from an attorney. By thinking defensively, and not acting overly aggressive or emotional, I can avoid legal mistakes that may hurt our school.

Technology

Technology competency is an absolute necessity for tomorrow's school leader. I must be fluent with communication tools such as e-mail, faxes, newsletters, staff bulletins, and interactive web pages. In addition, various programs, such as databases and spreadsheets, can be of great assistance in compiling, calculating, and illustrating information. However, whether it is for personal or professional use, I cannot afford to use technology merely to try something new and different. While there is an ever-growing amount of technology designed

for educational use, I must assess its effectiveness and efficiency, and have a valuable reason for its use.

Technology in our schools must be equally accessible to all students, academic in nature, and reflective of skills that are potentially needed for the job markets ahead. With the rapid changes of technology and its influence on the workforce, we must not teach outdated skills to our students. We must look to the future, communicate with potential employers, and provide students with hardware, software, and a flexible curriculum designed to prepare them for future technological changes.

One of the most common uses of technology in our schools is for research and information gathering. Students, as well as teachers, use the internet to access the most recent information available for projects, papers, and class activities. Likewise, teachers can research new curriculum or instructional strategies, or subscribe to on-line teacher publications. Administrators can also use technology

to study current trends in education, research instructional strategies, access professional organizations or professional growth sites.

The use of technology in the school, however, is not limited to accessing information. Students, teachers, and administration can use multiple modes of technology to communicate. Tools such as e-mail, internet, intranet, interactive websites, scanners, palm pilots, digital cameras, power point and projection devices can be used for student presentations and daily assignments, parent communications, informational nights, staff meetings or board presentations, as well as general communication within and outside the school building.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is perhaps the most important, and most time consuming responsibility of a building principal. An effective instructional leader works collaboratively with teachers to develop a quality learning environment. Through a diverse curriculum that addresses a variety of topics,

including co-curricular and advisory activities, teachers should be encouraged to address the unique needs of all children. The effective instructional leader clearly states and communicates expectations and a vision of quality teaching and learning.

Student Learning

While the needs of children, families and communities change, the structure of schools may vary, and new reform models may emerge, influencing methods of teaching. However, the main focus of schools will always remain constant. Above all else, no matter what the format or structure, schools are designed to educate the children. It is true however, that the science of teaching, the push for accountability in curriculum, instruction and assessment, as well as assurance that the needs of all children are being met, will continue to change the face of education in the years to come.

I believe that we must address the unique needs of each individual child. Among these considerations are the academic, social and emotional needs. Schools

can help all students succeed by setting clear expectations, providing advisories, encouraging parent participation, and creating a climate conducive to learning and exploration. Furthermore, research has concluded that reduced class size can affect students in a positive manner (Halbach, Ehrle, Zahorik, Molnar, 2001) and that smaller schools are "more effective than larger ones with respect to safety, accountability, student achievement... (and) drop out prevention" (Schoenlein, 2001, p.28). While the actual size of a school may be an inflexible variable, "the principal plays an important role in the success of any initiative to make a larger school feel small" (Schoenlein, 2001, p.28).

While teaching has always been viewed as an art or skill, recent research has helped direct education towards a "science." For example, the recent findings regarding brain research has led to major changes in the way we teach. As a building principal, I vow to continue my research on such topics so that I may assist teachers in improving their instructional

strategies. It is important to understand new findings such as students need for active learning, periodic breaks, time for standing and stretching in order to alleviate fatigue from prolonged sitting, and encouraging movement to increase heart rate, and improve circulation, resulting in increased student performance (Jensen, 2000). Likewise, new teaching strategies must allow for the consideration of issues such as constructivism and differentiated instruction. While it is not a new finding, "nearly all teachers believe that it's better to differentiate instruction..., (the) challenge lies in translating that belief into action" (Willis, 2000, p.2). Likewise, while "considerable research shows that active engagement in learning may lead to better retention, understanding and active use of knowledge" (Perkins, 1999, p.8), my true test as an instructional leader will be to empower teachers to initiate changes in their instructional skills, share new findings and research with others, while still being accountable for the "traditional" curriculum.

While the definitions and expectations of teaching have changed in recent years, so have those of learning. The question of "what" a student learns is now often replaced with "how" a student learns, indicating that there are multiple ways a student can demonstrate understanding. As a building principal, I will encourage the use of a variety of student assessments. Projects, papers, exhibitions, presentations, teacher made tests and portfolios are just a sampling of possible assessment tools. Regardless of the strategies used, it is important to keep in mind that "tests and assessments be used to improve student learning" (NASSP Board of Directors Position Statement on Standards and Assessments, 2000, par.8), and just as no single teaching strategy is best for all students, no one assessment tool meets the needs of all educators.

Co-Curricular Programs

I believe that each student must find a place for him or herself in our schools. While some students will experience their success in the classroom,

others, with more unique strengths and intelligence, need a variety of outlets to help make school a positive experience. Citing various studies on the issue of extra-curricular activities, John Holloway (1999) found benefits for both gifted and marginal students. Most notably he discovered a decreased drop out rate among "marginal" students due to a "positive and voluntary" (p.87) connection to school. Holloway also notes that athletic participation "reduces the probability of school drop out by approximately 40 percent" (p.87).

Co-curricular activities such as band, drama, athletics, and student government can play an important role in the education of the whole child. Likewise, such activities can aid in the development of teamwork, cooperation and self-confidence, as well as goal setting and time management skills. In efforts to be an extension of the classroom, co-curricular activities should have similar goals, objectives and expectations. Furthermore, school related activities more directly affect achievement

than activities outside of school (Holloway, 1999). Nonetheless, if we really plan on preparing kids for the real world, we should expand after-school, non-academic clubs, and de-emphasize winning and losing in team sports (Glover, 1999).

In addition to reduced drop out rates and increased achievement, I believe that there are many additional benefits of co-curricular participation. I feel that in addition to the personal benefits, co-curriculars can aid in developing pride in one's self and school. I believe that overall school climate can also be positively affected when the co-curricular activities include service learning, community service, or a large percentage of the student body. Furthermore, Ruder (1999) notes that a "program that is appealing to the student body and promoted by the staff will generate greater student participation with lower attrition, than programs sponsored by non-staff personnel" (p.20).

The benefits of co-curricular activities go beyond the individual student, enhancing the home

school relationship. Various school activities can be used to encourage greater parent and community involvement. Family nights, informational meetings and parent organizations, as well as other "non-academic" activities, can serve to further extend the classroom experience and provide needed reinforcement. As an administrator, visible support and attendance at such functions can improve public relations and help to communicate the value of such programs.

Teacher Observation

I believe the primary role of a building principal is that of instructional leader. The principal "must promote a vision for, establish a tone for, and create an atmosphere that encourages excellent teaching and successful learning" (Farrace, 1999, p. 4). A principal who fails in the area of instructional leadership, essentially fails the function of the school. While instructional leadership is a huge time commitment, it will be a priority in the scheduling of my day in order to

communicate my expectations and establish myself as an instructional leader.

As building principal, it is important that I create and communicate my vision of effective teaching. By encouraging excellent teaching, staff members will see that their efforts towards quality instruction are valued and that I care about the education of all students within our learning community. Through formal and informal classroom visits, I will gain an understanding of each teacher and classroom in the building, as well as communicate my commitment to quality instruction. Likewise, by regularly meeting with individuals and small groups and focusing on the impact teacher performance has on student achievement, I will further establish myself as an instructional leader.

A primary focus of any school should be success for all students. The logical path to success for all students would include success for all teachers. Jonathan Wilson (1998), in a Des Moines Register article, notes that it is "really tough for the

majority of students to rise very much above the competency level of their teachers" (p.13). A commitment to success for all teachers begins with a strong emphasis on the success of new teachers. As building principal, I will commit to new teacher training and mentoring programs that pair beginning teachers with veteran staff members. This collaborative environment can be extended to include all teachers as part of cognitive coaching, study groups, and support groups. Experienced and inexperienced teachers alike should realize that improved instruction, combined with enhanced collaborative relations among staff members, has a direct impact on student success.

If a truly cohesive and collaborative environment is to exist within a school, teachers must view formal and informal observations as an opportunity for growth. By developing a collegial relationship and effectively using a pre-observation, or goal setting conference, classroom observation and post-observation reflective conference, teachers will receive concrete

feedback regarding their classroom performance and instructional growth. My feedback to teachers will be timely, specific, and state facts along with conclusions to document teacher performance (Sullivan & Zirkel, 1999). While formal observation is a powerful tool, it will not be viewed as the only, or even main, medium for teacher evaluation or professional growth.

I believe the professional development of educators requires an ongoing, long-term commitment from both principal and teacher. Teachers, like students, have a wide variety of needs, abilities, interests and expertise. Therefore, in attempts to develop the entire individual, both personally and professionally, teachers require a variety of strategies designed to increase their performance and knowledge base.

Organizational Leadership

An effective organizational leader must possess qualities necessary for school-wide leadership. In order to address the many changing needs in the field

of education, an organizational leader must be a visionary, as well as being flexible and open to change. The effective leader should be able to clearly articulate where the school is headed, while working collaboratively and communicating with the entire learning community. The organizational leader must be committed to providing students with a safe learning environment and a climate that is conducive to learning and cooperation.

Visionary Leadership

Perhaps the greatest skill that tomorrow's educational leader can possess is the ability to enact change. With the pressures to continually improve, as well as document student performance, I must look at new ways to lead our school in a positive direction. While many people fear change, Spencer Johnson (1998) clearly, and humorously, illustrates the importance of accepting change through Who Moved My Cheese? While the author warns, "If you do not change, you can become extinct" (p.46), he also suggests smelling the cheese (your current situation) often, "so you know

when it is getting old (and change is needed)" (p.52). I prefer looking in new directions, and towards positive change, because "movement in a new direction helps you find new cheese" (p.56).

A visionary leader must have an awareness of the past, a feel for the present and a clear picture of the future. In constructing my own vision, I must begin with the end in mind, carefully articulating what I want as an end result. In addition, I must ensure that both my personal and professional visions are principle based - doing the right thing, for the right reason, and in the right way (Covey, 1994).

I believe that effective communication and cooperation between home and school is essential to a quality learning experience. Parents, teachers and administrators form a partnership with shared interests, visions and goals. In order to develop a group vision, I will seek the input of students, staff, parents, and others in our learning community. "Involving the community in the early stages of the reform process is a critical strategy" (King, 2000,

p.32). As leader, I must seek a team atmosphere, where our individual actions synergize towards a common goal. A vision, whether it is public or private, written or unwritten, individual or group, should guide actions. Therefore, the vision of an effective school should guide everything we do, including our hiring process, evaluation procedures, curriculum, instruction and assessment.

An effective vision, once agreed upon, must continue to grow. In addition to contributing to the development of a vision, all members of the learning community should be involved in its maintenance, because "without involvement, there is no commitment" (Covey, 1989, p.143). It is important that members of the learning community commit to and review the terminology and expectations projected in the vision. It should be clearly articulated, published, and posted for all to see. The vision should be a constant reminder of who we are and what we are aiming to accomplish. In order to keep the vision fresh and

alive, it should be reviewed frequently and revised when needed, to ensure it meets our needs.

Safe Schools

In light of recent tragedies across the country, perhaps the greatest challenge a building principal faces is ensuring the safety of the students. While prevention strategies, drug and violence curriculum and zero tolerance policies give an appearance of safer schools; there is much work to be done at the local level. As the building principal, I will communicate our policies clearly and assure others that we are committed to student safety. Sagarese and Giannitti (1999) specifically acknowledge that sexual harassment policies "must be recognized by students, enforced by faculty, and supported by all parents in the community" (p.7). It is important not only to communicate, but also educate and review all such issues with stakeholders.

Issues regarding student safety can change quickly. Research and professional reading, as well as communicating directly with local experts and law

enforcement, will help me stay informed of the many issues such as suicide and eating disorders that may involve our student body. At a more local level, I will be visible in the building and make regular walks around the facility to assess the maintenance and safety of our grounds. Furthermore, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Board of Directors Position Statement on Safe Schools (2000) states that schools "must conduct school safety audits, share findings with staff, students, school partners and the community" (par. 9).

Climate

There are numerous definitions and interpretations of school climate. Gonder and Hymes (1994) define school climate as the "attitudes shared by members of subgroups, such as teachers, faculty, and staff, and by the school population as a whole" (p.11). School climate is quite generally, the feeling that individuals have about being at their respective school building, or simply the "personality of a school" (Johnson, Johnson, & Zimmerman, 1996,

par.1). The study of school climate is sometimes confused with, but does not necessarily encompass the study of culture, or the "deeply embedded beliefs and practices so ingrained they are taken for granted" (Gonder & Hymes, 1994, p.5). Thus, culture has a larger, longer lasting influence compared to the climate of a school.

The principal is the "most potent factor in determining school climate" (Barth, 1991, p.64). Sagor (1992) suggests three "building blocks of transformational leadership" in creating a culture conducive to school success, including a "clear and unified focus" and a "constant push for improvement" (p.13). As building principal, I will work to maintain a safe and orderly building, using management and discipline to project a feeling of safety for all members of our community. While it is recommended that principals spend about 50% of their time outside of the office (Willis, 2000), I must be productive during this time. While out of the office I should vary my walking patterns in order to reach all areas

of the building, make notes of things to be addressed, as well as be in the hall during all passing times in an attempt to make positive contacts with students and teachers. In addition, maximum visibility within classrooms will allow me to demonstrate my commitment to quality instruction and student learning, as well as develop relationships with staff and students. By being a positive and active member of our learning community, I can help to improve the overall feel or climate of our building.

Improving school climate is one of the many challenges in assuming an administrative position. The challenge of improving something that is so vague and difficult to describe is quite daunting. In efforts to determine school climate, I will use formal and informal surveys to assess our students, staff and parents. In attempts to improve school climate, I will maintain an open mind and be flexible to changes that may improve our school. I will seek multiple resources, such as professional literature and outside agencies in order to provide new alternatives or

initiatives designed to create a more comfortable, effective learning environment.

Summary

It is clear that while I continue with my administrative training, the core values and beliefs that attracted me to teaching also draw me to an administrative position. I feel that the attitude and pride I have towards education has assisted me in becoming committed to my personal and professional development. I look at a career in school administration as a way I can lead, communicate with, and work alongside others committed to education in efforts to enhance student learning. As a result of my personality, experiences and professional activities, I am confident in my career path and my abilities to become a successful leader in education.

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