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## A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Andrew Merritt  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

### Abstract

The vision and mission a school community creates is the path and object of an administrator's position in a particular school district. The vision and mission is a foundation for the house and the beginning point of the road map. The vision is the idealized dream almost reachable, albeit reasonable enough for an attempt to reach. The vision should be shared and agreed upon by the community. Unique and culture driven, the vision needs to be the mirror of the culture's needs.

The most important passion an educator or administrator can feel is purpose. An institution's vision should give real purpose and direction to everyone involved.

A Preferred Vision for Administrating Secondary Schools

A Reflective Essay

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By Andrew Merritt

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Date Approved

Dianna Engelbrecht

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

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Date Approved

Gregory A. Reed

Second Reader of Research Paper

4.30.03  
Date Received

Michael D. Waggoner

Head of Department/The Department of Educational  
Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary  
Education

I have always believed that leadership is greatly determined by a very special balance of nature versus nurture. Everyone develops differently, but some individuals have profound experiences or life changing events that become an impetus for their very existence. The impetus in my life originated from the absence of my biological mother. As a very small child I was left by my mother, and my father practically gave everything he owned to her so he could raise me. He lost the house, large appliances, and even opted out of child support. We had rough times so they say, and people carried doubt for me simply because I was raised from a fairly low-income family. My father was never really a teacher in the traditional sense, but his actions spoke louder than anyone else's words or actions. I knew he would do anything for me; he had shown no one would take me away from him at any cost. Time and time again he proved himself a good and holy man—a man that was like an oak tree for me. Over time I tried to emulate my father, and I could not quite understand why I wanted to follow him, but I did it anyway in hope I could match his vision. He represented a nature-type of leadership.

I have also tried to nurture myself in understanding leadership by reading a multitude of books. I read Walt Whitman, John Donne, and even Friedrich Nietzsche avidly at a young age, but one great American thinker and essayist in particular, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote a series of essays defining many aspects of life. One aspect, of course, was leadership. Emerson said, "Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to

accomplish his thought;—and posterity seem to follow his steps as a procession” (Self Reliance, 197). According to this passage, the leader knows something, dreams something, and is willing to devote his whole life to it for others to see long after he is gone. People follow in that leader’s footsteps even though they cannot quite grasp why. I think this is a true testament to how difficult leadership is to comprehend. Even for one of the most revered writers, quality leadership was elusive.

There are certain areas or practices within leadership that are more absolute and tangible to analyze. Although reading and emulating others greatly aids the leader, the practice of leadership should be placed within a better context of understanding. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLC) developed for educational training greatly sets groundwork for the prototypical leader, or administrator in this case. Through these standards, an aspiring administrator is able to practice specific areas of leadership most likely expected by public schools. These six standards will serve as frames for discussion. They are as follows: visionary, collaborative, political, instructional, ethical, and organizational leadership.

The visionary aspect of administration is the area where a leader spends time building the platform of belief. Many times this is a shared dream or goal of a whole school staff. Collaboration plays a major role in the development of any goal in the educational setting no matter how small. Because of the public nature of most educational institutions, the surrounding community of a given school has

important needs to be met which are both ethical and political. The administrator is required to not only have certain collaborative skills, but also developed proficiencies within instruction and organization.

### Visionary Leadership

The vision and mission a school community creates is the path and object of an administrator's position in a particular school district. The vision and mission is a foundation for the house and the beginning point of the road map. The vision is the idealized dream almost reachable, albeit reasonable enough for an attempt to reach. The vision should be shared and agreed upon by the community. Unique and culture driven, the vision needs to be the mirror of the culture's needs. W.C. Cunningham and P. A. Cordeiro (2000) express in their book Educational Administration, "Vision coverts ideas, knowledge, experience, and futurist thinking into a reality that is clearly understood and achievable by practitioners" (68). The vision should be an ideal panacea, analeptic, and restorer of faith. The most important passion an educator or administrator can feel is purpose. An institution's vision should give real purpose and direction to everyone involved.

The organization National Association Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has developed a quality thematic approach to defining vision. NASSP's (2000) research outlined on their web site, entitled *Breaking Ranks*, expounds vision as containing the following: "personal development, academic achievement, technology, good citizenry, interdependency, lifelong learning, and advocacy of the young people" (Par. 1-12). Although seemingly inclusive, NASSP's aspects of

vision help create a mental framework for the objective of what a vision is intended to accomplish. It is an encompassing idea but specific enough for a school district to greatly define who they are, what they are, and where they are going.

The future of a school district is partially developed by that road-map vision, but the vision should meet the needs of the students and the culture that surrounds those students. This culture is a product of beliefs and values created over time by a specific community. Some aspects of culture need to be celebrated and solidified while some are areas of concern. These areas of concern many times determine what the vision would be.

In an ideal school, culture should represent many things. Therefore, the social environment should be constructive; the students should feel and be safe; the overall attitudes of the staff and students should be positive; the building should be inviting; the resources should be easily accessed and sufficient; there should be room for staff development; and most of all, the school should be student based. The wish list is long but nonetheless crucial for student and teacher success. How can a student have institutional respect when their classroom curtains are torn? How is a student supposed to develop a healthy and positive attitude toward education and their future if the administration and building staff are reclusive and negative? The school's culture should be the administrator's primary concern, for it is the backbone and driving force of everything in the school community.

School cultures are developed by a serious number of factors that influence climate and mood. One factor that usually undermines the validity of culture is an



administrator who lacks vision. If all the values of the culture are not talked about or thought about in an intelligent way by a school's staff, student achievement and morale are negatively affected. Any program or initiative that is started with care, but abandoned due to the lack of staff personalization adds to the pile of failures that a staff will not forget. The more this happens, the more difficult it becomes for any administrator to change the culture. Everyone seems to suffer in their own way, but pure dissatisfaction is just handed down from one person to another. To avoid this calamity, staff collaboration and administrative-led decision making is crucial.

Creating a vision-oriented school provides teachers with an important purpose for the work they do. There might even need to be few conflicts during the process of developing the vision to really make the goals and objectives more valuable. What is most important is that staff and administration do a lot of focused talking. Communication is vital. This is what makes people bond together personally and professionally. Colbert and Wallace (2002) state:

Simply increasing opportunities for people to meet, formally and informally, increases the opportunity for people to talk. Creating an environment to support professional talk entails organizing time within the school day and the school calendar for teachers to meet. (43)

All the visions created for any kind of initiative take time and effort, so the opportunities for teachers to meet must be encouraged. Without the sharing, talking, and deliberating about important aspects of school, teachers feel disjointed and unsatisfied about their jobs.

Many teachers and administrators in public school systems look at themselves as experts and have a tendency to rely upon themselves for answers. Unfortunately, this attitude interferes with what school districts are trying to accomplish. Unless every teacher naturally contains the same philosophical perspective about education and strives for the same objectives as everyone else in their school, there needs to be some profound collaboration to get meaningful tasks accomplished. Teacher meetings should not result in teacher comments put on paper and utilized for administrative paper weights. Teachers ought to talk with each other constructively and humanely. This talk is what brings about personal satisfaction and growth for teachers. Open communication improves the chances of a school district obtaining a common goal. The attitude should be that everyone has a voice, regardless how small it at first appears to be.

Administrators need to open the door for productive and valuable communication, so whether it be attendance, scheduling, building improvement, or the dress code, teachers must to be working continuously on focused school improvement goals every school year. Colbert and Wallace (2002) express:

Conscious efforts are required to structure the organization and to develop skill in teachers and support staff members that will enable them to work and learn together. Empowering people to reveal, share, and use what they know will not only create a better workplace for the teachers and staff members but also will advance the organization. (42)

More objectives will be met when teachers are empowered to control their own destiny. The administrator looks better, feels better, and is no longer viewed as a dictator. This ceremonial unshrouding of a negative persona which typical

administrators wear will model behaviors necessary for staff to break down barriers and take risks.

### Ethical Leadership

In addition to the relevant leadership of collaboration and vision, ethics can make or break a leader. There are a number of elements that comprise ethics, but they are actually difficult to define in simple terms. Ethics can either be attributed to a culture or an individual. In other words, ethics are decisions based on values instilled by environment or by the teachings of parents and church organizations. They play an important role in an educator's career because often they can overshadow rules or regulations of a school and even contradict them. It is those times in an educator's life where ethical questions are asked. Sometimes the answer to those questions can cause one to lose his job or generally make many people dissatisfied with him; nevertheless, the personal ethics of a leader play a role in maintaining not only trust from others but trust with oneself.

Emotional intelligence and job satisfaction are two valuable approaches for educational leadership that do not always fall under a typical policy or procedure. These two pillars in the career of the school administrator are not always entirely important to some leaders, but in the preferred approach to being an administrator, they must be. Caring about the emotional needs of students and teachers is ethical; it signifies a deeper purpose uneasily measured.

Administrators could be successful without concerning themselves with the trivialities of student's emotions or dealing with the personal satisfaction of staff

and oneself. I am sure there is some evidence that both elements contribute to higher academic and job performance, but even if the test scores do not show enough quantitative data to support emotional leadership, true experience will reveal its importance. Yes, an educator could be terminated for incompetency, neglect, or even harassment under school law. What about indifference? What about that child whom struggles with life on a regular basis but maintains a B average? The politician or researcher cannot quite quantify that phenomenon. It is the educator in the trenches making decisions that affect a student's well being. It is the educator making ethical choices that change the future of America's children.

Two sources really capture administrative ethics. The first, Victor E. Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning, is an autobiographical account of one man's plight during World War II as a Jewish concentration camp prisoner. He uses scientific reasoning through his experiences in the camp with his experiences as a doctor to outline key principles in life which can generally keep a person motivated to search for happiness and values. These values, as elements of happiness, should drive a person to do well in any situation, and in his case, even survive a concentration camp. Frankl's book is very inspirational to the aspiring principal because it gives plenty of solutions to looking at education in a very positive way.

A common feeling among educators is hopelessness. Educating students can be a very selfless job, and that constant selflessness can eventually seep into the most stable of minds. Frankl's life story hardly juxtaposes an administrator's

job, but it does exemplify the more difficult stages of life. If a man can have hope and make meaning in a concentration camp, an administrator can find reason to love their job because it holds meaning, regardless of how missionary-like it becomes.

Frankl sees life as cyclical. Find meaning, surge forward to capture it, and ultimate happiness can be achieved. The process is difficult but rewarding if one is able to have patience. Even when this process is achieved and happiness is found, more suffering could arise, and the cycle may begin again. Frankl expounds:

I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious "Yes" in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose.  
(60)

Although this quote cannot cover the book's descriptive 179 pages, it does get to the heart of the matter. To suffer means to find truth. When man hits rock bottom, he realizes the most essential aspects of life. As an educator dwells over hard work and sacrifice, he should realize that sacrifice can lead to a sense of higher meaning. It is ultimately a step to happiness.

The second pillar an administrator should utilize for an ethical base is the ideas behind the book Nobody Left to Hate by E. Aronson. The book is a thoughtful reaction to the contemporary violence plaguing American schools today. Aronson lobbies for emotional intelligence as a prime attribute of a student's education. He makes links between academic and emotional intelligence

while also criticizing the political band-aid so often used on big problems in education.

Using the background knowledge of a social psychologist, Aronson looks at the two students involved with the Columbine massacre, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, not just as cold blooded murderers, but individuals that went through the public educational system and suffered the consequences of various types of bullying. This bullying is put under the microscope. Aronson uses common sense and research to back up the idea that emotional intelligence is as important as academic success, and a focus on socialization in schools can help alleviate the potential problem of violence in schools such as Columbine. In other words, the way a school runs itself determines largely how students treat each other.

The main educational tool Aronson discusses is the Jigsaw method of cooperative learning. This teaching strategy facilitates student interdependence to reach learning goals, which in turn, teaches empathy. Irrespective of what method a school district uses to teach tolerance and empathy, the teaching should begin early in a child's education and should not finish until they leave the school doors.

The next appropriate question to really ask is "How does Frankl and Aronson apply to the average administrator?" They do not apply. The administrator satisfied with mediocrity will be less concerned with the future of children and more worried about the political structure of education or paycheck at the end of the month. The administrator that chooses to transcend the normalcy will look deeper. These deeper matters would include putting meaning into the

educational system and teaching children how to understand themselves.

### Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative and organizational leadership is pertinent to an organization's success. Many businesses in America were founded on ideas of teamwork and are still thriving today such as Apple, McDonalds, and Disney. In fact, collaboration is really a commonality in American education usually known by most educators as "cooperative learning." Committees and organizations today are numerous in public schools, but careful selection of prototype-collaboration strategies need to be explored to find the most effective models. The days of quickly throwing a committee together to create an appearance of change is not adequate. Two effective cutting-edge examples of organizational and collaborative leadership are explored here: Family Advocacy Alliance and Teacher Assistant Teams.

Schools are undoubtedly the primary agents for enacting political and moral change in American society. Only after community and school involvement can there really be a positive effect on what many people believe is an ever moral and decaying nation. A positive change must be applied in children's lives, not just at school or in the home, but everywhere a child can and might go in the community. A collaborative vision that is valid and reliable must be created and applied to improve the condition of children's lives. The school's vision should be agreed upon and supported with a strategic plan to achieve that reality. All the pieces need to be in place to create a positive village for everyone to grow.

With the community being a part of a school's organizational structure,

many positive results are wielded. The NCREL web site states, "School-to-home communication helps parents feel more self-confident, more comfortable with the school, and more likely to become involved" (G. Comuntzis-Page, Par. 9). The more the school contacts the parents in different ways the better the parents' attitudes become. For example, John Hopkins researcher Beth Simon (2001), found in a family involvement study from surveying 24, 599 grade 8 students from 1,052 schools over a period of time, initial contact with a parent immediately creates positive results for the community and school district. Here are some of the basic results from her study that further exemplify the point:

<b>When high schools....</b>	<b>Parents were more likely to...</b>
contacted parents about child's plans	attend college and career workshops
contacted parents about volunteering	volunteer as audience member at school activities
gave parents info about helping students study	help their child with homework
contacted parents about school issues	talk with teens about schools issues
formally recruited / trained parent volunteers	volunteer at school
encouraged parent-school involvement	join the PTA / PTO and attend meetings

(Bulletin, 17)

Parents are not the only individuals important to school-community partnerships. Business support creates more technological and innovative curricula along with improved facilities. Other community members can also have an important or positive impact in the school and community as role models,



speakers to classes about character education or professional experience, or volunteers for activities. Community member connections can be advantageous solutions to the character issues schools deal with daily. With an intelligently led collaborative program or organization, valuable connections can be made.

One local organization in rural Iowa that has created a framework for success in a community-school partnership is the Family Advocacy Alliance for the Starmont Community School District. The school district has a k-12 building with three small towns supporting the school. The building is in the country among all three towns as a center, but its placement is only symbolic. The communities need to collaborate in order for students to have better opportunities for success. Many students struggle with social issues, drop out, or have low ambitions for the future, so the FAA is a great way to help alleviate poor attitudes and save those on the edge of making a wrong decision about their future.

The organization was originally envisioned in 1999 by a local clergyman who wanted to improve community life. The school district agreed to create an organization that aimed to achieve specific results based on the needs of the community. A steering committee was created, an action plan was designed, and flyers were sent the community members and the students at Starmont. The brochures listed phone numbers and contact people providing assistance in the areas of abuse and violence, children's services, clothing, counseling, drugs and alcohol, education, emergency, employment, extension services, financial assistance, financial counseling, fuel assistance, health/hospital care, housing and

shelter, law enforcement, legal assistance, library, rehabilitation, runaways, sexual issues, special services, suicide, transportation, and churches. The committee decided they could group these concern areas according to resource availability.

School and community partnerships are largely supported by research, but the professional training to achieve these partnerships is sometimes inadequate. Professional leaders ought to find proven models within empirical research to suit a particular school district. The first and foremost action is to take action. Most educators know that community involvement should be improved, but that is the only thought given to the cause. Proactivity is a must to ensure helpful and enriching climates for all children within both the public school system and in their daily lives.

Organizational and collaborative initiatives are designed for real change or improvement of some aspect of the school. One initiative that Starmont High School utilized this past year was the Teacher Assistant Team. This initiative was brought about by the school counselor during his first year in the district. The concept was fairly new to the district and required a committee of members that met every week to develop solutions for children who were struggling for any reason. A problem-solving process was used, and various tools were studied every week to find solutions. After the first year of this program at Starmont High School, positives and negatives accompanied the program. A simple evaluation of the procedures the committee utilized would shed some light on what needed to be changed.

Teacher Assistant Teams (TAT) according to Bangert and Cooch (2001) are “committees of regular education teachers whose goal is to provide problem-solving assistance to general education teachers by designing interventions for ‘difficult-to-teach’ students,” (Bulletin, Par. 1). Students are referred by teachers to the team, and the team assesses what problems the student might have. A simple form is filled out and given to one of the committee members or put in a designated box. The team also compiles additional student names by examining data like attendance, midterms, progress reports, and office referrals.

The TAT committee is usually comprised of psychologists, counselors, regular education teachers, special education teachers, instructional leaders, and an administrator. Many other resources are used to answer questions and find solutions for the students. Outside agencies like foster homes, Department of Human Services, alternative schools, law enforcement, and hospitals are utilized. Parents, relatives, community leaders, local businesses, lawyers, school personnel, and the school superintendent may also be asked upon for help in the process.

There is usually a step-by-step process teams go through to problem solve for a particular student. First the problem is identified. Certain variables like environment and setting are looked at to see if there are any correlations which shed light on the problem. After the problem is established, an analysis of the problem takes place. Intervention ideas are discussed and resources are looked at for either short or long term solutions. The group agrees to move forward with the intervention, then implementation guidelines are set and people/resources

needed are chosen. Evaluation of the intervention is analyzed at a later date, usually weekly, unless there is a contractual agreement with the student which is supervised by the high school administrator.

Starmont High School basically employed these procedures of the Teacher Assistant Team mentioned above. Some strategies were more highly executed or implemented than others. At Starmont the team regularly met every week to discuss students on the list. This list was ongoing and committee members had this list at least a few days before the meeting. Attached to that list was also a summary of the previous meeting notes to review. Because of difficult schedules, many aspects of all the committee member's jobs had to be sacrificed to attend the meeting every week. Sometimes members would eat lunch during the meeting since that was the only available opportunity. The meeting was started by the counselor reading names off the list, and someone usually gave an update on the student's progress. The counselor might have talked about a conversation he had with a parent; the administrator might have talked about a recent behavior problem he had with the student; a special education teacher might have indicated what was directly going on in the classroom and so on. Usually someone came up with a solution to the identified problem. In no time this solution was put down on paper, and a committee member(s) had an assignment for the week.

Overall, the TAT program has worked very well in the first year of its implementation. The meetings were efficient and productive. Each member got a little better at developing strategies for problems. Sometimes a solution would not

be found, and the student would just stay on the list until the next meeting. One improvement determined by the team was involving teachers outside of the TAT. It seemed the committee just operated on its own, and the rest of the school was unaware of the positive gains the team had made. More teachers needed to participate in identifying students for assistance. A definite positive was seeing teacher-led solutions become successful. Many struggling students found themselves being successful due to the support of the committee. Some students might have been left behind if it was not for the group's problem-solving mentality.

Teacher Assistant Teams are very valuable to school districts, and they are becoming more and more popular. It is great to see a committee becoming proactive instead of just being political or lazy. So many committees are formed in schools, and questions related to their validity really need to be asked. Teams can demonstrate to community members that schools care about students, and they do not want struggling students to be left behind. Although it is not a fail-safe approach to helping students, it is proactive and positive.

#### Political Leadership

Political leadership may not be the preferred area of administration, but it does seem to contain the most weighty consequences. Many trivial decisions are made based on stakeholder needs which have a negative-like effect on a community or school. There are areas of growth and concentration where an administrator needs to be successful politically. Special education, teacher termination, and bullying all appear to be political topics in the media;

consequently, it remains wise for the educational leader to have knowledge and ethical stances on each of these subjects.

There are many terms thrown around in special education and maybe a few educators really understand the parameters of them. More importantly, the media in America has taken hold of terms like “access” and “accommodation,” but many do not understand the issues behind the terminology. Litigation is also just around the corner while the ADA (America Disability Act), IDEA (Individual Disability Education Act), and LEA (Local Education Association) act as freedom-fighting instigators to those who are discriminating. T. Frye (2002) indicates:

There are several relevant and timely issues with which school employees are wrestling: ensuring that students with disabilities receive educational benefit and access to general education curricula, adhering to procedural safeguards, and keeping up-to-date with discipline-related issues and recent IDEA-related developments. (49)

Being cognizant of special education requires an understanding of current laws which can be an enormous challenge when combined with every other responsibility an educator typically has. School leaders need to consult the appropriate individuals that specialize in that field as well remain current with laws and politics. Court cases change precedent almost every year and sometimes contradict other circuit decisions, so comprehension of basic laws and historical court cases is a must. Every circumstance is different and should be treated as such.

There are basic tenants to special education for every administrator. First: an administrator or school representative with building knowledge needs to attend

all Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Failure to do so would violate IDEA. Second, documentation is extremely crucial. Phone calls, meetings, goals changes, and placement considerations all require documentation. If it was not written down, it did not happen. Third, modifications and accommodations must be met according to the student's IEP goals. Failure to do so could result in litigation because the student is not receiving a FAPE (Free and Appropriate Education). Lastly, IEP students with behavior problems need to go through the manifestation determination process before there is a change in placement. Bad behavior can be a disability and penalizing those for their disability has limitations under federal law.

Besides special education, bullying is also a large part of the social consciousness today and finally has been coined negative by the press and educators alike. It is not as if bullying has not been present since the inception of man, but now it seems to be a phenomenon of great interest. The most obvious reason for the new trendy attention to bullying is the Columbine shootings. The partial means of the catastrophic end of Columbine was bullying, and many people are willing to accept this fact because of what they saw in the media. Perhaps now, many parents, with children that are typically less likely to have much power over others, are more sensitive to the problem of bullying. Since educators will be asked questions regarding bullying, and America has opened its doors to looking at the problem, administrators must be aware of the new research. Solutions should be explored by schools to discover avenues for curbing the problem as much as

possible.

A recent study done by S. Harris, G. Petri, and W. Willoughby (2002) in NASSP's Bulletin outlines eight strategies for the reduction of bullying:

1. Conduct an annual survey to inform antibullying strategies specific to that school's population.
2. Share survey findings with staff members to increase awareness of where and when bullying occurs at school.
3. Share survey findings with parents. This informs and notifies the larger community that everyone's support is needed to reduce bullying.
4. Discuss the problem of bullying openly with students and listen to their concerns. This can be done in dialogues with school leadership groups, as well as informally with individual students.
5. Increase supervision in areas identified as problem areas, especially the lunchroom, the classroom, and at cocurricular events.
6. Provide training for all faculty on how to support students and how to respond to bullying.
7. Adopt policies for dealing with bullies and bully victims that focus on helping all students increase self-control and take positive responsibility for their actions.
8. Build a school climate that emphasizes trust and support by demonstrating respect for all. (p.11)

Although these steps appear to be straightforward, much deliberation would need to occur between staff in order to find tangible approaches to the problem. It will take more than a year for a school district to understand the causes and effects of bullying. In fact, character education and morality are buzz words associated with bullying, and those issues alone in public education have been worked on for decades with no real national or state consensus. Every school community is different and every year is different as to the levels of moral consciousness that exist. Each culture has their own set of values and degrees of acceptance toward bullying, so the solutions are going to be very specific. As the eight steps suggest,



research and polling must be done to have concrete evidence of improvement or lack thereof, so it would be an appropriate idea to include moral education in building improvement goals. The real concern becomes how much time is spent on the different aspects of moral education and at what length and energy the bullying problem is given.

Another controversial and political aspect of being an administrator is the termination process of teachers. The process is probably one of the least attractive parts of the profession, but can be necessary for the advancement of an educational institution. Many times administrators shy away from terminating a teacher for two main reasons. The first reason has to do with fear and confrontation. Ending someone's career or position at a school can really set aflame the administrator's embers of consciousness. This is the moment where the leader has to prove him or herself, and the smallest detail could cause failure. The second reason for not terminating a teacher is lack of knowledge on the subject. There are general procedures for termination. Inexperience or lack of principalship preparation feeds doubt into the principal who needs a healthy dose of support and background knowledge to make the choice to terminate a teacher.

Steve Permuth and Robert Egley (2002) in Principal Leadership elucidate these common areas for grounds of job termination: incompetence, insubordination, neglect of duty, and moral turpitude. Incompetence would be defined as the teacher that lacks job knowledge. Insubordination is when a teacher is antagonistic to the point where their attitude and behavior causes problems with

the underlining responsibilities of the job. Neglect of duty is simply a teacher not doing what their contract outlines, and moral turpitude qualifies as immoral acts done by the teacher considered unacceptable by community or school mores (p. 22-26).

When teacher is terminated, due process must be given to the teacher if they have a tenured contract. A teacher with a probationary status contract is not granted due process. Before the process of terminating a teacher begins, multiple forms of documentation are needed. More than one person needs to witness the behavior and be able to testify to that cause. Coaching and intervention must occur before actual termination. Action plans or new plans must be written; true evidence must be shown the administrator attempted to help the teacher improve. Irrespective of what stage the termination process is in, specification and redundancy in documentation and action ensures success.

### Instructional Leadership

Instruction as well as ethics play a significant role in an administrator's career and ideally should represent a large majority of an administrator's time throughout the day. An administrator who is only concerned with the organizational machine and sees people as cogs in the assembly line will less likely inspire people to rise above their current situation. Very few external factors motivate workers to work harder for almost the same pay every year except the worker who has developed a personal stake or sense of ownership with the vision. The ownership one gets is really developed by the administrator who finds a way

for the vision and goals of a district to be bought by the staff. Facilitating a shared vision takes a very dynamic leader—one who has the ability to step aside for the sake of the organization. Committees and “let’s see a show-of-hands” at monthly faculty meetings rarely accomplish what administrators hope to develop and implement. In any change process, time is necessary even if it means less teacher-to-student instruction. What is the point of how many instructional hours a school has without the motivational drive of the teachers? Teachers must have a stake in the vision to put their hard-earned time into the job, and the school district should offer them that opportunity.

One well researched teaching theory or philosophy currently utilized in education is constructivism. Most teachers have heard about it and have a good sense of its general definition. Just how many teachers use the method is another question. Traditionalism puts up a good fight against constructivism because it creates fear from its unfamiliarity. Teacher-centered classrooms are the norm, and any swaying from that requires a paradigm shift. Any one teacher may use constructivism in their classroom, but the method becomes most effective when students are acclimated to its process and are given chances to practice it over and over again across the curriculum. Since it really is different than traditional methods of learning in public schools, it takes a paradigm shift not only from teachers and administrators but also from students.

One popular research phenomenon currently in education is “brain research.” Brain research explores how the mind works when it processes

information. Although scientists are really just on the surface of understanding the brain, a few key discoveries have been made to support the case for using constructivism in the classroom. One discovery is that the well-known right brain-left brain theory is not exactly true. The brain is quite resilient to a part of it being shut down; in fact, one side of the brain can make up for the other side. Some cases indicate the left and right brain works together, not separate as once believed—this is the connection theory. The connection theory is the theory that bits of information in the brain only can be moved into the long term memory mode when they are connected to other important bits of information. This principle can easily be added into instruction. When teachers create their curriculum, it should be developed like a spider web. Concepts, dates, periods, etc. must be studied in their relationships, not just as lone subjects which do not allow students to make analogies. These analogies are student-centered acts of making meaning out of something—this is the basic premise of constructivism.

The other main discovery about the brain is the research conducted on how people react to pictures and visuals and what that does to aid in understanding material. The pattern theory is basically the idea that people need to organize material according to some kind of pattern that is visual and personal. What makes the pattern theory fit into the constructivist theory is that students work

with relevant material in constructivist classrooms. Material is consumed and then reorganized into a visual format to aid in memory. The more strategies a student becomes aware of, the better chance they will find a technique which fits their own learning style. The process of students taking material and creating their own meaning and construct for it qualifies as personalization. This is similar to the act a teacher goes through when preparing for the teaching of a new concept to a class. That same teacher-learning process is what students should be experiencing.

Even though constructivism makes complete sense, some teachers and administrators are afraid of its total implementation into the classroom. Constructivism is a “new” way to look at teaching because the teacher is not the center of the universe and the giver of information. The teacher becomes the expert on the periphery constantly monitoring students working on projects or prompting students to engage in long conversations over material. It complicates the job in a sense that information and time cannot be handled as easily. If a teacher lets a group of students discuss a subject for thirty minutes, and the teacher intended the discussion to be fifteen minutes, the week or even monthly plan needs to change. This flexibility of the teacher is necessary for a constructivist classroom, and some are not willing to make the sacrifice. An administrator that is dynamic can exemplify and make a case for the implementation for constructivism,

but the staff will need to believe in it and have the ability to analyze and talk about the method deeply.

Political pressures and educational norms can hinder new practices.

Numbers, grades, benchmarks, and standards are constantly discussed to the point of no return. These extra pressures make educators think one dimensionally.

Educators see time as a factor which should be controlled. Certain ends must be met; standards should be exemplified. Unfortunately, this educational approach is not conducive to how the brain really operates. Students learn in the right environment at the right time that is best for them. Test scores do not take any of those variables into account. In fact, the new strategies like constructivism are processes where the learner discovers knowledge more on their own terms. How does the educator teach less material to support self discovery and continue to give students a better chance to score well on standardized tests? This is polar tension--another challenge for the new type of administrator.

Besides constructivism, there are other researched-based approaches and activities which support learning. Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools (1998) successfully outlines these areas: student-centered classrooms, experiential activities, holistic approaches, authentic materials, expressive activities, reflective activities, social activities, collaborative

learning, democratic modeling, cognitive thinking, developmental readiness, and challenging material (Daniels, Hyde, & Zemelman, 8). All of the above mentioned areas are difficult to employ and have in the classroom accompanied with all the other trivialities in education, but they still should be lobbied for because both quantitative and qualitative research supports them.

The six standards explored here give ample structure to analyze the educational system through the eyes of an administrator. The administrator, due to new demands and social concerns, must be a collaborative individual with an inspirational vision that leads the organization into the future. Ethical and political decisions must be made with tact and employment. Instructional leadership should be a strength to new administrators as social and political spheres apply pressure. New avenues like emotional and constructivist learning, coupled with new knowledge in special education and teacher hiring, bring about new demands for school leadership.

As Emerson pointed out, the leader is the spirit of an age and time without total emulation or definition of another. The leader is a cause and a purpose still yet disagreed upon by many, but one thing is for sure: he or she is born with intangible characteristics to prepare them for success. He or she sees hope in the future and sees hope in education, while their passion and vision for change is

passed onto others who themselves hold true qualities of leadership. Perhaps it will be later when the definition of leadership is fully recognized. Perhaps somewhere beyond the leader's courage, leadership will be completely understood.

The story of my father and the path I took because of the experience offers some insight on how difficult it is to develop a leader. Many poets and philosophers have attempted to define leadership, but the new administrator today relies on separating different issues into standards or frameworks for analysis. The ISLCC standards provide adequate terminology and goals for a practicing administrator to reach. Albeit every leader takes their own path to arrive at quality leadership like I have, the leader must make decisions about the common challenges. These leadership challenges have been placed within these categories: visionary, collaborative, political, instructional, ethical, and organizational. Full attention and study within these areas as prescribed in my preferred vision of educational leadership, provide me and others an unique opportunity to face the challenges differently.



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