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## Exemplary educational leadership : a reflective essay

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## Exemplary educational leadership : a reflective essay

### Abstract

Maybe now more than ever, the need for strong leadership in education is necessary. Unfortunately, leadership can be masked by many other titles: director, manager, boss, dictator. None are accurate descriptions of a leader. A leader takes on the appearance of servant, peer, guide, and mentor. By serving the staff and meeting their needs--physically, professionally, and emotionally--authority is developed so that managerial techniques which instill resentment are no longer effective, nor needed, and staff will feel comfortable working with you, for you, and along side you.

EXEMPLARY EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

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The Department of Educational Leadership,

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in Education

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So, this man decides to plant a special type of bamboo. He goes to his yard and measures an area 20 feet by 20 feet. Over several days, he digs down two feet to break up the clay earth, sifts the dirt, adds manure to fertilize the soil, carefully plants the bamboo, covers it, and marks off the boundaries. Every morning, before breakfast, he carries water from the stream to his plot. He weeds and waters and waits. Every day.

After a year, no shoots have appeared. A neighbor who has observed the man's daily efforts stops as the man works away and asks, "Why are you working so hard for nothing?"

"It takes time," the man replies.

The next year, the man does exactly the same thing. Every day, he walks to the stream at dawn, carries the water, carefully soaks and weeds his plot. At the end of that year, still nothing has broken the surface. The same neighbor walks by. "Why are you wasting your time?" he asks. "I have some good seeds I'd give you."

"It takes time," the man replies.

The third year, the man builds a small fence around the plot to keep out the animals. He continues to tend it with care. At the

end of the third year, when still no shoots have appeared, his neighbor asks, "Are you crazy? Why do you keep doing that?"

"It takes time," the man replies.

Three weeks later, the first small, green shoots push through the soil. They grow. And grow. And grow! Six weeks later, the man's bamboo towers over 60 feet high.

During those years when it seemed the bamboo was doing nothing, critically important things were happening: The roots of the bamboo were spreading, branching, thickening, and developing the strength and vigor to support the bamboo's future phenomenal growth and size. Only with watering and careful nurturing could the plant develop the root structure to support the towering stalks of bamboo. (Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003, pp. 1-2)

The bamboo tale helps to set the stage for understanding leadership.

Though our purpose as educators is not to grow fields of bamboo, the parable parallels the ideas surrounding leadership and exemplifies some of the same basic, necessary characteristics for leaders who want to implement and sustain positive change in education. If we examine some of those personal characteristics more closely and draw connections between them and the standards for exemplary leadership, we will come to see that the principles of leadership can be applied with a great deal of success.

## Leadership Characteristics

One might look at this parable and say that the character was a leader in his own right. He was a trailblazer, doing something in a way that hadn't been done before. He had a plan, and he saw results. He was committed, determined, patient, and hard-working. He possessed many characteristics one might identify in a leader.

We have learned, however, that leaders actually possess a range of skills, styles, and abilities. They might be autocratic or democratic, transactional or transformational, Theory X or Theory Y, an introvert or an extrovert, right-brained and left-brained...the list goes on. Because of this, there is no real prescription for true leadership. There is no test you can take, no questionnaire you can fill out to determine if you will be successful. There is no "ideal" disposition for quality leadership. Leadership is comprised of the unique skills of an individual in areas as broad as problem-solving, managing, attitude, intelligence, inherent personality, commitment, and vision. It is the culmination of many aspects. Therefore, the challenge set before any potential leader is to understand his/her own self and how his/her values, beliefs, and behaviors contribute to the overall style and success of leadership.

Through reflective thinking, we begin to see that our influence and ability to lead comes through our actions, not our rhetoric. If we, as educational leaders, cannot change our own selves and grow into more effective able educators, we

will never effectively spark the internal desire in each of our staff members to rise up to the challenges of the “creative tension” referred to by Dr. Else (Personal communication, June 2004). Therefore, the effect of implementing an effective growth plan is two fold: not only will we be more successful in our own lives; we will be better able to positively influence those we work with and accomplish the vision of the organization.

### Developing a Common Vision

Recent research indicates that in order to be successful in any organization or endeavor, a common vision must be developed. This is of such importance that it actually stands as the first of the principal leadership standards (Wilmore, 2002):

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school district vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

(p.19)

In an educational setting, this vision must address critical elements in order to be comprehensive enough and collaborative enough to be successful. These elements are important cornerstones for effective educational leadership. They include understanding your own self and leadership style, understanding student achievement and how it is defined as success, creating quality



professional development for the teachers, and hiring the right people to work with you to accomplish that vision. As you read, it should become clear how each element can not be truly separated from any of the others; how they work together to create a solid foundation in the school district to promote success.

### *Understanding Visions*

Influenced by these personal characteristics, we all inherently create images of whom we are and who we want to become. We set goals and develop plans to bring ourselves closer to self-actualization, in which we reach our fullest potential. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (1998) calls this a personal vision. He compares it to the United States Constitution: unchanging, all-encompassing, and a powerful document by which to live. Our personal vision becomes our personal creed; it becomes the standard against which every action is evaluated.

Similarly, schools must develop a common vision. By developing a vision, one that involves and is communicated to all stakeholders, the district will be able to visualize its future. "Well-designed visions are 1) detailed enough to carry meaning, 2) vivid and compelling, 3) motivating, and 4) collective" (Blankstein, 2004, p. 78). Ultimately, they move an organization ahead.

Dependent on the development of this solid vision--one that will be able to sustain challenge and change--is visionary leadership. "The goal of having a visionary approach to leadership is to help make certain that an organization

continues to improve and remain flexible to move forward, given the new circumstances and situations that will always arise” (Pasi, 2003, p. 1). By the name alone, one can conclude, then, that the vision should guide action. “Every decision made, every program implemented, every policy instituted, and all goals should align with this vision” (Blankstein, 2004, p. 77)

...the principal must be willing and able to articulate the vision frequently, while making thoughtful effort to behave in a way that advances it as well. Otherwise, a vision statement becomes simply words on paper, visionary words that never become action. (Pasi, 2003, p. 1)

The creation of a vision provides a link between the work we do today and the success we have tomorrow. It provides a common understanding of the actions that must be carried out on a day to day basis to reach success. It is at the core of everything we do. The bamboo parable exemplifies this.

The bamboo farmer had a clear idea of what he was trying to accomplish: he wanted to plant and harvest plentiful fields of bamboo, a special and unique variety. That was his clear and simple vision, and that set in motion his actions for the coming three years. His actions, frequent and deliberate, advanced his vision and his bamboo grew. Despite his seemingly “crazy” behavior, he knew that the efforts he made to build and develop that deep-rooted system would bring him closer to his vision.

### *Developing Educational Vision and Values*

If your school's core rests on state standards, then you had better hope that the standards never change, because if they do, you have lost the core of your school. Instead, every decision should rest on doing what is best for students. (Whitaker, 2003, p. 56)

Unfortunately in education today, the vision is becoming blurred. The background buzz of words related to the recent No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation--accountability, achievement gap, assessment, standards, proficiency--is sending mixed messages about what the role and goal of a school really is. Administrators around the country are worried about the future of their schools and their district. But what do these words really mean and how do they impact school administrators when making decisions about what their educational vision really is?

When the administrator is the one ultimately responsible for the performance of students and the level of their achievement (again, often defined and determined by performance on standardized tests), it can be easy to lose focus on what the primary responsibility is as an administrator and what the primary vision is for the school. The pressure can mislead you into believing that the singular role of the principal is to focus on performance on one particular test. It can be easy to find yourself repeating "Raise those scores!" and let that ring throughout the school as the new slogan. Is this the new vision of education?

Fortunately, the answer is no. “Effective principals don’t let standardized testing take over the entire school,” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 55). To restate, effective principals continue to keep the whole child in mind and understand the relationship between that and student achievement. Whitaker’s broader context for student achievement presents a more hopeful and gratifying look at the essence of the vision for education.

For any beginning principal, it is essential to understand the environment he/she is walking into prior to developing or even discussing a common vision. Doing an environmental scan, conducting surveys, questionnaires, personal interviews, and the like to understand the beliefs and attitudes, values and traditions of the school will save the administrator precious time and energy. Once that is established, the administrator will know how to move forward and will know better what steps need to be addressed before attempting to initiate any type of change, especially if it involves large scale, second order change.

Once the administrator has obtained a feel for the organization, he/she, together with the staff, can begin building the core of the school--the vision. As the vision becomes clearer, the values of the organization do as well. Whereas the vision guides the organization’s decision making, the values guide the behavior. “Values express a *shared* commitment to certain behaviors; they do not result from a top-down dictate—that is, they start with ‘We will,’ not ‘You will’” (Blankstein, 2004, p. 84). “Effective values are 1) few in number, 2) direct and

simply stated, 3) focuses on behaviors, not beliefs, and 4) linked to the vision statement” (p. 87).

One way to express the values of the organization is to develop operating principles. That is, developing a “code” of actions and beliefs that the organization chooses to live by and demonstrate in their every day behaviors. These operating principles will maintain the focus of the staff and the administration and will send a clear message to anyone outside looking in as to the core, or vision, of the school.

#### Defining and Influencing Student Achievement

It would be safe to say that student achievement is at that core of any given district’s primary values. The desire for student achievement is a consistent mission of all schools. What isn’t so consistent is the interpretation of student achievement. Stated more clearly, how student achievement is defined and determined.

The recent design of education presents an interesting conundrum for schools when it comes to this understanding of student achievement. The law presumes that student achievement can be solely influenced by the quality of education provided within the school building per teachers, instructional strategies, and curriculum. However, much research has been done to indicate that far more contributes to the success of a student. Rothstein (2004) plainly states:

Many well-intentioned people blame the achievement gap on “failing schools” because common sense tells that it could not be otherwise... This common sense perspective, however, is misleading. For although income and skin pigment don't directly cause low achievement, the characteristics that in general define social-class differences inevitably influence learning. (p. 40)

Additional research (Barton, 2004, p. 10) supports this position by citing 14 different factors which influence student achievement. Some of those factors are labeled as before and beyond school, such as birth weight, lead poisoning, hunger and nutrition, reading to young children, television watching, parent availability, student mobility, and parent participation. Those factors found within school are rigor of curriculum, teacher experience and attendance, teacher preparation, class size, technology-assisted instruction, and school safety. Notice that more than half of the factors contributing to student achievement are outside the control of the traditional role of the school district. Unfortunately, this research does not absolve a school district of their responsibility of educating all students. It merely provides a realistic picture of the intertwining of factors-- school, parents, and community--and the challenges that this presents to any good school administrator.

No one can deny the importance of understanding and striving to meet state and national standards when it comes to student achievement. Truth be told,

it is a reality that must be faced. However, there is much more to being an effective administrator than that, and much more that surrounds the issue of student achievement. The issue is broader than a single test and requires more than a hurried attempt to revamp curriculum or redesign assessments.

In today's educational age, heavy consequences are handed out for schools who fail to perform. If *Failure is Not an Option* (Blankstein, 2004), which happens to be the title of a recent publication addressing student achievement, then a principal must be prepared to ask hard questions and make sound decisions regarding student achievement. By basing decisions on current student achievement data, principals can start to improve their schools. By understanding the interrelatedness of the multiple factors (such as visions, learning communities, achievement data, etc.), principals can start to improve their schools. By meeting the variety of needs of students, not all of which are academic, principals can start to improve our schools *and close the achievement gap*.

Though it is most readily apparent that this critical element of being an educational leader falls into the role of instructional leader and supports the "fundamental purpose" of curriculum and instruction referred to by Wilmore (2002, p. 35), it appears that through this approach, improving student achievement is truly an instructional, operational, collaborative, ethical, and political issue, reaching multiple standards for excellence by administrators.

## Providing Relevant Professional Development

The challenge of positively impacting student achievement is not just set forth as the standard for excellence, however; but is mandated by the State of Iowa and the requirements for highly qualified teachers under the NCLB legislation. The success an administrator has with this challenge is dependent on his/her ability to create opportunities for quality professional development. Research suggests that the manner in which professional development is conducted can have a tremendous impact on the culture of the school organization and make noticeable gains in student achievement and performance.

Todd Whitaker (2003) may have summed up best when he stated, “Outstanding principals know that their primary role is to teach the teachers. The best way to provide an exceptional learning environment for students is to give them outstanding teachers. Great principals focus on students--by focusing on teachers,” (p. 35).

### *A Shifting Paradigm*

Let us first take a look at how professional development was once implemented in schools. Teachers would have a full school day, free from students, to attend joint sessions, conferences, workshops; or they got to sit and hear random guest speakers present the current “hot topic” of education; whether or not it was relevant to their own classroom needs was not an issue. Some teachers would listen closely, some would not listen at all, and at the end of the



day the teachers would hand over their paperwork and a check and receive actual graduate credit for “learning” something new. If the principal was lucky, a few teachers would come away with a new found enthusiasm and hope for real change in their classrooms. A week or two would go by during which those teachers may discuss the great workshop they attended, but soon the novelty of the presentation would wear off and the teachers would resort to the same teaching styles and methods they had always used. There would be no implementation of ideas; there would be no significant change. Ultimately, there would be no effect on student achievement. And that is what they called professional development.

This sort of “Sit and Get” professional learning, as Marcia Tate (2004) might say, is representative of times gone by. Now is the time for traditional approaches to professional development to move aside so that a more collaborative approach can be implemented (see Figure 1).

Teachers today have the awesome responsibility of taking part in meaningful, relevant professional development that provides the real opportunity to improve teaching methods and increase student achievement through research based techniques and analysis of student work and student achievement data. Teachers will use actual classroom data to guide decisions and identify areas where improvement is needed. They will gain knowledge of research based strategies and implement the ideas within the context of their own classrooms. They will participate in an ongoing process of collaboration, reflection, and

evaluation, thus refining their ability to act as reflective practitioners and improve their practice. This process is designed to be ongoing and provide positive results for students, teachers, and school districts.

**FIGURE 1: Traditional vs. Collaborative Professional Development**

Practices and Policies: Traditional vs. Collaborative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal Delivery</li> <li>• Professional development plans determined by evaluator</li> <li>• Structured professional development schedule</li> <li>• District goals guide school improvement plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple authentic learning opportunities</li> <li>• Personalized professional development plans</li> <li>• Designed by staff</li> <li>• School improvement plans inform and are informed by district goals.</li> </ul>

(Compiled referencing Lambert, 1998)

As we speak, educators all across Iowa are taking part in this shifting paradigm, the shift from the factory model professional development to professional learning communities. More than ever before administrators are acting as instructional leaders and teachers are acting as professional learners. And today, this is what we *expect* of professional development.

### *Professional Development Design*

Legislatively, the new Iowa Professional Development Model noted in Figure 2 (Hansen, 2005) is the guide for all professional learning for teachers. There are seven foundations that underlie this new model of professional

development that must be clearly understood by administrators in order to organize effective and compliant professional development for the district or building.

**FIGURE 2: The Iowa Professional Development Model:**



Hansen, D. (2005). Iowa Department of Education. Retrieved January 9, 2006 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/tqt/tc/doc/ipdm05.html>

These seven foundations are as follows:

1. School improvement and staff development decisions are driven by student learning needs.
2. The focus is on instruction and curriculum.
3. When increased student learning is the goal of professional development, the efforts of collectivities of people have the best chance for success.
4. The collection and analysis of data guide the entire professional development process.
5. Specific student learning goals provide the direction for selecting professional development content.

6. Content selected for professional development is supported by research.
7. The professional development process is cyclical. (Department of Education, 2005, p.3)

But simply understanding professional development is not enough. In order to sustain a comprehensive change within a district, the building principal is given the daunting task of redesigning the structural conditions within the system to support and promote the seven foundations. Some argue that this ability to shape the learning community is one of the most pressing tasks of a building principal.

Professional learning communities have become the current craze in education as a way to address the demands of this new model of professional development.

A school learning community is one that promotes and values learning as an ongoing, active collaborative process with dynamic dialogue by teachers, students, staff, principal, parents, and the school community to improve the quality of learning and life within the school. Developing schools where every aspect of the community nourishes learning and helping everyone who comes into contact with the school to contribute to that learning community are important concepts. (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003, p. 6)

When designing the professional development structure for a building or district, administrators must keep this new approach at the forefront of planning and consider some common characteristics of professional learning communities. First, and possibly most importantly, is the concept that this learning is based on a cycle of reflective thinking. The Iowa Professional Development Model illustrates this, but other researchers have addressed the criticalness of this design. Roberts and Pruitt (2003) suggest a six step process that mirrors the design of the Professional Development Model:

1. Identifying a Practice/Product for Group Reflection
2. Describing the Practice/Product Selected for Group Reflection
3. Examining the Practice/Product Selected for Group Reflection
4. Action on What is Learned during Reflection
5. Assessing the Outcome of the Action Plan
6. Building Community through the Cycle of Reflection. (p. 17)

The Professional Development Model is again suggested in the following characteristics for professional learning communities: 1) shared mission and values, 2) collective inquiry, 3) collaborative teams, 4) action orientation and experimentation, 5) continuous improvement, and 6) results orientation (DuFour, 1998, p. 25-29).

Though there is no "silver bullet" for professional development, there is enough current research to provide ideas to create a system that will work within the structure and uniqueness of each school. Through work in my own district, I have been a part of the restructuring process district wide and the redesign of

implementation building wide. Figure 4 is my personal vision of what professional development could look like at the building level. Currently, through work with the district and building administrators and other teacher leaders, we are implementing part of this model.

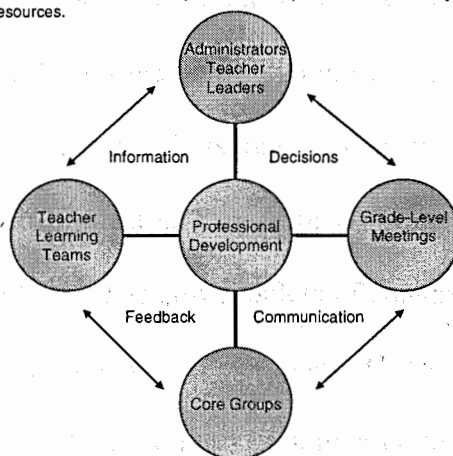
FIGURE 4: Sample Professional Development Model

## Professional Development Model

**Administrators/Teacher Leaders:** Develop schedule to support weekly opportunity for professional growth. Provide building-wide research-based content, structures for practice and implementation, flexibility and opportunity for teacher leadership, and time and resources.

### Teacher Learning Teams:

- ✓ Choose own topics of study, guided by building goals and Comprehensive School Improvement Plan
- ✓ Participate in reading/learning
- ✓ Do supplemental research
- ✓ Present and provide feedback to large group, core groups, goal committees, and administrators



### Grade Level Teams:

- ✓ Analyze student achievement data
- ✓ Identify curriculum issues, problems, gaps
- ✓ Collaborate on strengthening curriculum
- ✓ Develop/revise assessments

**Core groups:** Learn, collaborate and participate in implementing research-based strategies as part of building wide professional development. Peer observation and coaching will be embedded into the process. Additionally, analysis of student work through formal process (i.e. CASL) will guide decisions for instructional improvement.

Dennis Sparks (2004), Executive Director of the National Staff

Development Council, reiterates the basic principle of quality professional development.

Some of the most important forms of professional learning occur in daily interactions among teachers, in which they assist one another in improving lessons, deepening understanding of the content they

teach, analyzing student work, and examining various types of data on student performance. Consequently, ongoing high-quality teacher-to-teacher communication about teaching and learning is one of the most powerful yet underused sources of professional development and instructional improvement. (p.45)

This new vision of professional development-a commitment to developing teachers as pedagogues-will require a systematic change as well as a change in the way teachers and administrators view their own professional responsibilities. This new vision brings hope for the future of a more meaningful professional development. Someday may we truly be relentless in our attempts to reach a common purpose and create a lasting professional desire for growth. Michael Fullan may have said it best, "The new problem of change...is what would it take to make the educational system a learning organization-expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work, not just in relation to the latest policy, but as a way of life" (As cited in DuFour, 1998, p.24). I believe that we will succeed at this and that a new commitment to ourselves as professionals will not come from a legislating group of men and women but from within our own selves, driven by our vision of success and our hopes to attain high levels of student achievement.

The creation of this new culture, this new way of thinking, is a tremendous application of both the role of principal as visionary leader and instructional leader. Bringing the two standards together allows the principal to play a leading

role in the shifting of beliefs held by professionals. The sharing of knowledge, the commitment to personal and professional growth, and the modeling of enthusiasm and passion must be made evident by the administrator. It may possibly be the most powerful factor for influencing first the behaviors and then beliefs of the staff in regards to professional development.

### Hiring High Performance Teachers

Unfortunately, there is a major obstacle that will challenge even the best administrators.

The current teacher shortage represents arguably the most imminent threat to the nation's schools. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that approximately 2.2 million teachers will be needed over the next decade--an average of more than 200, 000 new teachers annually. (Heller, 2004, p.1)

Clearly, education today is facing a critical problem: finding teachers. Unfortunately, that is simply stating it. To be realistic, not only will there be a problem of hiring teachers, educators will find a distinct shortage of *qualified* teachers in the hiring pool that exists. To continue to make matters worse, school districts are going to struggle most with the issue of hiring in particular subject areas: math and science (especially when hiring female teachers) special education, bilingual education, and other high needs areas, often exploratory classes such as Industrial Technology or Family and Consumer Science.



It is an interesting dilemma to have in the face of the recent educational legislation. No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) has strict requirements regarding employing only highly qualified teachers. Maybe even more importantly, that same piece of legislation has strict standards for student achievement in the areas of reading, math, and science, and for the achievement of those students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and various other subgroups, one of which could be English Language Learners. Notice that these are some of the same content areas that are in demand for quality teachers. This problem raises the stakes in the “game” and forces administrators to look at the situation from a broader spectrum. Not only must they consider raising achievement scores, they must also consider the “curb appeal” their school has so that they may recruit and retain high quality teachers to help raise those scores.

What is causing this teacher shortage? Where are all of these highly qualified teachers going? Part of the problem is the age of the current teaching population. “Nationally, 60 percent of current teachers are eligible to retire in the next six years” (Heller, 2004, p.1). This is going to put an immense strain on administrators when competing to hire quality teachers, particularly for those administrators in districts considered “less desirable,” such as those inner-city schools, small rural communities, and districts in areas of low economic status. Unfortunately, this is not the only factor.

Demographers are estimating that schools will need to hire two million public school teachers in the first 10 years of the new millennium. Of those who begin teaching, about one in five leaves (the profession) after three years in the classroom...most likely [to leave] are the teachers who were the top undergraduates as measured by their scores on college entrance exams. (McEwan, 2002, p.124)

The hiring problem is not to be blamed solely on those teachers who are retiring. "Teachers have one of the highest attrition rates of any profession; in particular, new teachers are apt to leave our schools" (Heller, 2004, p.4). Just as McEwan (2002) suggests, new teachers, those who are the best and the most effective, are the ones who are finding employment opportunities elsewhere. As a teacher and future educational leader, I find it to be essential that I understand, and all other administrators understand, the root cause of this attrition.

Too often, teaching is [described as] a dead-end job with low status, uncompetitive salaries, and poor working conditions...

Frustrating to many teachers is the idea that they are solely responsible for student failures, while extraordinary success in the classroom often goes unrecognized. With the negative and sometimes unreasonable expectations associated with the teaching profession, it is logical to ask why one would enter the teaching

profession or remain there if already there. (Bradley & Loadman, 2005, p. 2)

Though not every teacher views education in this bleak light, administrators will have to be prepared to face that reality that some teachers, one in five to be exact, will experience this kind of frustration. Exemplary administrators must design and implement programs to provide pre-service and continued support to those teachers in their first years of education. Some important elements of this support would include new teacher induction programs, mentors, quality in-service programming, and powerful professional growth opportunities. In this way, fewer educators will feel the frustration and lack of job satisfaction and will continue to lead in this profession.

At the same time, I know the frustration of teachers who are not “new” to the profession or the district and the lack of support they feel in their own professional growth. Administrators must work to not only retain the new hires, but the experienced teachers they have as well; these teachers are the foundation of the organization. Through the use of study teams, learning circles, peer observation, informal walk-throughs, well-designed evaluation tools, teacher leaders, and relevant professional development, administrators can work to support those experienced teachers who continue to want to grow. Who knows? They may even have some affect on those that don't! Experienced teachers, who have a breadth of knowledge and skill to offer, need strong instructional leaders to

help foster their ability and make them a necessary part of the organization. They need strong instructional leaders to keep them enthusiastic and passionate.

No matter how conscientious the district is towards the retention of quality teachers, however, hiring teachers is inevitable. According to Todd Whitaker, “A principal’s single most precious commodity is an opening in the teaching staff” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 43). Though this is a challenging statement to make in the face of the teacher shortage, Heller (2004) supports it with the idea that we will be able to build our faculties to “offer us the greatest chance to effect positive and enduring change in education in 100 years” (p. 52). These statements suggest to administrators the value of beginning and new teachers to shaping an organization. If administrators are conscientious and aware of the necessary attributes for good teaching and aware of the attributes that form the school culture and the school vision, they will be able to hire the kind of quality people that will move the district forward. I do love how Whitaker continues. “It’s simply impossible to improve a school by hiring people who fit right in with its average teachers” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 43). When hiring, even in the wake of this teacher shortage and the seeming impossibility of finding good, qualified candidates, an administrator must strive to hire the best teachers he/she can find.

McEwan (2002) describes the characteristics that are related to quality teaching and quality teachers.

1. Mission-Driven and Passionate: feeling the purpose in teaching

2. Positive and Real: demonstrating qualities of caring, empathy, respect and fairness
3. A Teacher-Leader: positively affecting the lives of students, parents, and colleagues
4. With-It-Ness: controlling three critical elements of the classroom: management and organization of the classroom, engagement of students, and management of time
5. Style: exhibiting enthusiasm, humor, creativity, etc. in teaching
6. Motivational Expertise: believing in his/her ability to make a difference and maintain high expectations
7. Instructional Effectiveness: using a variety of skills, abilities, and strategies leading to student learning
8. Book Learning: demonstrating knowledge of the content area and outcomes
9. Street Smarts: solving problems in the instructional setting through knowledge of students and community
10. A Mental Life: thinking metacognitively, strategically, reflectively, communicatively, and responsively.

Keep in mind; it is also essential that an interviewer not base the decision on personality traits alone. As discussed earlier in relationship to leadership, there is no prescription for what makes a great teacher. Ultimately, in order to

successfully hire a teacher, the administration must understand the specific needs of the district and consider those needs when preparing for the interview. He/she must understand the direction in which the school district is currently traveling and the direction it would like to be traveling, or the vision. Through the development of operating principles, both the interviewer and the interviewee remain on the same page. Those operating principles will help to determine whether the hire will be effective for positive change, and he/she can develop interview questions based on the criteria established for the position. Consider this point:

The ability to create and maintain a strong professional learning community in a school is limited not by teacher supply, but by high turnover among the teachers who are already there--turnover that is only aggravated by hiring unqualified or under prepared individuals to replace those who leave. (Bradley & Loadman, 2005, p. 5)

Hiring employees who are not qualified or committed to the vision and/or culture of the district will not only be devastating to the organization but it will be devastating to the individual members of the staff and the students.

McEwan (2002) cites a positive definition of teaching, in all of its complexity and grandeur, as "...instructing, advising, counseling, organizing, assessing, guiding, goading, showing, managing, modeling, coaching,

disciplining, prodding, preaching, persuading, proselytizing, listening, interacting, nursing, and inspiring” (p. 2). It becomes the goal of the administrator to find a teacher who is skilled enough, artistic enough, scientific enough, sympathetic enough, and passionate enough to fill the very large shoes that McEwan’s definition requires.

Needless to say, the hiring of qualified staff is one of the most important jobs an administrator will do as an organizational leader. The choices made in hiring will be a determining factor in the ease of which the vision is achieved and success is found. Teachers are the most precious commodity an administrator has, and the responsibility lies within that administrator to do what is best for the students and the district. The organization is only as strong as the people within it.

### Summary

Eight years ago, I became that teacher described by McEwan. I came into education eager to work with the students, staff, and administration to make my school the very best place for learning. I was filled with passion and a hunger for anything and everything to do with education. Throughout the next few years, I read more about teaching and learning, and soon I couldn’t get my hands on enough material. Through leadership from others, formal training, and self-directed learning, I began to better define education and the role it plays in our society. At this point, I began to understand that I had greatly underestimated the

system of education and my position as teacher, and now, as I look ahead, my position as an administrator. Education is more than just meeting the standards and passing the tests; it is an engaging, empowering experience in which character is developed and the mind is molded. Education provides for both intellectual and behavioral development, and it stimulates enhancement of the soul. The excitement of catching a breath of an idea that challenges existing ideas causes you to want more. Once exposed to more new information, the new ideas are challenged and rethought. This cycle of investigation encourages the progression of society and the betterment of mankind. Teachers are the ones to foster this experience; administrators are the ones to provide this experience.

I worry that some educational leaders in this country who do not project this educational belief. The true excitement of education is often bogged down with legislative and financial burdens, so it seems a chore rather than enjoyment. Because of this, are teachers and administrators failing to instill this passion for learning in their students? If so, is it because little or no passion for learning still exists within them? Have we cast down our strongest advocates for education?

Maybe now more than ever, the need for strong leadership in education is necessary. Unfortunately, leadership can be masked by many other titles: director, manager, boss, dictator. None are accurate descriptions of a leader. A leader takes on the appearance of servant, peer, guide, and mentor. By serving the staff and meeting their needs--physically, professionally, and emotionally--



authority is developed so that managerial techniques which instill resentment are no longer effective nor needed, and staff will feel comfortable working with you, for you, and along side you.

Bill Gates (source unknown) once said, "As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others." Through respect, honesty, commitment, and service, an educational leader can create an environment of leaders, experts within each field of education. They should promote the development of authority within each individual so that they may contribute to the overall success of the organization. From there, it is a trickle-down effect. An educational leader should empower the staff giving them a voice in the vision and the tools to accomplish it, which in turn should empower the students; this may offer the greatest potential for learning.

I became a teacher because I like kids. I will become an educational leader because I value kids. But not only kids, I value the teachers and the education process. I have a high regard for the potential and the ability of the students and staff. I want to serve them in their pursuit of a more genuine education, one that includes a sincere, self-motivated approach to learning.

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