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

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

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses reform in our schools today. It contains opposing views of change, national standards, career-oriented reform, the school as a "home within a school", kindergarten-like atmospheres, market-based initiatives, school employee reform, philosophical models, and the pitfalls of reformation. The paper closes with my own comments.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Department of Educational Administration  
and Counseling  
University of Northern Iowa

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

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by  
Kellie A. Peterson  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses reform in our schools today. It contains opposing views of change, national standards, career-oriented reform, the school as a "home within a school", kindergarten-like atmospheres, market-based initiatives, school employee reform, philosophical models, and the pitfalls of reformation. The paper closes with my own comments.

A reflective paper is a great challenge for me as I have so many class topics which deserve intense scrutiny. I have finally chosen to discuss school reformation. I believe that we must do something radically different from what most schools do now. I see bored students just going through the motions, doing just enough to get by, or to achieve an "A." Some students have no motivation and do not achieve at all. I saw teachers in my former school who rarely saw anything positive in any student or any situation. In my current job, teaching in the Omaha parochial schools in violence ridden north Omaha, my students discuss daily which family member was arrested last night. Most of my colleagues work a second job to survive our base salary of \$16,000 per year with a cap of \$20,000 for the most experienced and educated teacher. I've seen my own child, (in public school) with an I.Q. of 155 placed in a talented and gifted program where expanding his horizons meant diagramming seventy five sentences per night.

This paper relates to educational administration as it is the principal who must often lead the crusade to bring change through democratic leadership styles. It relates to school-community relations as the two entities which must work together as one to bring about needed reforms. Reform is an integral piece of our outdated curriculum.

In my opinion, every class in which we have participated, helped spread the need to change and charge us to be different. Our classes taught us the philosophical need for reform and our activities and practicums hopefully allowed each of us to be a part of some kind of change at our individual schools. I know that in my three years I have helped make schools a better place, especially my first year, and this year.

I had no intention of becoming an administrator until I met Jeff Schumacher, former principal of Nishna Valley Schools. As I taught for him my first semester we became close friends. He asked me if I had ever thought of being an administrator. I laughed. He said there would be a semi-

administrative opening for elementary lead teacher where the person serves as a liason between the elementary staff and himself. Being a K-12 principal, he could not be everything to everybody as he wanted to be. Jeff said I had all the qualities to succeed in the position. Plus there was a \$2,500 stipend.

I'll be honest, I wanted the money. As I began, Jeff let me take on simple administrative tasks and helped me through them. Next, he said, "Stop asking me what to do all the time. You are smart, you do it....and if you screw up, I'll help bail you out." I found I could make wise decisions. Next, he said, "Run a bi-monthly teachers meeting on your own. You and the teachers plus you and I will set the agenda." I loved this!

The more I did, the more Jeff gave me to do and the more excited I became. I actually was given the power to make change. I knew about leadership styles from typing my husband's administrative papers for his masters and specialist degrees. I believed I was a democratic leader in a site-based



managed school, based on my natural style and modeling from my principal.

We reformed curriculum. We met together for several days, not on our own time, but during the regular school day. We talked at length with the grade level before and after us to find curricular gaps and senseless repetition. We created rubrics concentrating on problem-solving skills. We purchased new books which matched what we believed to be important, rather than the book directing the curriculum and the principal dictating what we supposedly needed in the classroom. We implemented a new discipline plan for grades K-6. We began the "norming" process of curriculum-based assessment. Our management team worked well and we did so many good things. Needless to say, I wanted to be a principal and was thrilled when the Iowa Communications Network program (ICN) came to southwestern Iowa.

I hope to be the visionary leader of the future, sparking new interest in educational reform. I want to expand upon

what I have learned so far in my university studies.

Unfortunately, the more I study reform, I realize that there is little agreement on what reforms we need and how to get them in place. The research is rather disheartening as every positive reformer has a critic to tear the idea apart.

I will not have the same choices in career movement as many of my class colleagues. My husband is a successful school principal and he has no intention of leaving his school. Our families live here and we do not want to leave them. The result is, I will have to take whatever job I can get, plus hold on to it as relocation is not seen as a possibility in the near future. This may limit my glorious dreams of the ideal school I want to create, but I do not lose hope that someday I will make a difference. I must keep abreast of reform possibilities and use my leadership style to change my future school for the better.

### Which Reformation Idea Should We Use

An Angus Reid poll completed this year shows that two out of three people believe that the school system is doing a poor job. However, the same majority thinks that their school and their child's teacher is adequate. On the other extreme, Frank Ogden, the futurist, cited in Tom Benjamin's (1997) internet home page, has been telling his audiences that our schools brain-damage our children. Benjamin now agrees that schools do more harm than good. The page continues:

The education bureaucracy is a classic example of a rigid industrial age system that has lost touch entirely with the changing needs of society. It is a sad thing to say but one can only conclude that it is completely incapable of change. The sooner we do away with it the better. Demand accountability. Complain and bitch about everything and keep complaining and bitching until the system folds like a cheap tent. It is the only way you can make sure your child becomes an educated person. It is

the only way you can make sure your child has a future.

(Benjamin, 1997, p.1)

In reference to the best selling book, Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus, the same chasm described fits the discrepancy of ideology in school reform (Wagner, 1996). We could easily change the scenario to Liberals are from Mars and Conservatives are from Venus.

In my opinion, liberals tout the educational jargon buzz-words: benchmarks, rubrics, curriculum framework, and others. They believe that combining state educational guidelines with money for professional development is the answer to school improvement.

Conservatives are the back-to-basics people, however I believe they fit into two categories. I teach in the Omaha parochial system which espouses very conservative values. We believe in school reform and embrace whole language, cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping and outcomes. The other conservative faction (religious right) generally is

not advocating innovative reforms and wishes education to be "basics-oriented." Both conservative groups, however believe that boosting self esteem has taken up too much valuable class time and has lowered curricular standards. They want the three R's and more discipline. Some people may also want values like honesty and patriotism taught side by side with morality-based books to teach life's lessons.

Lastly, there are the galactic travelers between Mars and Venus. They believe that bureaucracy is the problem. If schools were allowed by law and society to make their own decisions, then parents and teachers could decide what is best for their children (Wagner, 1996). Since all of these planetary people live in the same school district, how do we find common ground?

When I think about this chasm between liberals and conservatives, plus people like me who stand in the middle, I see why reformation is so difficult and time consuming. No matter what the outcome, feelings will get hurt, and if not

checked may run rampant in a community to the point of causing terminations of school personnel.

Ideology permeates the issue, but education reform isn't about left verses right, either, or even about right verses wrong. It is about dramatically changed societal needs, and the ongoing failure of a huge bureaucracy to adapt. There is no one individual or group of individuals or organizations to blame for the failure of reform....it is a systematic failure. (Benjamin, 1997, p.1)

As a school leader, I believe it is crucial to keep all parties informed with open and honest communication. It is desirable to have a site-based management system in place with school and community members to find the common ground between all parties and build from group strengths.

### National Standards

We have a rather new national agenda in Goals 2000: The Educate America Act, released in 1995. This originated in the Clinton administration and is now part of federal law. Goals

include: (a) our children should come to school prepared to learn, (b) all Americans should be literate, (c) schools should be free of drugs and violence, (d) graduation rates should be at least ninety per cent, (e) students deserve a well educated teaching force, (f) and parents should be involved in their children's schooling (Clinchy, 1995). I believe that these goals are difficult to protest. Likewise, the goals were already in place in many schools throughout our nation even before Goals 2000. These goals if achieved, will help America realize the status of world class schools (Clinchy, 1995).

The difficulty in Goals 2000 arises when people contemplate the implications. The result could be a national curriculum and a national system of assessment. One curriculum may not fit every single school in our nation. Furthermore, compliance could carry into the funding arena. For example, unless a school bought in to the Goals 2000 philosophy, it may not be eligible for federal funds (Clinchy, 1995).

A requirement of Goals 2000 states that academic disciplines will be required to write new standards for their areas. The math standards are now complete and contain over two hundred pages (Viadero, 1994). I do not believe that many teachers will take the time to read that many pages of educational jargon which may or may not coincide with the state guidelines or their own local situation.

Glen Cutlip, cited in Viadero's (1994) article, believes that the documents require an educationist to decipher the content. They are not readable at the classroom level.

Goals 2000 terrifies me as an educator, and even more so as a parent. In comparing my son's rural school setting with my urban one, I find few similarities. We are worlds apart so how can our curriculum be the same? I am pleased that currently we have not heard President Clinton speak specifically about this program so it may be relegated to the vault where many reforms and/or fads retire. If a person wants to "stir the pot", Goals 2000 is a good way to do it.



### Career-Oriented Reform and Business Partnerships

In earlier decades most students arrived at school pre-processed and ready to function and learn and work in society. We can no longer depend on the home for this. Instead of outcomes the focus of school should be the three C's: care, concern, and correction, not taught as subject matter, but by living in a school environment full of safety, nurturance, and love (Martin, 1995).

"There are many barriers that affect student performance. They usually begin in the home, but are quite often found in the schools as well as in the community and government legislation" (Banks, 1994, p.18). Every educational reform proposed in the 1980's was rooted in the need to increase America's ability to compete internationally. However, a career-oriented approach was overlooked and did not concentrate on the new labor force; women, minorities, and immigrants. The few school-work relationships neglected defining the roles of each and left a sour taste in the mouths

of many. True partnerships did not exist except for financial assistance and acting out a "big-boss role" (Hoyt, 1991).

There are two kinds of educational change: process (or people) change and structural (system) change. True school reform will occur with process change. This type of reform takes effort, not cash. This "people reform" must occur before the structural change can take place. Partnerships develop during process change where teams from the public and private sector work in the school together. The private sector can bring their ideas and increase productivity right into the classroom (Hoyt, 1991).

Student focus groups have discussed school reform. Depending on the studies used, seventy to ninety per cent of students state that school is boring....they see no relation to what they do in class and the outside world (Wagner, 1996). For example, how will reading the novel Moby Dick help them in the real world? ( I can answer that....learning what revenge can do to your soul, sticking to a desired goal, etc.) However,

in my discussions with many students and educators I have heard that a technical reading course is more suited to our high tech world where many future jobs will exist (Martin, 1995).

*This boredom in our school then creates a pathway for disrespect:*

There's something basic to be learned here: no matter how knowledgeable and professionally developed the teacher, no matter how high the standards or how basic the curriculum, students won't engage in classes where there is little mutual respect. And if they don't engage intellectually, they will inevitably be bored. (Wagner, 1996, p.146)

A critical issue is that so many of our young people are displaced before they even enter the labor market. At least part of a school's job is to prepare students for real-life work. Schools are preparing people for factory and bureaucratic work. These jobs are disappearing quickly (Benjamin, 1997).

## The School as a Home

I have no quarrel with those who point out that science and math and literacy education in the U.S. are not what they should be. I am as thoroughly concerned as anyone that the country's vocational education system needs overhauling. But, this nation's political and educational leaders talk repeatedly about setting higher standards in the teaching of literacy and math and science and about the school's failure to develop a highly skilled work force without ever seeming to notice that our changed social reality makes correspondingly radical changes in schools imperative. To put it starkly, there is now a great domestic vacuum in the lives of children from all walks of life. In light of this radical change in conditions, once again the pressing question has become, "What radical changes in school will suffice?" (Martin, 1995, p. 356)

The reform suggested is that now, the school must become the moral equivalent of home. I believe there is a great vacuum

in many children's lives. One may suggest turning back to a time where moms stayed home and "did their duty" to raise "good" children. Personally, I enjoy the stimulation of work and the security it gives me for my professional future. Actually, it may be the exodus of both parents from the home. Blame is not the issue, the solution is what counts. Reality is that in many homes, both parents (if there are two parents) must work.

This home-school environment is the key to children feeling safe. Schools must expand their curriculum to share in women's studies, the poor, and minorities. Mind and body, thoughts, actions, and emotions are educated (Martin, 1995).

The school-home is a moral equivalent of home where this nation's children can develop into constructive, contributing members of culture and society-individuals who want to live in a world composed of people very different from themselves and who have practiced doing so. As I envision it, the school-home is also a place that possesses and projects a larger point of view, and

ultimately the whole world of nations and the planet earth as a moral equivalent of home. (Martin, 1995, p. 356)

While schools have responded (although sluggishly in my opinion) to technological innovations, hard and software, and expanded curriculum, the school has virtually ignored the social changes which occur in our lives.

Consider poverty, one of the main societal problems rampant today. "No person who does honest, useful work, regardless of his or her educational attainments, should live in poverty. A society that allows this to happen is not an educational failure, but a moral failure" (Nodding, 1995, p. 366).

Society may not need the United States to claim victory at being first in the world's tally of test scores. We do need to:

....reduce violence, to respect honest work of every kind, to reward excellence at every level, and to insure a place for every child....in the economic and social world to produce people who can competently provide for their own

families and contribute effectively to their communities.

(Nodding, 1995, p. 146)

A transformation like this requires organizational and structural changes. We must give up our pre-conceived notion about what an educated person is and leave our hearts open to other models. Education should be modeled after themes of care: care of self, of others (both intimate and global), care of objects and environment, care of ideas with morality stressed as a main goal (Nodding, 1995).

We must be clear and unapologetic about our goal, take care of affiliative needs, lessen control, rid ourselves of program hierarchies, and give part of every day to themes of care where caring implies competence (Nodding, 1995).

Many home-schools are patterning themselves as a Kindergarten all throughout the elementary and secondary journey. One high school mentioned was not broken up into tiny subjects, rather it kept instead the wholeness of subject matter and learning (Nodding, 1995). The students remain in a

self-contained classroom where a thematic integration of all subject matter is included. This type of school is a model of democracy in the classroom and in the workplace itself. The teachers also work in a democratic environment, modeling democracy themselves.

This model school has substantial documented evidence concerning college acceptance, drop-out, and graduation rates. The schools in New York City with the kindergarten home-school philosophy report that ninety per cent attending their elementary schools graduate from high school. More compelling statistics show that ninety per cent of these high school graduates go on to college. Lastly, this is not an elite group of students. It reflects the same racial make up of the rest of the city (Nodding, 1995).

Many educators believe reformers are requiring that the current curriculum be taught with the addition of higher order thinking skills to aid in complex problem solving. Educators question the reasoning behind teaching an outmoded curriculum



and preparation for 19th century college admission standards (Clinchy, 1996).

Traditionally criticisms of our educational system have centered on passing the buck. Graduate schools blame the bachelor's degree programs, which blame the high schools, etc. Could we again go back to kindergarten and run the school in a developmental fashion (Clinchy, 1996)?

Two Massachusetts teachers restructured their school into a developmental system combined with a college partnership, all with the blessings of their supervisors.

They had four objectives in mind. First, they wanted to restructure the school's environment to create increased opportunities for students. Secondly, they began a collaborative pre-service training program to improve curriculum and improve the teacher-student ratio. Thirdly, they desire to serve special needs students better by eliminating pull-out programs. Lastly, career advancement

(without leaving the classroom) became a priority (Boles, 1992).

In this school, one sees constant team-teaching and full time college interns in the classroom. Children move from room to room depending on the activity. There is intensive planning that occurs at the two hour weekly team meeting during the school day and at a monthly five hour Saturday workshop. A pullout program does not exist, a specialist moves from room to room. "For teachers to remain vital, engaged, and committed to teaching, they must have time for dialogue and reflection away from the daily demands of the classroom" (Boles, 1992, p. 55)

I believe that schools must take on the additional burden of becoming a "home away from home". Yes, many schools will struggle financially with this burden.

However, I believe the majority of educators love children and want only the best for them. If we truly care about each of our students, we want them to have balanced meals, a warm

safe place to be before and after school, health care and other necessities. This, in my opinion makes us a moral civilized country....in other words, a home. Morality is the issue, not the dollars.

### Market-Based Initiatives

"Market-based initiatives have been among the most durable types of reforms to be proposed for improving education." (Murnane & Levy, 1996, p.109)

As business competes, schools are now in competition with vouchers, charter schools, and tuition tax credits. This may stimulate creativity and hold schools accountable.

People who support school vouchers say that our school failure in the United States is due to lack of competition. However, many schools in other nations are government run with mandated texts and outcomes. Could that be our answer?

"Foreigners who put their kids in American schools say that their children are taught in the U.S. seventh grade what they

have already learned overseas in the second or third grade" (Shanker, 1993, p. 7).

As a foster parent of a foreign exchange student from the former Soviet Union I will attest to the fact that she knew more than every classmate at our local school, and unfortunately more than many of her teachers. She attended school in Belarus from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with homework until at least midnight six days per week. There were no sports or extra curricular activities within the school day, only community based weekend sports programs. School was difficult academia twelve hours per day. The academic pressure was also astronomical as tracking was prevalent. I cannot condone putting pressure like that on children. ( I have barely survived this masters program as a thirty seven year old adult!)

General Motors (GM) can be a model for our school systems today. As sales decreased and the trade union became stronger, GM decided to eliminate their problems by almost

total plant automation of assembly lines. Robots replaced most humans. This experiment failed miserably as productivity and accuracy became unacceptable.

There are two lessons to be gleaned from General Motors. First, consumer choice can send signals to an organization when change is needed. (However, consumer choice cannot tell us how to do it). Secondly, it is human nature to search for a magic fix to our problems (Murnane & Levy, 1996). There is no new technology, no new set of rules to "fix" education.

The education in public schools today is by no means worse than the 1980's. Back then, a high school education was good enough to get a middle class job. This is not true in our economy today. The skills required for success have changed while our schools lag behind. Teachers, Administrators, Universities....Are They the Problem?

Most American schools are geared to produce students for a world which no longer exists. The crux for change may lie in

our universities which must provide schools with teachers who believe in the vision of reform.

Since the mid 1980's new standards have been set for students and teachers. Emphasis of teacher performance is leading to more rigorous teacher assessment. It is time to develop and adopt a system of quality assurance already used by other professions: accreditation of institutions which prepare teachers, performance-based initial licensing and certification of accomplished teachers or an outcomes-based education model. This procedure cannot stop at this point. It must continue throughout a teacher's career (Wise, 1996).

The teaching profession has suffered from decades of neglect. Teacher education is often undefined, there is little recruitment, and teachers' salaries are low (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

There are five current barriers of adequate development of America's teachers.

1. Teacher education is often inadequate. Accreditation is not a requirement in many schools of higher learning.

2. Recruitment of the brightest and best is almost non-existent.

3. Induction into the school system contains a "sink-or-swim" attitude where most teachers are not provided with help through internships or mentor programs. (As many as thirty per cent quit teaching in their first three years due to the lack of proper induction.)

4. There are a limited number of hours allotted to meet with colleagues, revise techniques, and share ideas.

5. Schools contribute to the failure of teachers because teachers are structured for failure as they are isolated from one another, technology is often lacking, and too many teacher hours and resources are allotted to extra-curricular activities rather than the subject of learning (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future discussed by Wise (1996) challenges us to embrace six goals to attain by the year 2006.

1. All children will be taught by teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and commitment to teach children well.
2. Teacher education programs will meet professional standards or risk being closed.
3. Teachers will have regularly scheduled collegial time and have development access.
4. Teachers and administrators will be hired and retained based on their ability to meet professional standards.
5. Teachers' salaries will be based on knowledge and skills.
6. High quality teaching will be the major investment of schools.

Al Shanker (long standing president of the American Federation of Teachers) states that:



...the improvement of public education ultimately does rest on the reform of teaching, on recasting an occupation marked by low standards, low pay, narrow career opportunities, little recognition of achievement, and poor public image into one with tough entrance requirements, respectable salaries, collegiality, rewards for performance, opportunities for leadership, a serious intellectual environment, a career path, and status-the hallmarks of professions like law and medicine and of teaching itself in countries such as Japan and Germany.

(Toch, 1993, p.14)

Some people believe that incentive pay is the key to improvement of the public school system. The Career Ladder Clearinghouse of the Southern Regional Education Board (cited in Cornett, 1995) has tracked and monitored teacher incentive programs since the early 1980's. The findings were:

1. Performance-based pay works when it fundamentally alters pay structure.

2. Pilot incentive programs fail when they lose their guiding vision or state support.
3. When state leadership changes, incentive programs are often hurt.
4. Funding decisions are rarely based on real knowledge or effects on students.
5. Teachers who participate in incentive programs are positive about them, those who are not are negative.
6. Teachers who disagree philosophically with performance-based pay will most likely never concede that incentives can work.
7. Given a choice, most teachers prefer to earn additional pay by working more hours than by judgement of teaching performance.

I began teaching in 1982 and one of the main differences I see between then and now is that more of today's teens and young adults are extremely money oriented. I believe this affects education immensely as many bright children often

enter into a high paying field and ignore the teaching profession.

I have tried to encourage several very bright high school students to major in music education. Most laugh and tell me the "big" profession they desire and add, "Why would I want to submit myself to all the crap you guys take?" I believe that teacher salaries must be increased drastically to attract the next generation.

### Philisophical Ideas of Change

There are many theories suggesting ways to transform our schools through restructuring. "One theory suggests that if schools were free to design their programs and to market these programs to families, U.S. education would improve" (Murnane & Levy, 1996, p.112).

There are suggestions to run schools as businesses. In most organizations, simple top-down commands do not work. Many private sector businesses and schools have come up with

a set of five basic ideas to illicit help from the front-line people, those "in the trenches".

1. Ensure that all front line workers understand the problem.
2. Design jobs so that all front line workers have both incentives and opportunities to contribute to solutions.
3. Provide all frontline workers with the training needed to pursue solutions effectively.
4. Measure progress on a regular basis.
5. Persevere and learn from mistakes; there is no magic answer (Murnane & Levy,1996).

A philosophy impacting curriculum follows:

1. We must have high academic standards, but without blame or standardization.
2. We should require schools to develop "merit badges" such as step-by-step portfolios of accomplishments in order to receive a diploma.
3. We need high standards of citizenship in all schools.

4. Smaller is better (450 pupils per school or less).

These are the basic truths about students and learning and from where reform should come (Wagner, 1996).

Another mode of change concerns two distinct visions which exist between the schools of tomorrow. These visions are often shared by the same people, hoping our schools can simultaneously use these visions even though they are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

One vision rests on the assumption that top-down support for bottom-up changes verses top-down reforms are only useful to create and sustain self-governing learning communities (Meir, 1995).

Goals 2000 is weighted down with assumptions that the top does the critical intellectual work and the bottom is left figuring out how to do it. Yet, many are marching to a different tune. The systemic approach makes education child centered with team approaches patterned after Saturn Car Company or Deming's philosophies (Meir, 1995).

According to Conley (1996) there are four factors inhibiting higher education's interest in reform.

First it seems that many people in higher education almost instinctively view school reform as an attempt to lower standards. Second, higher education has always made a distinction between conceptual and applied, or instrumental knowledge-and school reform seems more concerned with the latter. Third, admissions officers are wary of anything that looks as though it will complicate the admissions process portfolios in particular. And fourth, higher education really doesn't have very high expectations for the secondary school system. (Conley, 1996, p. 10)

### Problems with reformation

We have been buried in reform proposals for more than a decade. The reformers "have taken the perspective that there are problems with the education establishment, problems with society, problems with the political structure, problems with

current practice; in short, problems with everything except reformers and their proposed reforms" (Pogrow, 1996, p. 657).

Most reforms, historically have failed and the ones that survive are very structured. Educational reforms are not the only type of reforms that fail. Peter Drueker, (cited in Pogrow, 1996), finds that historically, the vast majority of reforms and creative ideas have failed to take root. Druecker lists conditions for success that show that humans have little tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. School reform is full things for which people have little tolerance.

There are vast dilemmas in transformation. We talk of visionary leaders, changing the culture of our school. If the principal is the only person with that vision, nothing can happen. It is difficult to get people to share transformational visions that are outside their experience. It is especially difficult to get people to share a vision that contradicts and challenges their existing world views, customs, tradition, and history which is their culture (Parish & Aquila, 1996). Some

staff will not see any need to change. Our current culture punishes visionaries. Being a visionary is risky business.

Many visionary principals find their vision squelched by becoming the "enforcer"....the enforcer of the discipline policy, controlling others and showing loyalty to the superintendent, yet at the same time supporting the teacher. I believe that the discussion may need to arise that all teachers shouldn't be backed one hundred per cent of the time. We need to talk about the unwritten law that says, "Everyone, stay out of my classroom!"

The literature on school reform is prevalent and available for all to see and the visionary leader can share his/her determination with the staff. Hopefully, through visionary democratic leadership, changes will begin to take place.

### Summary

It is quite obvious there is little agreement in what the problems facing education are, let alone how to solve them. I wish I could believe that nuts and bolts additions of standards



and technology could fix our schools. I firmly believe that all the money in the world would not be enough.

I believe there are elements which can be utilized from each school reform package discussed in this paper. Just as curriculum must be customized to one's district, so must school reform. Pure forms of school reform are very difficult to assimilate into any specific school district because we have community interests, parent interests, faculty interests, and student interests vying for their own beliefs. It would be rare to find a community where all these values mesh at the same time. Too many times the leader gets so far ahead of the pack that ownership exists with only one or two groups. The result is that so-called brilliant reformation ideas (such as OBE) may be tossed away.

My "perfect school" would be a combination of elements of each reform discussed in this paper with an emphasis on the home-school. Unfortunately, my future school will not have a committee of one (myself) to make these choices so my hope is

to find a school-community with at least some of these philosophical values.

1. Concerning Goals 2000, the goals for America are admirable. Let's allow local control.

2. I believe that career-reform is crucial to preparing students for the future. Deming's philosophies have merit in our educational system. They are difficult to implement due to the fact we would need to tear apart education and schools as we know them. My only fears lie in the possibility that liberal arts may vanish under this system and our nation loses its affective domain.

3. In viewing schools in an open market forum, an illustration of the American view of competitiveness appears. Free enterprise is a staple of American society. I believe that competition will hold schools more accountable as is illustrated in my metropolitan parochial school system. We are actually in competition with each other and students do not necessarily attend the school in their neighborhood. We must

keep on top of new innovations, keep our buildings updated, and hire competent teachers for this competition.

4. I believe that The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, cited earlier, hits the nail on the head. I am lucky as I feel my undergraduate experience in music education at Iowa State University prepared me more than adequately to teach. My continuation of work here at the University of Northern Iowa has expanded my ideas and my philosophies greatly. The crucial elements for me are collegial time and salary. I truly miss adults greatly as I am with children all day with no team teaching or aides in my classroom. I have no other teacher in the arts in my schools so I often feel alone. This is one reason I desire administration, I need some adult stimulation during the day. Salary-wise, I sometimes do resent my limited salary. I do realize I am in the parochial system and must take less money. I wish I could be judged by my effectiveness in the classroom and my salary determined by level of teaching mastery.

I believe that change in structure of the school bureaucracy must take place in order to make schools more productive. I have taught in bureaucracies and in site-based management schools and I definitely prefer the latter. Employees feel as they have a say and count in a site-based school. This will be a priority for me.

Last, but most important, I believe the school must be a home away from home. Before my current position, I would have said that innovations and dollars are a cure-all. Now my views have changed. At Saint Richard's school in north Omaha we have a high minority population (90 per cent African-American). We are in the section of Omaha which makes the most 911 calls in the city. There are gangs in our parking lot, shootings all around (even on our premises). Children with no mittens or coats are the norm. Single parent families are rampant. Poverty is everywhere. We are a mission school, meaning we must beg for money to keep our doors open every month. We use no new paper, have no typewriters, use an old

second-hand xerox which jams every four copies, and use old text materials discarded from the Omaha Public Schools.

Yet, the students learn. They fare better than many Omaha schools in standardized tests. They feel safe. They have a staff of 11 teachers who hug them all day and tell them they can be something. There are no drugs or gang activity in school. We are a family. We are a "home-school" and we are making a difference in a destitute community.

I would be remiss to say that an up-to-date computer room, books under twenty-five years old in the library, and balanced edible lunches would be nice. But quality teachers do quality work there for little pay and little glory. Our principal makes us feel welcome every day. She puts a piece of candy, a note, a puzzle, anything....just to let us know we're important to her and to the African-American community. If a family emergency occurs, she's the one who covers your class with a smile and a hug. She asks our input on almost everything. We

reform curriculum on our own time with no materials. We often clean our own rooms. Teachers help serve lunch.

If this can happen at St. Richard's, literally the poorest school in Omaha, just imagine what could happen at a school with resources. It boils down to this: a strong leader who consistently models moral attributes, has knowledge of the facets of education, nudges and gently leads to group consencensus, combined with an open staff who believes in their administrator and school, who believe that children are a great treasure, and who believe in themselves, can do most anything they set their mind to.

Finally, Maurice McDonald (currently superintendent of BGM school district and my husband's former superintendent) taught me a valuable question to ask ourselves in making a change. He said, "Is the decision good for the kids....not for ourselves, or for parents, but for the reason we go to work as educators every day." (Personal communication, McDonald, 1990.)

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