

2001

A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

In this research paper, I will be reflecting on three major components: (a) my personal values, beliefs, and philosophies; (b) the necessary elements to be a better educator and administrator; and (c) my personal vision for administrative practice. Some of these components will intermingle and others will stand on their own principles. These components will be affected by my previous experiences and the experiences that occur during the courses in the Masters of Arts in Education Program, in Educational Leadership.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Education

by

Brian J. Truax

May, 2001

This Research Paper by: Brian J. Truax

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Education.

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4-25-2001

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In this research paper, I will be reflecting on three major components: (a) my personal values, beliefs, and philosophies; (b) the necessary elements to be a better educator and administrator; and (c) my personal vision for administrative practice. Some of these components will intermingle and others will stand on their own principles. These components will be affected by my previous experiences and the experiences that occur during the courses in the Masters of Arts in Education Program, in Educational Leadership.

Values, Beliefs and Philosophies

Education runs deep in my family. My father taught high school math and physical education and coached girls basketball, track, and softball for nine years. At one week old, I attended my first athletic event and during my first seven years of existence, I became immersed in school and athletics. This is where the seed for becoming an educator first began to grow. My father is not my only educational influence. One of my little sisters is now teaching eighth grade Earth Science in Independence, Iowa. Two of my uncles were teachers and coaches. One left the teaching profession after three years to be a full-time farmer and the other taught for close to 20 years before he lost his battle with cancer. I have an aunt who is a media specialist and another who teaches in the State Health Center in Woodward, Iowa. I also have a cousin who teaches fifth/sixth grade math and coaches at Riceville, Iowa. My family has been a pillar of support and knowledge in assisting my becoming an educator.

Other than family members, some of my best influences in education have been teachers and coaches. Most, I would emulate. These individuals have demonstrated both the positive and negative aspects of teaching. The best have shown respect for students, honesty, and the need to work hard, and set goals for oneself. My high school basketball coach, during my senior year, epitomized the best aspects of being a teacher and coach. One cannot take for granted the lessons learned by watching his/her teachers.

I believe that all people can learn, some better than others, but everyone can learn. I believe that people learn in different ways, which makes them a potpourri of thoughts and actions. Robert E. Lee said, "The education of a man or woman is never completed until they die" (Bedwell, 1998, p. 43). I believe that people should have some ownership in their learning. There are countless numbers of ways to work with individuals who can be vastly different from one person to the next or from one minute to the next. With this diversity I find that I have to learn as much as I can about individual students and learn about old or new methods of working with this diverse population. I am a life-long learner and I have to work hard to keep ahead of whatever it may be that I face in the future. I do this by attending conferences, reading books and articles, talking with specialists, other educators, parents, and yes, children. I talk with children because they are the ones that are effected most when I am teaching.

The learning environment is an important factor in education. The learning environment should engage everyone that enters it. These people include, but are not limited to, students, teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, school volunteers, and guests to the district. If the people that enter the learning environment can interact with the environment, they tend to feel more at ease with themselves and whatever it is they may be doing in the learning environment.

The learning environment should be a gallery of student work and accomplishments. This gives the students some ownership of their surroundings and makes them feel good about themselves and where they come to learn. This gallery also helps to let visitors know what things are being done in the school and how they may be impacting the lives of the students in the learning environment.

The learning environment should be a safe place where students, teachers, parents, and community members can have positive learning experiences. Positive experiences help to ensure that the school and community will grow and thrive. In the case of smaller communities, the school is often the lifeline of the people and anything that is positive or negative effects those people greatly. Since this scenario is abundant in Iowa, it is the responsibility of the teachers, administrators, school board members, and community to make sure that a majority of the experiences that the students go through are positive ones.

During my twenty-seven years on this planet, I have gained a large amount of knowledge. Most through schooling, some through individual experiences, and some by watching others fail or excel. I spent time in four very different school districts growing up and received, a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Northern Iowa. During my years in school I was introduced to many different cultures and ways of life. Most of them I found to be very positive, but some not so positive. It was in the experiences that were not as positive that most of my learning took place and where I developed a strong will to achieve. I believe that I have been able to achieve many of my successes because of the experiences I had. I was an academic and athletic leader. I have several academic and athletic awards from high school and college.

From my experiences in leadership as a youth, through coaching and umpiring I began to set the standards for my future. Along the way I saw many people achieve success the same way I had, and saw the opposite with those whom failed to achieve success. By witnessing those failures I better understood what I had to do to avoid being in such a predicament.

I have many skills that need polishing and I work on them every day. I practice listening, communicating with others, taking reflective notes on what I, or others have done, and being confident. These skills are very important if you wish to become an administrator. Listening helps you to understand the opinions and feelings of the people with whom you work. Communication whether it is

verbal or nonverbal, helps to solidify relations with the individuals around you and it helps to ensure that people will have an opportunity to feel comfortable while working with you. I am finding it more important to look back on the things I have said or done and those of others as well. This gives me a chance to think about my actions and helps me to make better decisions in the future. In the heat of the moment we often think we are right, but in hindsight, what we did may not always have been the right thing. Finally, there is a fine line between confidence and arrogance. Many people walk this line with no thought to what may happen when they cross over to one side or the other. Arrogance leads to distrust and disrespect from people. Confidence helps to bring people closer and makes them more willing to work toward a common goal. From a lieutenant of Nathan Bedford Forrest, "We had the confidence in him which I imagine the Old Guard had in Napoleon" (Bedford, 1997a, p. 40). I have crossed the line before and met strong resistance and it has taught me a lesson or two. I now believe I am better equipped to walk that line and not fall to the temptations of arrogance. This statement shows the confidence I have in my own decisions.

I value my family, hard work, discipline, respect for others, the opinions of others, and maintaining the integrity of the institution through honorable and well thought out acts. These are the core values that effect everything that I do and say. Without a set of values or a starting point for which your values may come from, you cannot move positively in the direction you wish to go. I cannot

imagine being able to meet goals without a set of values to guide my actions and thoughts.

I value my family, which consists of my wife, my parents, my two sisters, and all of my in-laws. My wife and I plan to have children of our own in the future, which will help to give my life even more direction. I know that there are times as an administrator when you are unable to spend a great deal of time with your family, but I believe when I do, I will make every moment as positive as I can. The family is one of the strongest support groups known to man or woman. It can be persistent, persuasive, positive, and powerful. Any decision that I make about my future affects my wife and that is why we discuss our options, our goals, and our feelings before I, or we come to a final decision. An administrator has to make great decisions and must take into account the goals of the school, the community, and most important, the children who will be affected by those decisions.

I believe that if a person is going to truly succeed in life he or she must work as hard as possible to reach the goals one may set. I have had to work hard to be where I am today. Thomas Jefferson said, "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find that the harder I work, the more I have of it" (Riley, 1993, p. 159). I have struggled through a lot of adversity and against long odds. I won the struggles and beat the odds through hard work and perseverance. Vincent Lombardi said, "The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength,

not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will” (Lombardi, date unknown, from a poster). Stonewall Jackson also wrote of having a strong will. He said, “I knew that what I willed to do, I could do” (Bedford, 1997b, p. 21). I believe that I have the will to succeed in anything that I put my mind too.

Discipline is important in maintaining some sort of self-control. You have to have your own routine for what you do. As a teacher you have a set routine for every teaching day. This routine allows children to become comfortable with their surroundings and more efficient in their studies. If you have your own set of routines, you become more efficient, more comfortable with what you do and feel more confident. Discipline does come with a price; it’s hard work.

You need to respect others, just as you want to be respected by others. “Treat people as if they were what they ought to be...and you will help them become what they are capable of becoming” (Goethe, date unknown, personal collection: no book). I believe that you need to show respect for others until you find that your beliefs or values are jeopardized. Sun Tzu gives an excellent example of when respect has been lost:

One whose troops repeatedly congregate in small groups here and there, whispering together, has lost the masses. One who frequently grants rewards is in deep distress. One who frequently imposes punishments is in great difficulty. One who is at first excessively brutal and then fears the masses is the pinnacle of stupidity. (Sawyer, 1996, p. 91)

People often mistake “respect” with “being liked”. To be liked by everyone is impossible, but to receive some degree of respect from everyone is a reasonable expectation. I would much rather be respected by people than liked. I know that I cannot please all of the people all of the time, but if they understand that I am willing to try and listen to them they will hopefully give me some sort of respect.

You must value the opinions of others, whether you agree with them or not. It is good practice to evaluate the opinions of others in making decisions. Often, those opinions help to spark new ideas or better ways of accomplishing goals. Abraham Lincoln believed in the opinions of the people around him. He said, “When your subordinates come up with good ideas, let them go ahead and try. But monitor their progress” (Phillips, 1994, p. 107). There is no one correct opinion. A majority with the same opinion will usually win out. You must be able to agree to disagree at particular times, especially when an important decision is being made about the future of children. I know that I am not always right and that other people’s opinions could be the voice of reason that I need.

The maintenance of integrity of a school should be done in the most honorable and prudent fashion. It should not be done in haste. You should pay attention to detail and choose the path in which the honor of the school will survive the situation. Most schools have been around for a long time and their integrity has set solid roots that should not be disturbed by dishonorable actions or decisions that were not thought out to their fullest potential.

I see myself as becoming an administrator in a medium to small school district, trying to move it in the right direction so that it may thrive in the distant future. I am from a smaller school district and feel that I have a better understanding of the kind of values a smaller district may have. I will help the district evaluate its student, staff, curriculum, and goals for the future. With the help of the students, staff, parents, board, and community I will try to help the district align itself with what is going to be expected by the state and federal education organizations.

I see myself as being a strong leader in the community and a positive representative of the school district. I believe that I will be a part of making the students in the community more responsible for their learning and help them to advance in their education and careers. I believe that I will have excellent relations with the other administrators and the school board, which will be helpful in making sure that the school's policies and procedures are in the best interests of the children. I believe that these accomplishments will take a lot of hard work and that I will have to keep learning how to be an even better administrator during this process of progress. I understand the responsibility involved in being a school administrator and truthfully believe that I can handle the challenges that the position of administrator holds.

Necessary Elements

I believe there are four necessary elements a person must have to be a quality educator and administrator. A successful school leader is: (a) able to create a positive learning environment, (b) a reflective practitioner, (c) an instructional leader, and (d) highly organized. These elements establish a solid foundation for quality educational leadership.

Positive Learning Environment

A positive learning environment should be motivational, with opportunities to bring forth the best aspects of the school and the individuals who work in the school. As stated by Demosthenes, “ Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises” (Perpetual calendar, 1984, January 4). Small opportunities include displays of student work; acknowledging the achievements of students, staff, and parents; intermittent celebrations; and invitations to the parents and community to see, first hand, the success of their children. The administrator orchestrates the possibilities for positive interactions between students, staff, parents, and community. The students, staff, parents, and community become the members of the orchestra who perform the possibilities presented to them.

The administrator needs to be able to motivate him/herself, the staff, the students, the parents, and the community to help create or maintain a positive learning environment. “The key to motivation is motive. It is the why. It’s what

gives us the energy to stay strong in hard moments” (Covey, 1994, p. 142). I believe the motive for the staff, the parents, the community, and the administration should be growth and education of all children who pass through the doors of their schools. In whatever we do, if it does not benefit the children, then we should not be doing it. Motivation can come in the form of: celebrations; having pleasant conversations with parents, staff, and dare I say, students; posters; signs; eating lunch with students; and showing that you genuinely care about each individual that enters the school.

As an administrator, I will use all of the resources I currently possess to create a positive learning environment. I have been a member of the Social Skills Committee in my building and have helped establish basic building and classroom rules. I am one of seven teachers in the building using the CHAMPs (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, & Participation) model of classroom discipline created by Randy Sprick (1998). This model establishes ground rules to aid classroom discipline and create a positive climate.

The building I am currently teaching in provides many opportunities for positive interactions between teachers, students, and parents. Most of these events and ideas will be incorporated into my administrative practice and can be used to motivate the learning community. Opportunities provided to the whole school are performing arts assemblies; a Career Day; a school clean-up day; a Fall Frolic for the fourth and fifth grade students; an overnight reading program for the second

and third grade students; a Spring Fling for the kindergarten and first grade students; an open house; a Family Fun Night, a Family Reading Night; a Family Technology Night; and an End of the Year Celebration with an awards ceremony, picnic, and talent show. Individual classrooms have holiday parties. I have an annual model rocket launch, a biannual chess tournament, and occasionally I bring food for the students to help maintain a positive learning environment.

Another aspect of the positive learning environment is safety. The events at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado and Jonesboro, Arkansas acknowledge our need for safe schools and demonstrate the realization that anything can happen, at any time, in any school. These events have made schools focus their energies on the safety of all students and staff. The safeness of a child affects how he/she may learn. "Survival and emotional data have priority over cognitive processing. Threats and emotions inhibit cognitive processing" (Sousa, 1995, p.13). If the child does not feel safe or the environment is negative, the child's ability to learn is weakened. We must make every effort possible to insure the safety and well being of the students and staff in our care. By having the necessary motive, a safe school, and creating positive possibilities an administrator will increase the likelihood of having a positive learning environment in his/her school.

I believe that the children within any school that I administer should be safe. I have played a key, role in the safety of the children in the school I

currently teach. With the principal, secretary, and a local police officer, I helped to create our building's, current intruder/emergency plan. This was a difficult task because the building is quite old, with three levels, and two outer buildings and only a handful of classrooms have telephones in them. The plan will go as follows: a) we will have a series of bells that tell the staff and students that an intruder is in the building; b) students are to go to the nearest classroom; c) the teachers will lockdown the classroom doors and windows; d) the teachers will have the students huddled at a place in the classroom furthest away from the door and take attendance; e) the classrooms will stay locked until a separate series of bells gives an "all clear." We will practice this plan every semester to ensure the safety of every member of the learning community. I believe that my knowledge and experience in creating a safe school environment will benefit students in the future.

Reflective Practitioner

The second necessary element an administrator must possess is the ability to be a reflective practitioner.

Most of our mental development and study discipline comes through formal education. But as soon as we leave the external discipline of school, many of us let our minds atrophy. We don't do any more serious reading, we don't explore new subjects in any real depth outside our action fields, we don't think analytically, we

don't write – at least not critically or in a way that tests our ability to express ourselves in distilled, clear, and concise language.

Writing is another powerful way to sharpen the mental saw.

Keeping a journal of our thoughts, experiences, insights, and learning promotes mental clarity, exactness, and context. Writing good letters – communicating on the deepest level of thoughts, feelings, and ideas rather than on the shallow, superficial level of events – also affects our ability to think clearly, to reason accurately and to be understood effectively. (Covey, 1989, p. 294)

I maintain a reflective journal to help clarify my thoughts and actions.

Internalizing what occurs during any given situation, conversation, or thought.

This process has improved my teaching and thinking over the last year. I use a journal to keep track of conversations with parents, of who I discipline and why, of who gets the honor of eating lunch in the classroom with me, and of my thoughts on particular lessons, conversations, and events. My actions become clear and it helps me make better decisions. As an administrator, I believe the use of a reflective journal will hold the same importance. I believe that by reflecting on one's practice, that the person who reflects can make better decisions, think critically, and teach individuals better.

The administrator is the spiritual guide who facilitates the reflective process and promotes its growth in the learning community. The leaders of the

learning community are the classroom teachers, teaching associates, special education instructors, and teachers of music, art, and physical education.

How will we develop the seekers that we need? To begin with, we need a revolution in how we think about leadership and how we develop leaders. Most management and leadership development programs ignore or demean spirit. They desperately need an infusion of poetry, literature, music, art, theater, history, philosophy, dance, and other forms that are full of spirit. Even that would still leave us far short of the cadre of leaders of spirit that we require. Leaders learn most from their experiences – especially from their failures. Too often, though, they miss the lessons. They lack the reflective capacity to learn on their own and have not been fortunate enough to find a spiritual guide, who can help them find their spiritual centers. (Bolman & Deal, 1995, p. 167-168)

An administrator needs to create a community of reflective practitioners.

In order to improve their practice and push their students to higher achievement, teachers must be open to doubt. This work, with its doubt and self-reflection, can be lonely. But in the company of colleagues and within a forum structured to provide support as well as feedback, doubt and self-reflection can be dynamic and motivating. (Cousins & Mednick, 1996, p. 148)

I believe this quote culminates the need for reflection by administrators and teachers. I will promote reflective practice by modeling it for teachers; discussing how it has improved my understanding of teachable moments; and share specific reflections with teachers that have benefited me personally and professionally.

I would like to create a staff of reflective practitioners. By providing a positive example of self-reflection and supporting the staff with their reflective practice, I believe I can create a community of learners who can better understand their own teaching practice. Reflection makes us think about our practice and that thinking, leads to questioning, and eventually, options for improvement. The improvement benefits the children, the staff, the parents, and the community. I believe that the power of reflection is needed in every school and I will work hard to make it a part of the school I administer.

Instructional Leader

An administrator must also be an instructional leader. “The research shows that ‘effective schools’ – the schools where, generally, students learn what they are supposed to do – succeed by virtue of a principal who is an instructional leader animated by a vision of what the school should be” (Zoch, 1999, p. 62). The ultimate goal of instruction is to see that all students learn. Instructional leaders need to know how they impact teachers and students; be knowledgeable about current practices and processes in education; and proficient in the use and instruction of technology. “With more people involved in educational decision

making, it has been our observation that there is an even greater need for the principal to understand the nature of educational processes and their impact on teachers and students” (Hallinger & Hausman, 1993, p. 140).

The principal’s leadership impacts the learning community, especially the teachers and students. “Sheppard’s (1996) synthesis of existing studies showed a positive and strong relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness” (Blasé & Blasé, 1999, p. 352). We want teachers who are committed to the students and the rest of the learning community. We must never stifle innovative teachers because they are the teachers who produce life-long learners. An instructional leader must keep the students informed about why we are teaching the materials we teach. Students need to understand the importance of the materials and how they apply to them now and in the future. My relationship with teachers and students is important to the success of the learning community. Abraham Lincoln said, “The inclination to exchange thoughts with one another is probably an original impulse of our nature” (Boritt, 1996, p. 24). I will passionately communicate the goals of the learning community with its members and seek their input on how we can achieve the goals. There will be an openness, which allows individuals to share their thoughts and innovations, freely within the learning community.

Instructional leaders need to be knowledgeable about current practices and processes in education. Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970), Howard Gardner's study of multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1993), Daniel Goleman's study of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), and information about brain compatible teaching are current practices that are having a greater impact on teaching and learning, today. I believe that studying, with teachers, information about multiple intelligence and brain research, will help teachers understand how students and themselves learn better. I will assist teachers in the use of brain compatible teaching strategies by providing information and resources, observing instruction, providing feedback, and reflecting on the use of the strategies. Professional development opportunities will be provided for the staff. These may consist of on-site or off-site workshops on brain compatible teaching strategies; study teams in which teachers may read books or articles about brain compatible teaching, try some strategies in the classroom, and then share their experiences; observations by teachers to see how brain compatible teaching is used in the classroom and the affect it has on student learning and the learning environment; and conferences on brain compatible teaching where staff can talk with educators from other schools about how they are using these strategies.

Medical science has advanced at such a rate that doctors and scientists can now observe what is happening in the brain while learning is taking place. Within

the last five years, the ability to see how the brain functions, dramatically increased the information provided to teachers about how children learn. If teachers have a greater understanding of how children learn, they are more capable making teaching decisions. This information is already changing education and the way teachers teach children. As our ability to understand how the brain works increases, our ability to improve the teaching of children increases.

Comprehensive school improvement and the development of standards and benchmarks are two factors dominating schools today. “Comprehensive reform models vary substantially, but they ultimately intend to affect every aspect of school functioning: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school organization, support for children having difficulties, parent involvement, and sustained professional development” (Slavin, 2001, p. 23). An instructional leader’s goal is to make school improvement understandable for the teachers. My experience with comprehensive school improvement will help me communicate the goals that have been established by members of the entire learning community. It is my responsibility to make sure each teacher understands how to read the comprehensive plan and use it as a guide for learning and instruction.

The two major parts of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) that teachers will need to refer to is the action plans and student achievement data. The action plans stem from programs and practices that may

already exist in the classroom, but now they have a clear timeline for completion or use. The action plans describe who is responsible for completing the plan, provides the resources and staff development, and how success will be measured. I will have teachers work in small groups to look at the action plans for each of the goal areas and discuss what we are currently in doing the classroom to meet the action plan. If there are any gaps in the plan we will determine how to go fill those gaps. This may be staff development, bringing in a speaker or having teachers attend workshops.

Teachers need to be able to read and understand student achievement data. The best way to look at Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) data is to sit down in grade level teams, put the data in front of the teachers and walk through the information. When we look at ITBS scores we will focus on each student's Iowa Grade Equivalent (IGE). We will determine specific areas where students are consistently low and discuss what we can do in the classroom to improve those areas. If for example, we find students low in usage and expression, we may want to look at our daily oral language program or how our textbook series covers this area. They may be too outdated or too vague. We will want to develop ways or find resources that will supplement the area of usage and expression. Each teacher will also be asked to develop at least three learning activities designed to strengthen usage and expression. Other data that classroom teachers use on a daily basis is their classroom grades. The teachers need to be able to understand

that if a student seems to be having trouble with his spelling tests, he/she may want to provide some alternative ways that the student can study for the test or modify the test to help him become more successful. There is no special trick to using student achievement data, teachers just need to have guidance in how to read and use the data to help them in the classroom. Then utilize the data to strengthen instruction.

Standards and benchmarks are important resources and teachers need to understand their content, and how to implement the information found in them. I will frequently attend curriculum meetings, share curriculum information with staff, and assist teachers with the presentation of the curriculum to students. The teachers will be placed in curricular committees to write objectives by grade level and subject. Teachers will be assigned to the curricular committees according to their curricular strengths, knowledge, and/or interests. The curricular committees will help to ensure curriculum continuity.

Today, the ability to send and gather educational information can happen at the speed of fiber optics. The Internet and e-mail have revolutionized how teachers, parents, administrators, and students communicate and gather information. "We now live in an age of instant communication. We have the ability to store all the world's information, and make it available almost instantly, in virtually any form, to almost anyone anywhere on earth" (Dryden & Vos, 1997, p. 29). Administrators should make a concentrated effort to understand how to

use this powerful tool and then make its use accessible and easy for the staff and students. “Principals who are technology leaders view themselves as learners” (Anderson, 1998, p. 26). Build a relationship with the media specialist to assist in your own personal development with technology. Do not be afraid to have a core group of teachers who are capable of assisting the rest of the teachers with technology. R. H. Grant said, “When you hire people who are smarter than you, you prove you are smarter than they are” (Perpetual calendar, 1996, February 12). An instructional leader should use the talents of the people in the building to make him/herself a better instructional leader.

Instructional leaders need to be proficient in the use and instruction of technology. I am very knowledgeable in the use and instruction of technology. I work closely with the building principal, the district technology coordinator and the building media specialist. In this relationship I have learned how to set up networks, coordinate the use and distribution of technology, and to troubleshoot technology problems in the building. These relationships will improve my ability to use and manage technology. “Computer literacy no longer exists for the privileged few. More than half of U. S. households today have a computer, and many children master a keyboard and mouse before they can recite the alphabet” (Brogan, 2000, p. 57). This is a considerable challenge for educators and my experiences with technology will help me make these challenges more meaningful for teachers and students. To ease the burden of the technology challenges I will:

(a) demonstrate my abilities with technology; (b) share technology resources; (c) search for technology funding; (d) seek and provide technology training for staff members; and e) answer questions about technology for the staff and parents. By being able to answer questions about the use of technology, I will be able to make teachers more comfortable when they attempt to use technology in their own instruction.

I have attended workshops on how to use technology in the classroom and create web pages, presented technology information over the Iowa Communications Network (ICN), presented at state and national conferences, and received awards and grants because of my use of technology to improve the education of children. My presentations about technology have helped me become more comfortable in sharing what I know and understand about the use of technology in the classroom. I will share these experiences with the learning community through staff development activities that will be held throughout the year. The activities will be done during in-services and before or after school. The activities will be done so that teachers can use their new technology knowledge and skills immediately in the classroom. The technology training activities can be taught by a variety of people. The media specialist, a classroom teacher with some expertise, a member of AEA staff, or even I can teach the activities.

One of my first goals, as an administrator, will be to establish a student technology team. I will look for assistance from staff members who have proven themselves in the use of technology or have a strong interest in technology. Individuals with proven abilities and strong interests in technology are, in my mind, the best teachers and learners in the use of technology. I will provide my knowledge and experience with student technology teams, and with the teachers and students, to help them build a successful program that will benefit all members of the learning community. The teachers will also receive support for the program through the use of my personal time, searching for grant opportunities, and sharing the benefits of the program with the learning community.

My experience with the student technology team has improved my use of technology and how technology is used by students. Technology is not a separate part of the curriculum. Technology must be blended into the curriculum to improve and increase the effectiveness of curriculum for children. My duty will be to help teachers understand that technology is a means of teaching the curriculum and not separate from the curriculum. Teachers may not use technology in every lesson, but I will help them understand that it can strengthen a lesson, because it taps the interests of the students and makes information available. I believe that my knowledge of and ability to use technology will be one of my strongest areas as an administrator.

Organization

The final element necessary to be a quality educator and administrator is being highly organized. “Structure influences behavior. When placed in the same system, people, however different, tend to produce similar results” (Senge, 1990, p. 42). If you are a positive example of organization, the people who work for you are more likely to follow your example. I believe that the more organized you can be, the better prepared you can be to make adjustments, to unexpected events and established goals. Your ability to organize information helps you be prepared for difficult situations that may occur. Penn State football coach, Joe Paterno, says, “The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital” (Riley, 1993, p. 159). Former football great Merlin Olsen said, “One of life’s most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn’t do our homework, that we are not prepared” (Perpetual calendar, 1996, April 2). Being prepared can only help an organization function better.

Time management plays an enormous role in being organized. Goethe said, “Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least” (Covey, 1989, p. 146). Administrators need to make time for themselves and for teachers. If an administrator can create quality time for teacher preparation, I believe it increases the possibility of quality education for children to take place. I will try to establish a schedule that gives teachers common planning time. I want teachers to be able to discuss what they are doing in the

classroom with teachers at their own grade level so that they can bounce ideas about instruction and classroom management off each other. If the administrator makes time for teachers, the teachers' efforts during that time should be used to help create strategies to benefit students. The issue of time may never be solved, but I will make every effort possible to manage it wisely.

I have been and always will be a highly organized individual. I believe that the more organized you are, the more prepared you will be for any given situation. I am not just a classroom teacher. I am involved with the student technology team, the language arts committee, the comprehensive school improvement committee, the staff development committee, our building advisory committee, and assisting the principal with administrative duties. I am able to be involved with more aspects of the school district because of my organizational skills. As an administrator, I will have numerous responsibilities and to meet those responsibilities I will need to rely on my organizational skills.

My organization skills will be demonstrated and shared with the staff. I will provide materials for meetings and in-services ahead of time that are three hole punched, and placed in appropriate binders for the staff. These binders will be brought to each meeting or in-service and the teachers will be able to easily access information they received from the meeting or in-service. My office will be a model for organization and efficiency. Members of the learning community feel more comfortable, entering the principal's office if it is neat and inviting.

Modeling my organization skills will eventually transfer to other members of the learning community and make them more organized. I will offer suggestions or ideas to help organize teachers who feel overwhelmed by all of the materials they have. I may suggest arranging bookshelves, getting rid of old materials that the teacher has not used in a while, or ask the students to help clean the room. Some students are always looking for opportunities to help the teacher and getting organized is a great way of increasing both communication skills and relationships with students. Students are more relaxed when they are doing activities that seem to have no apparent educational value. They are less self-conscious about what they are doing and feel free to express themselves as people rather than pupils. Some students have rigid beliefs about their role in the classroom and doing an activity that switches their role helps them communicate who they truly are.

Being organized gives me the ability to create time for myself, my colleagues, the students, and my family. Being able to make time for students and staff will help to create and maintain a positive learning environment.

Summary

I believe this reflective paper creates a clear understanding of who I am and what I will be as an administrator. The values, beliefs, philosophies, and thoughts truly represent the capability I have of becoming a quality administrator.

This blue print reflects the amount of time and effort I am willing to exert to achieve my goals. At an early age, I wanted to be an educator. Through the influences of my father, my relatives, and some great teachers along the way, I have become an educator. The necessary elements of creating a positive learning environment; being a reflective practitioner and an instructional leader; and possessing organizational skills will be the cornerstone in the development of my abilities as an administrator.

When creating a positive learning environment, I will focus on motivation, social skills, community building activities, and most of all, safety. I want members of the learning community to be motivated, enjoy coming to school, and being active participants in their learning. Social skills are the backbone of our acceptance in society. It is important for every member of the learning community to have knowledge and practice with social skills to improve their chances of succeeding in society. The learning community must work and play together. Activities that bring the teachers, students, and parents together, help each other understand their roles in the learning community. Safe schools are essential to student learning. "Recent brain research tells us that when people do not feel safe there is an actual shift in how the brain functions" (Rogers, Ludington, & Graham, 1999, p. 7). We want children to function at their highest abilities and which can be assisted by creating a safe and positive learning environment.

Personal reflection and creating reflective practitioners is beneficial in the development of teachers who understand who they teach. Modeling, promoting and teaching reflective practice will encourage members of the learning community to think about and study their own teaching and learning. As our abilities to reflect about our teaching increase so do our abilities to improve the learning of all members of the learning community.

Instructional leadership is probably the most important element in being an effective administrator. “Effective instructional leadership is embedded in school culture; it is expected and routinely delivered” (Blasé & Blasé, 1999, p. 370). My leadership in the area of instruction will affect the teachers and students in the learning community. I will communicate the goals of the learning community, along with why the instruction is needed and applicable to every member of the learning community. Using my knowledge of educational practices and processes, I will be able to provide the necessary information and resources, including the professional development the teachers will need to be successful in the classroom. Experience in the use and instruction of technology will help me provide information, resources, and tools that will impact the members of the learning community and greatly improve the understanding of the educational practices and processes.

Lack of organizational ability can be the downfall for any school leader. Being able to manage time, prioritize functions, and meet the countless needs of

the learning community can be very stressful. My organizational skills are very strong and I use them to my advantage with instruction, planning, and personal management. I cannot make a person be organized, but I can provide the necessary modeling, instruction, and assistance. These will give any member of the learning community the skills or knowledge to be more organized. I will make the importance of organization known to all and practice what I preach.

By combining my values, beliefs, philosophies, and the necessary elements for a quality educator and administrator, I have created a clear vision for my future as an administrator. I will take on the responsibilities of an administrator whole-heartedly and do everything within my capabilities to secure and preserve the success of the learning community.

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