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

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

### Abstract

The principalship is a collection of contradictory roles and responsibilities that requires knowledge and skills in many diverse areas. Paul Houston's (2001) description of society's expectations for a superintendent applies to the expectations for a principal as well: "The job is impossible because the expectations are unrealistic. We want one individual to be all and know all in a complex system" (p. 432). Today's principal is expected to effectively assume the roles of leader, educator, and manager (Speck, 1999), while creating "conditions that elicit the best from most students, teachers, and parents most of the time" (Barth, 1990, p. 64).

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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The principalship is a collection of contradictory roles and responsibilities that requires knowledge and skills in many diverse areas. Paul Houston's (2001) description of society's expectations for a superintendent applies to the expectations for a principal as well: "The job is impossible because the expectations are unrealistic. We want one individual to be all and know all in a complex system" (p. 432). Today's principal is expected to effectively assume the roles of leader, educator, and manager (Speck, 1999), while creating "conditions that elicit the best from most students, teachers, and parents most of the time" (Barth, 1990, p. 64).

A principal's greatest responsibility is to ensure improved learning for all students. As Tirozzi (2001) stated, "Each principal will have to answer the question, Did my leadership make a difference in improving the academic achievement and social and emotional well-being of students?" (p. 435). The old attitude that some students just can't be successful is no longer acceptable.

A principal's fate will be determined not by the accomplishments of individual teachers or students but by the achievement of a total student body...In a nutshell, the successful school principal of the future will be the individual who raises academic standards, improves academic achievement for all students, and provides support and assistance to the faculty. (Tirozzi, 2001, p. 438)

A school administrator must be grounded in the present yet constantly focused on the future, maintaining a balance between the idealism of a shared vision and the realism of daily operations. The principal must ensure that the school operates efficiently on a day to day basis and concurrently champion the vision of a desired future state. "The enlightened principal, which the schools of tomorrow will demand, will strive to create a sense of urgency in his or her school and, if necessary, elevate the urgency to the status of an educational crisis" (Tirozzi, 2001, p. 438). DuFour (1999) states that principals must live with paradox: balancing that "sense of urgency about improving their schools" with "the patience to sustain them for the long haul" (p.12).

In order to guarantee high achievement for all students, schools must become professional learning communities where organizational learning is practiced: communities where teachers learn continuously, reflect on their practice, and focus on improving student achievement. Attaining the status of a learning community can only happen if a culture of learning exists within the school; staff members share a common vision of the learning environment they want to create; structures are in place to allow for reflective practice; and leadership is widely dispersed among the staff. It is the principal's responsibility to structure the environment so that it supports a culture of learning, facilitate the development of a common vision, and cultivate the leadership capacity of the staff so that a school can develop into a true learning organization.

#### Learning Communities

More and more, professional literature is calling for transforming schools into learning communities as a solution to school improvement (Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998; Rameriz, 1999). Renewal literature recommends that "parents, teachers, administrators, staff members, and students join together to learn their way through change as communities of inquiry and experimentation" (Watkins & Marsick, 1999, p. 78). Ann Lieberman has described professional learning communities as "places in which teachers pursue clear, shared purposes for student learning, engage in collaborative activities to achieve their purposes, and take collective responsibility for student learning" (Sparks, 1999, p. 53).

What needs does a professional learning community address? Dr. William Glasser (1990) asserts that human beings have, as part of their genetic makeup, five basic needs: survival, belonging, achievement, freedom to make choices, and fun. A learning community meets the need for belonging by breaking down the traditional isolation of teaching as teachers support each other's growth and development. In recent

years, teachers' need for competence and success has been challenged by "the steady drumbeat about the failure of public education," states Richard DuFour (1998), who adds that a professional learning community can restore a sense of achievement by "calls for clarifying purpose, monitoring results, and celebrating progress" (p. 57). A learning organization also meets the basic human need for choice by allowing a school community to chart its own course for improvement rather than adopt strategies imposed from someone outside the school.

In a learning community, members of the organization work together to create the results they desire (Senge, 1990). According to Leithwood et al. (1998), "A fundamental purpose for OL (organizational learning) is to enhance the school's capacity for self-organization or self-design" (p. 265). A school that evolves into a community of learners will be able to tackle the daunting task of school improvement from the inside out by honoring and using the knowledge, talents, and common sense of all the school's stakeholders. Becoming a learning community will allow a school to avoid what Roland Barth (1990) calls "list logic", the assumption of those outside the schools that if they create lists of desirable school characteristics with clear directives and regulations, then reforms will automatically happen. In a true learning community, the stakeholders are committed to discovering and creating for themselves the conditions that lead to meaningful change.

Bierma (1999) acknowledges the promise of learning organizations as a means to improve schools, but argues that the ability of schools to create true opportunities for teacher learning is largely unrealized:

Following the popularization of the ideas of Peter Senge's The Fifth Discipline (1990), there are few schools in North America that do not refer to themselves as learning communities. Unfortunately, in most cases, this shift has been mostly cosmetic, and the promise of learning organizations in education is wearing thin. The adoption of the name does not make a school a community of learners or a learning

organization. Organizational learning takes deliberate and ongoing effort.  
(p. 39)

If organizational learning can indeed bring about meaningful school improvement, what conditions will foster a school's evolution into a learning community?

Strong principal leadership is a critical factor in determining whether a school can be transformed into a learning organization (Holland, 1997; Goldman, 1998; Rinehart et al., 1998; DuFour, 1999). According to Bierma (1999), "The imminent failure of schools to realize the benefits of being true learning organizations can only be avoided by school leaders who have the foresight to change the reality of teachers' workdays to accommodate reflective practice" (p. 38). There are a number of ways for an educational leader to establish a learning community. First, a principal needs to promote a culture of collegiality, inquiry, and efficacy by acting as a role model and building trusting relationships. Second, the principal must be the champion of the vision, constantly reminding members of the school community of their common goals. Improved learning for all students can only happen when teachers examine the results of their practice. It is the principal's responsibility to provide the structures that support reflective teaching, including focused professional development. Finally, the principal alone cannot bring about meaningful school change. He or she must develop the leadership capacity of the entire school community in order to achieve the status of a true learning organization.

### Culture

In an article synthesizing the results of three independent studies of conditions that foster organizational learning in schools, Leithwood et al. (1998) recognized school culture as one of the key features for establishing a learning community. They identified the following cultural norms which support organizational learning: "mutual support among teachers, respect for colleagues' ideas and a willingness to take risks in attempting new practices" (p. 255). Rick DuFour (1998) agrees that a learning culture, or

a culture of inquiry, is a fundamental prerequisite for a school to become a learning community, and he argues that many school improvement efforts are unsuccessful at changing practice because they focus on structural issues (policies, procedures, rules) and overlook culture, "the assumptions, beliefs, values, and habits that constitute the norm for that school and that shape how its people think, feel, and act" (p. 58).

### Collegiality

A culture of congeniality exists in many schools today. People get along well and enjoy each other's company. They talk to one another about a wide range of subjects, but they don't usually talk about teaching. However, school improvement more readily succeeds in situations in which teachers where teachers work in a collegial manner (NASSP, 1996). In a collegial school culture, adult conversations revolve around pedagogy and practice. Judith Warren Little (cited in Barth, 1990) describes four specific behaviors that signal a collegial culture. She states that adults in collegial schools talk about practice, observe each other teaching and reflect on those observations, work on curriculum together, and teach each other about teaching, learning and leading. According to Deal and Peterson (1999), school cultures that value collegiality have "a better climate for the social and professional ideas, the enhancement and spread of effective practices, and widespread professional problem solving" (p. 7). The benefits of a collegial culture also include better decisions, a higher level of morale and trust among adults, and sustained adult learning declares Roland Barth (1990). He cautions, though, that collegiality "is extremely difficult to introduce into the persistent cultures of schools" (p. 31).

If collegiality is not the norm in schools, what can a principal do to "nudge" his or her school's culture in that direction? Barth (1990) again looks to the research of Little who found that a collegial culture was more likely to be attained if the principal:

- 1) States expectations explicitly for cooperation among teachers.
- 2) Models collegiality, that is, enacts it by joining with teachers and other principals working collaboratively to improve conditions in the school.
- 3) Rewards collegiality by granting release time, recognition, space, materials, or funds to teachers who work as colleagues.
- 4) Protects teachers who initially engage in collegial behavior and thereby risk the retribution of their fellows. (p. 33)

A school community tends to reflect the values of the principal. When a principal relates, through both words and actions, that collegiality is something he or she values, a culture of collegiality will be more likely to evolve.

### Inquiry

Many schools have vast amounts of data collected, but few actually study their data and use it to analyze the results of their practice. Data analysis forces school personnel to move beyond their perceptions and allows them to accurately assess the impact of their teaching. Studying data together encourages honest reflection on the underlying root causes of problems and allows for collectively agreed upon solutions. "When schools understand their school processes, especially in relationship to the results they are getting, they can know exactly what they need to do differently to get different results" (Bernhardt, 1998, p. 122).

Principals must be data-driven and results-oriented. Focusing on results sends a message to all constituents that improved performance is the desired state of affairs. According to DuFour (1999), "The ultimate test of any principal is the results the school can achieve for students" (p. 15). He advises principals to work with staff members to define clear, measurable goals, determine which indicators will offer evidence of progress, and develop systems for monitoring those indicators on a continuous basis. He asserts that merely presenting data is neither informative nor effective. In order to be relevant, data requires comparison. Analyzing data and finding evidence of improved student learning gives cause for celebration and lets people know that improved

performance will be noted and appreciated. This can foster a staff's commitment to continuous improvement, which is an important characteristic of a professional learning community. Seeing their efforts produce improved student learning will also promote the teachers' belief that their actions can significantly impact student achievement, strengthening their sense of self-efficacy.

### Efficacy

An important variable that consistently correlates with student achievement (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), is teachers' self-efficacy, or the extent to which they believe they can influence student learning. Self-efficacy has been described as:

“...a future-oriented belief about the level of competence a person expects he or she will display in a given situation. Self-efficacy beliefs influence thought patterns and emotions that enable actions in which people expend substantial effort in pursuit of goals, persist in the face of adversity, rebound from temporary setbacks, and exercise some control over events that affect their lives.” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p.210)

Hoy (1998) argues that perceived self-efficacy is a strong predictor of behavior, stating, “Unless people believe that they can make a difference through their actions, there is little incentive to act” (p. 154). Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more open to new ideas, report fewer disciplinary problems, engage students in more self-directed activities, call on non-volunteers more frequently, and are less likely to refer students for special education services (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Efficacious teachers “believe they can control, or at least strongly influence, student motivation and achievement” (Hoy, 1998, p. 155).

Teachers have historically worked in isolation, yet the goals of improved learning for all students require collective action. Hoy (1998) discusses the importance of collective efficacy as it relates to a school's culture. He writes that culture involves not only shared beliefs, values, and norms; it also encompasses shared assumptions about

the organization's capabilities to innovate and attain its goals. Further, Hoy argues that teachers' sense of collective efficacy can be developed, thereby positively impacting student achievement. "Equipping organizational members with a strong belief that they can produce valued outcomes by their collective action is one means of enabling participants – that is, empowering them" (Hoy, 1998, p. 156).

According to Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), research on individual and collective efficacy has several implications for an administrator seeking to influence a school's culture. First, mastery experiences, perceptions that an action has been successful, are powerful sources of efficacy information. An administrator can reinforce successful practices by celebrating them publicly. Also, efficacy can be strengthened through vicarious experiences. A principal can model efficacy, recognizing that successes are the result of effort, not external influences. Social persuasion can also contribute to increases in feelings of efficacy. Small pep talks or specific performance feedback from an administrator have encouraged people to initiate new tasks, attempt new strategies, and try hard enough to succeed. Social persuasion can also counter occasional setbacks that could otherwise cause enough self-doubt to decrease persistence. Teachers who felt they could influence school-based decisions reported a greater sense of efficacy than those who worked with autocratic administrators did. A principal's ability to inspire a common sense of purpose among staff members was also associated with a sense of collective efficacy. Finally, the single greatest predictor of teacher efficacy was a sense of community in the school. Clearly, a principal who wishes to inspire a culture of efficacy can do much to enhance both the personal and collective efficacy of staff members.

## Modeling

A principal's power to influence the culture of a school cannot be underestimated. Deal and Peterson (1999) describe leaders as "cultural 'teachers' in the best sense of the word" (p. 90). Roland Barth (1990) discusses the "extraordinary influence of modeling" (p. 72), asserting that a principal who wants to build a community of learners must look first to his or her own behavior and adopt the role of head learner. Elise Goldman (1998) states that a principal's "deep-seated values and beliefs are mirrored throughout the school" (p. 20), and says that to encourage teachers to live the concept of a learning community, principals must first examine their own behaviors. Goldman cautions that many leaders are unaware of how great an impact their behavior has and says, "many of the important consequences of leadership style are the unintended ones" (p. 21).

Leadership behaviors set the tone for the culture of a school. "In a learning environment, leadership style says everything about the leaders' deeply held educational beliefs - and these are mirrored in the culture of the school" (Goldman, 1998, p. 20). Deal and Peterson (1999) describe principals as "living logos" and state that principals influence school culture "through their actions, conversations, decisions, and public pronouncements" (p. 85). In other words, what the principal chooses to focus on becomes the focus of the school.

A principal's interests and behaviors communicate meaning, value and focus. Deal and Peterson (1999) state, "Almost all actions of school leaders have symbolic content" (p. 90), and these authors suggest a number of specific ways that a principal's actions influence the culture of a school. First, principals play a key role in determining how space, which is often at a premium, will be used, so the arrangement of a building offers clues about what the principal values. Is there an inviting lounge available so that staff members can gather and converse, or are people isolated in rooms or departments?

Is there a professional library? If a principal is committed to the concept of a learning organization, resources for professional learning will be available. The location, accessibility, decoration, and arrangement of a principal's office also reflect his or her core values. The office can be welcoming, or it can be cold, impersonal, and forbidding. The artifacts a principal chooses to display send powerful messages about what the principal considers important.

A principal's daily actions also have a powerful impact on a school's culture. Deal and Peterson state that a principal's demeanor and actions signal formality or informality, approachability or distance, concern or unconcern. When staff members approach the principal, are they given undivided attention, or does the principal continue with paperwork while talking? Can all staff members approach the principal with ease, or is there the perception that some are shown preferential treatment? Principals communicate what is important to them by what they devote their time to. Does the principal spend the majority of the day in his or her office or out in classrooms and hallways? By showing public appreciation, a principal can communicate his or her beliefs about quality teaching, correct behavior, and desired cultural traditions. Finally, Deal and Peterson identify the power of a principal's correspondence. "Memos may be a source of inspiration, a celebration of success, or a collection of bureaucratic jargon, rules, and regulations" (p. 92).

Perhaps the most important quality for a principal to model is trustworthy behavior. People will only follow the lead of someone they believe they can trust. The principal's credibility and capacity to build trust are essential for moving a school to a culture of performance (Holland, 1997).

### Trusting Relationships

An atmosphere of trust can help dispel the fears that are common in so many schools. Kathleen Ryan (cited in Greene, 1994) outlines the fearful attitudes that are often found in organizations:

Among them are the fear of speaking up or sharing ideas because we might be ridiculed or put down, the fear of participating because we might be criticized, and the fear of taking risks and being creative because we might fail. (p. 57)

A learning community cannot develop unless people feel free to speak their minds, participate, and take risks, and such feelings are absent in far too many schools today. Roland Barth (2001) argues that many teachers lack the personal, interpersonal, and group skills essential to a collegial culture, and says those teachers' inertia and insecurity often causes them to resist promising initiatives. Brad Greene (1994) sums up the importance of trust when attempting to influence culture, "Creating a quality environment, where people can do their best, requires building trust" (p. 57). Trust brings out the best in people; it fosters cooperation and provides a foundation for developing an attitude of continuous growth and improvement. In an atmosphere of trust, people can honestly express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and concerns. Honest communication is a key component of a learning community.

What can a principal do to promote a climate of trust and overcome the fearful, cautious attitudes so common in schools? Roland Barth (1990) believes the relationship between staff members and the principal influences all other relationships in the school. "The relationship between teacher and principal seems to have an extraordinary amplifying affect. It models what all relationships will be" (p. 19). Trusting relationships begin with the principal's commitment to teachers and students. Rinehart et al. (1998) define a principal's trustworthiness as the "perceived willingness to suppress one's own self-interest for the benefit of the school" (p. 630). Trust is not automatic; it can only be

built with time effort and patience, but it can quickly and easily be destroyed (Greene, 1994). William Holland (1997) states that trust develops when a principal demonstrates integrity, consistency, openness, and discretion.

Staff members need to believe in a principal's integrity before trusting relationships can exist. To demonstrate integrity, a principal must be courteous, honest, moral, and willing to do the right thing instead of being concerned with the appearance of doing things right. Trust is gained by listening to people's concerns and doing something concrete about them. Too often, actions in schools are undertaken that look good but have no real impact on the problems they are meant to address. Stakeholders are astute at recognizing when programs or processes have no real substance. It may be tempting to tell people what they want to hear or to act impulsively, but inconsistencies can quickly undermine a principal's credibility.

Consistent behavior and following through with commitments are essential for building trust. People must be able to predict and count on a principal's actions. They need to be told up front what the principal is willing or not willing to do. It is essential for the principal to follow through on any commitments made. People also need to know where they stand with the principal. All staff members deserve to be treated fairly and professionally. If there is a perception that some people are treated preferentially, a climate of trust will not be possible.

Openness, which involves both self-disclosure and sensitivity to others, has been found to correlate with a faculty's trust in the principal (Rinehart et al., 1998). A principal demonstrates openness by articulating the beliefs that underlie his or her actions. "People do not trust leaders until they know their motives and their personal agendas are exposed" (Holland, 1997, p. 97). As Brad Greene (1994) says, "To build trust, we must let others know what we value, what we hope for, and what we want" (p. 58). A principal

also displays openness by listening to staff members. Being sensitive to the needs and interests of others and respecting other viewpoints helps to build trust as does loyalty to those who are absent (Greene, 1994). Gossip about and criticism of those who are not present destroys trust as people begin to wonder whether they, too, are the targets of criticism when they are absent.

Trust is also enhanced when a principal is willing to self-evaluate by acknowledging mistakes and accepting responsibility for them. A principal who treats failures as mistakes to learn from will encourage both staff and students to develop beyond the status quo. Both trust and the willingness to take risks are destroyed in an atmosphere of blame. Focusing time and energy on helping others succeed is more productive than pointing out when they are wrong. "Looking for ways to make ideas work, rather than for reasons they will not, creates motivation to take risks" (Greene, 1994, p. 60). Only the willingness to risk new practices will allow a school to achieve the vision of improved learning for all students.

### Shared Vision

A major responsibility for any principal is the identification, promotion, and protection of a shared vision (DuFour, 1999). According to Peter Senge (1990), "Building shared vision must be seen as a central element of the daily work of leaders" (p. 214). For a school community, the shared vision is a collective picture of the school that stakeholders want to create. Genuinely shared visions matter deeply to the members of an organization; people commit to a vision because it both reflects their own personal vision and embodies a common caring. "Vision in a learning community is not the principal's personal goals but the collective vision of the community that develops over time and becomes the heart and passion of what the school is about" (Speck, 1999, p.

220). A shared vision provides focus and energy for change while fostering commitment to the long term. Having a vision facilitates decision-making by providing a standard by which all decisions can be made, "Will doing (whatever the decision is ) help us achieve our vision?"

According to Senge (1990), it is impossible to create a learning organization in the absence of a shared vision, "Without a pull toward some goal which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of the status quo can be overwhelming" (p. 209). A vision that is created with input from all stakeholders allows an organization to shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of commitment. Richard DuFour (1999) states that one of the most productive accomplishments of his principalship was engaging the faculty in an agreement of what they hoped the school would become:

Gradually a consensus evolved and we were able to identify a common ground, a school we all could endorse... The identification of the shared vision and values changed my relationship with the faculty. Rather than emphasizing regulations and procedures to control the work of teachers, I could rely on shared vision and values to provide a sense of direction.  
(p. 14)

William Holland (1997) argues that loyalty to a "shared covenant for improvement" transcends the loyalties to teachers' unions or individual welfare and convenience that are common in many schools.

A principal seeking to build a common vision must be willing to repeatedly articulate his or her own personal vision. Peter Senge (1990) states that shared visions materialize out of personal visions, and he argues that without personal visions, people may enroll in someone else's vision, resulting in compliance but not commitment. Compliance signifies agreement, but commitment goes far deeper than mere acceptance; it involves taking responsibility for making the vision happen. Building a shared vision is a process that can be arduous and time-consuming, but the benefits of devoting time to the occasionally messy conversations that must happen for a vision to

evolve far outweigh the drawbacks. Senge (1990) states, "A shared vision is the first step in allowing people who mistrusted each other to begin to work together. It creates a common identity....In the absence of a great dream, pettiness prevails" (p. 208-209). Shared visions foster risk-taking and experimentation and help keep improvement on course in the face of inevitable setbacks. People with a vision remain committed and are less likely to jump from one bandwagon to the next as they seek meaningful ways to improve student achievement.

### Reflective Practice

#### Structures

It has become popular to refer to teachers as "lifelong learners", and teachers certainly do accumulate experience over time. However, neither time nor experience automatically improves teaching. "Continuous examination and modification of practice is essential to professional growth" (Joyce, 1990, p. xii). There is increasing evidence that teacher expertise is a critical factor in determining student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Darling Hammond & Ball, 1997), and also that reflective practice improves teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Shann, 1998). The concept of a learning community implies that all stakeholders are continuously learning and improving, yet few schools have structures in place that allow for teacher study. To facilitate teacher learning and realize the ideal of a learning organization, teachers must have regular and ongoing occasions to strengthen and develop their skills.

Time to study and reflect is not typically built into teachers' workdays, but according to Darling-Hammond and Ball (1997), opportunity for focused analysis and reflection are central to learning to teach well. "Teachers need time to engage in activities associated with their growth, especially in an era in which knowledge expands exponentially" (NASSP, 1996, p. 65). Linda Darling-Hammond (1998) asserts that a

professional teacher has not finished learning how to teach, but continues to learn from teaching. A principal can demonstrate commitment to a culture of learning by providing time, space, and encouragement for reflection and collaboration. Lieberman and Miller (cited in Brandt, 2000) write, "Supportive communities find ways to provide time for sharing, evaluating, choosing among alternative ideas, reading, studying, taking action, reflecting, changing and improving" (p. 61). It is the principal's responsibility to facilitate the process of organizational learning by structuring time during the school day for teachers to reflect and exchange ideas. Such time for study and reflection can be created by organizing the faculty into teaching teams with collaborative planning time built in and by using substitutes to cover classes on a rotating basis. According to Leithwood, et al. (1998), other structures that support organizational learning include:

Brief weekly planning meetings, frequent and often informal problem solving sessions, flexible and creative time-tabling, regularly scheduled professional development time in school, and common preparation periods for teachers who needed to work together...cross-department appointment of teachers, integrated curriculum teams, and team teaching. (p. 254)

Self-reflection is central to improved practice, but it "becomes far more effective when pursued in a formal and systematic way" (NASSP, 1996, p. 64).

### Staff Development

"Because professional development is critical for the success of school improvement initiatives and student achievement, the principal must place a high priority on the continual professional development of the adults in the school" (Payne & Wolfson, 2000, p. 15). A principal needs to communicate enthusiasm and a sincere interest in teachers' and other staff members' learning. He or she can promote risk taking and support teachers as they attempt new initiatives, then encourage teachers to share what they have learned with colleagues. Staff members must see the principal as a source of both information and resources. It is vital that the principal share articles, websites,

books, and information about conferences and workshops to convey an expectation of continuous growth and development. The last two decades have produced an incredible amount of research into methods that could significantly impact student learning.

According to Joyce and Showers (1995), "The potential is great. Many researched teaching strategies have enough power to help the average student (the student normally at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile) achieve what the top 10 percent of students achieve" (p. 9). Sadly, such research rarely impacts the daily practice of teachers. In order to achieve significant advances in student achievement, teachers will need to be provided with comprehensive staff development, and it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that this happens.

Staff development is said to be one of the most important issues when designing a learning organization (Ramirez, 1999), but in far too many schools, "there is a sore lack of the kind of staff development that helps practitioners reflect on fresh ideas (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 6). Despite the vast amounts of time and money spent promoting and implementing new initiatives, few schools have realized measurable advances in student learning. Burke (2000), quotes Michael Fullan, "Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when the teachers returned to their classrooms" (p. 29). Staff development that is focused, systematic, and ongoing can overcome potential shortcomings and is essential to school improvement efforts. "Recent research on staff development has demonstrated that virtually all teachers can learn the most powerful and complex teaching strategies provided that staff development is designed properly" (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 10).

Entire books and journals are devoted to staff development, so outlining a comprehensive staff development program is not feasible within the context of this paper.

However, there are some important points that can be addressed. First, it is essential for a principal to believe that there is a powerful link between staff development and student achievement, and it is equally essential for the principal to communicate this belief to all stakeholders. Also, it is important for a principal to recognize that for new learning to become ingrained to the point where using it is automatic, there must be follow-up training, coaching, and opportunity for extensive practice. "Training to reach an adequate level of competence in new skills and knowledge requires intensive study, many demonstrations, and opportunities for practice in the training setting" (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 37). Feedback is another crucial component of meaningful staff development:

Effective professional development activities also are sustained over a long period of time and carefully planned to provide teachers with early and ongoing feedback about the direct impact of what they have learned and applied on their work and especially on the children they teach.  
(Ganser, 2000, p. 8)

Peer coaching is just one way to provide timely feedback as teachers practice new skills. Effectively assimilating new methods into teachers' repertoires will take time. Therefore, it is important for a principal to limit staff development initiatives that are undertaken simultaneously. With the limited resources typically available for staff development, a principal would also be wise to utilize the talents and resources of people in the school.

#### Leadership Capacity

As stated above, members of a learning community work together to create the results they desire. In a school, those desired results must revolve around improved learning for all students. Innovative practices that promise significant gains in student achievement can only be sustained if leadership is dispersed throughout the school. In too many cases, promising initiatives are abandoned after one or two key leaders depart. Linda Lambert (1998) writes, "As long as improvement is dependent on a single person or a few people or outside directions and forces, it will fail" (p. 3). Maintaining the

momentum necessary for new practices to become established requires the energy and commitment of a broad leadership base within the school. Widely dispersed leadership fosters both personal and organizational growth. Teachers who lead come to see themselves as responsible not only for their own classrooms, but for the school as well (Lambert, 1998). Speck (1999) agrees that principals who advance a culture of leadership promote shared responsibility, stating, "by empowering others the principal helps build the sense of commitment and ownership necessary to carry out their efforts for improving the school" (p. 59).

According to Richard DuFour (1999), "Principals should lead through shared vision and values rather than rules and procedures" (p. 13), and he says that enlisting teachers in the decision-making process empowers them to act on their ideas:

Over the years I gradually came to a better understanding of what it really meant to be a strong instructional leader. I learned (sometimes painfully) that the best strategies for improving the school were to delegate authority, to enlist the faculty in critical decisions, to pose questions rather than impose solutions, and to create an environment where teachers could continually grow and learn together. (p. 13)

DuFour advocates dispersing power throughout the school by giving teachers information, time, and collaborative structures that enable them to use the information to identify and solve their own problems. Brad Greene (1994) describes this as moving relationships from "power over", or boss management, to "power with", or lead management (see Appendix A).

Roland Barth argues that principal behavior is a crucial factor in building a culture that supports teacher leadership. He writes, "The concept of shared leadership in schools goes to the heart of the principal / teacher relationship" (p. 449). Few teachers will be able to successfully undertake school improvement projects without support from the school principal. To inspire leadership, a principal must convey, through both words and actions, the expectation that all teachers will lead. A principal invites leadership by

empowering teachers to determine their own solutions to problems. "Often the most spirited, inventive teacher leadership comes when teachers themselves become disenchanted by the encrusted 'way we have always done it,' see a better way, and set about bringing it into their schools" (Barth, 2001, p. 448).

Historically, teachers who have accepted leadership opportunities frequently encountered resistance from colleagues. This resistance comes both from peers, who resent teachers behaving like administrators, and from unions, who discourage teachers from taking on leadership functions without pay. A principal can cushion teacher leaders from such opposition by running interference and protecting faculty members from attack. According to Barth (2001), "When it's clear to teachers that their leadership is protected, they will be more willing to exercise it" (p. 448).

Accepting leadership duties on top of classroom duties is both time and energy consuming. A principal can help sustain teachers' willingness to undertake the additional responsibilities of leadership and encourage a culture of leadership by publicly recognizing teachers' leadership efforts. It is also important for a principal to give teachers credit for successful leadership endeavors. "Good principals are more hero-makers than heroes" (Barth, 2001, p. 448). When teachers' leadership initiatives aren't successful, a principal can accept responsibility and treat the effort as an opportunity to learn from rather than a failure to assign blame for. A principal's behavior can create opportunities for teachers to utilize their talents, interests, and potential-- embedding teacher leadership in a school's culture.

### Conclusion

The concept of an effective principal has changed significantly in recent years; a principal is now thought of more as a facilitator rather than a boss (Rinehart et al., 1998, DuFour, 1999). Principals are less likely to lead from positions of authority. Rather,

today's principal leads through interactions with the faculty, and those interactions must result in a culture of learning that promotes high achievement for all students. In a school where organizational learning is the norm, staff members take collective responsibility for student learning. A principal can advance the concept of a learning community by promoting a culture of inquiry and reflection, facilitating the development of a common vision, and developing the leadership capacity of stakeholders.

## Appendix A

A Boss Manager

1. Judges others
2. Blames people for problems
3. Says, "I am not as bad as a lot of other people"
4. Controls
5. Takes himself and others for granted
6. Covers up mistakes
7. Says, "I only work here."
8. Demands
9. Builds walls
10. Drives his people
11. Depends on authority
12. Inspires fear
13. Says "I"
14. Gets there on time
15. Fixes blame for the breakdown
16. Knows how it is done
17. Says "Go."
18. Uses people
19. Sees today
20. Commands
21. Never has enough time
22. Is concerned with things
23. Treats the symptoms
24. Lets his people know where he stands
25. Does things right
26. Works hard to produce
27. Creates fear
28. Takes the credit
29. Seeks first to be understood
30. Has a win-lose approach to conflict resolution.

A Lead Manager

1. Accepts others
2. Looks for solutions
3. Says, "I am good but not as good as I can be."
4. Leads
5. Appreciates himself and others
6. Admits mistakes
7. Does more than his job
8. Asks
9. Builds communication
10. Coaches his people
11. Depends on cooperation
12. Inspires enthusiasm
13. Says "We"
14. Gets there ahead of time
15. Fixes the breakdown
16. Shows how it is done
17. Says, "Let's go."
18. Develops people
19. Looks at today as well as the future
20. Models
21. Makes time for things that count
22. Is concerned with people
23. Identifies and treats the causes
24. Lets his people know where they stand
25. Does the right thing
26. Works hard to get his people to produce
27. Creates confidence in others
28. Gives the credit to others
29. Seeks first to understand
30. Has a win-win approach to solving problems

(Greene, 1994, p. 55)

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