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## 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

I embrace change. I think back to when I lived in Massachusetts with my parents during high school. I looked into colleges that I might want to attend. inquired into business colleges. In the northeast region of the country there were plenty of them. But for some reason I applied to one school out west; The University of Denver. I did not know any friends in Denver. I did not have any relatives close-by. I wanted an adventure. I was accepted and I decided to attend. This decision changed my life.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:  
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership,  
Counseling, and Post Secondary Education  
University of Northern Iowa

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

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by

Richard E. Wulf-McGrath

May 1997

This Research Paper by Richard E. Wulf-McGrath

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTRATING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:  
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for  
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I embrace change. I think back to when I lived in Massachusetts with my parents during high school. I looked into colleges that I might want to attend. I inquired into business colleges. In the northeast region of the country there were plenty of them. But for some reason I applied to one school out west; The University of Denver. I did not know any friends in Denver. I did not have any relatives close-by. I wanted an adventure. I was accepted and I decided to attend. This decision changed my life.

During my four years, I changed my major twice. I started as a Hotel and Restaurant Management major and then Business Management, but I was never happy with what I was studying. I decided to volunteer at a near-by elementary school and I knew what I wanted to do the moment I started working with the children. I changed my major one last time to Elementary Education. I had accumulated enough credits to graduate with a minor in Business Management.

Upon graduating, I could not wait until I got a teaching job. I would imagine how I would arrange my room, how I would treat the students, and I often thought about applying all the innovative teaching techniques I learned during my undergraduate training. I wanted to teach children. I wanted to change children's lives.

Eleven years later, after the experience of teaching kindergarten through the fourth grade, I have gained some valuable lessons due to the changes I have made in my career thus far. I have worked in six schools in a variety of communities (including inner-city, blue collar, and upper-middle class neighborhoods). I have worked in one and four track year-round schools. I have worked with nine principals (including assistants and an interim). I have taught self-contained, interdisciplinary units, multi-age, whole language, inclusionary, basal phonetic approach, language experience, flexible grouping, and ability grouping. I have evolved into a better teacher with every change.

Just as I never thought about being a teacher when I started my undergraduate degree, I never gave much thought to being a principal until several colleagues and supervisors over a period of time planted a seed by suggesting that I would make a good principal. So I began to seriously think about influencing positive changes beyond the walls of my classroom and beyond the ears of my closest peers. I was thinking about another change in my life; becoming a principal. Being a principal in a traditional school does not interest me. I am not attracted to maintaining the status quo in education. I would sooner prefer to continue to teach in my changing classroom.

I am truly excited about the kinds of changes taking place in education. I believe public education is witnessing a revolution. Schools are struggling with some issues that have serious implications for our students of today and the future. Issues that are forcing school employees to assess the purpose of a public education. Issues that will require innovative leadership, creative problem solving, competent teachers and honest hard work.

Regardless of the current reform jargon, the best way to improve student learning is by putting a competent teacher in every classroom. There is no issue more important than improving the quality of the teaching force. This needs to be the goal of every school district, every teacher's association and every principal. This has implications on how teachers receive their pre-service training and how schools conduct their staff development programs. Other important issues in the foreground also need to be addressed.

Issues such as how students learn. Educators and scientists know a great deal more about how humans learn new knowledge and apply it. Scientist continue to learn more about how the brain functions. This has great implications for teachers. Educators need to practice new teaching methods that are compatible with brain research and how people learn. Issues such as living and learning in a multicultural, diverse society. The people within the schools and its community

need to learn more about each other and then promote their diversity as a strength. Finally, issues such as schools becoming more sensitive to parental/community needs are also needing to be addressed.

Change is a very scary process. To some it implies that current practices are not valued or effective. This may be true, but change is also an enhancement of what we already know and do. To some it is about loss. Acknowledging and grieving the loss is an important step before change is accepted. Helping faculty understand the process better will facilitate the needed changes at the school and district level. Principals need to let teachers know that they anticipate change. Allow for open and honest dialogue about the change. What it may look like. When it might occur. Frequent discussions on the topic will prepare the staff. Allowing teachers to risk needs to be a part of the conversation as well. Leadership also requires the principal to assume risks, sometimes at great personal and professional cost. There are five ingredients to formal change:

1. Vision: There must be a blueprint of the final outcome so all participants have an idea of where they are headed. Without a vision confusion will result.

2. Skills: There needs to be adequate on-going staff development so every one can feel competent with the changes. Without skills anxiety will result.

3. Incentives: There must be some motivation for the participants to want to change. Money and recognition are often used as incentives. Without incentives change will be gradual.

4. Resources: Time and materials need to be provided for the change to take place. Without resources frustration will result.

5. Action Plan: There needs to be a specific plan of action. A written document must outline what is going to be done, by whom, and by what time. This action plan should be in every staff member's possession. Without the action plan false starts will result (Sheldon, 1990).



### Personal Characteristics

As a Christian, father, and a teacher, I have a set of morals and values regarding how children are treated. There are two beliefs that have given me guidance when interacting with children. Globally, adults do not treat children very well at all, which is a symptom of a bigger problem: children are not valued. All one has to do is to pick up the morning paper or listen to the news to come to this dire conclusion. In war torn countries, such as Bosnia, children were often dismembered from playing with toys that had hidden bombs waiting to explode. In India, families often give away or kill female infants because they are a burden to feed, whereas boys are the prized possession and absorb much of the families resources. In America, the situation is not much better. We lead advanced nations in childhood poverty, homelessness, and mortality rates for those under 25. We lag behind in rates enrolled in preschool education as well. And in some parts of the country there are more stringent laws to protect animals than our own children from abuse (National Commission on the Teaching & America's Future [NCTAF], 1996). Children are often victims because they are powerless.

As a teacher of poor children for many years, I see the consequences of abuse and neglect. I have filed reports to social services for child abuse. I have visited feces-infested homes. I have seen the embarrassment of the child when a parent comes to the school high on drugs or alcohol. I have consoled a child when their parent has been arrested for prostitution or drug charges. I have seen the sorrow in their eyes and the anger in their fists.

### Love

There is always hope, however. There is always love. Love is not a feeling, but a decision. I believe all children need to be loved. All teachers, principals, and other staff members, including the custodians and secretaries, need to decide to love children. Otherwise, they should not be at the school. All children need to see love modeled often.

Children at-risk for school failure particularly, need to establish special relationships with caring adults at school. Someone that can show that they are loved. This sounds like a simple idea, but seldom happens, especially in middle schools and high schools due to the large student body and 50 minute classes. Academics are not the only need that are fulfilled at school. For children, school means a chance to socialize and make human connections. Friendships and special relationships with adult mentors are absolutely imperative for students to feel academically and socially successful.

There are many other ways teachers can show love. I greet every child at the door in the morning and say good-bye to all my students in the afternoon by name. I try to smile at my students as often as possible. I believe it is important that children see their teachers laugh and display a sense of humor. I offer hugs and I never refuse a child's hug. I understand why so many teachers are hesitant about hugging their students, particularly male teachers, but with other children present, I reduce most risks. Teachers need to share with the students a little about their personal lives. Teachers need to portray themselves as human and vulnerable to the human condition. Teachers need to share their personal joys and sorrows. They can share their hopes and dreams. They need to paint an imperfect face of someone prone to err and apologize for mistakes. There are many ways for a teacher and other staff members to show students that they love and care about them.

Teachers show students that they love them when they have high expectations for them. Many teachers claim to have high expectations for their students, but most really do not. The system allows for low expectations and most go along with it. Schools have low academic standards and teachers have low expectations for children of color, special education students, and girls. Failure should not be in the hands of the child. Failure should not be a choice. A child with low self-esteem will often choose failure. A child whose parents or teachers have low expectations will choose failure. The child that has tasted success knows that in time and with

work, achievement will follow. Teachers show their love for their students by expecting well behaved students.

When children behave poorly, teachers need to continue to demonstrate their love. In many respects, children may test the teacher. They will test to see if the teacher will continue to love them, even when their behavior is at its worst.

I believe teachers need to hold children accountable for their misbehavior, instead of seeking the principal as the disciplinarian. The teacher has the better relationship with the child. When the child misbehaves, the teacher must talk with the student about the unwanted behavior, why it is unwanted, and follow up by describing the desirable behavior. The teacher needs to be willing to help the child achieve success with appropriate behavior. Parent notification is absolutely necessary when mediating school problems. Parents need to know what the child is doing and what they can do to help the misbehavior. When the teacher makes the extra effort to involve the parent in correcting their child's behavior, the teacher is sending a clear message that s/he cares about the student.

I believe when punitive measures are used they need to fit the crime. For example, if the student makes a mess on the floor during lunch, then s/he should clean the floor. I do not believe in punishing the student by having them write, "I will not make a mess on the floor during lunch." fifty times. Writing is a skill and an art form, teachers certainly do not want children to associate writing with punishment. When so much effort is invested in correcting a child's misbehavior, the child gets the message that s/he is loved. Once the unwanted behavior abates, the messages of love should not. Messages of praise and encouragement should continue. And from love comes respect.

### Respect

The second value I hold for children is respect. As soon as a child or parent enters a school they should feel that this is a place where I am respected. Respect is not just limited to children, however. There should be respect between

administrators and teachers, teachers and teachers, teachers and students, teachers and parents, and students and students.

### Principal respecting teachers.

Just as people show love by their actions, respect can be modeled as well. Principals need to respect teachers' time and talent by: a) making sure teachers are not interrupted unnecessarily throughout the day by reducing the usage of the intercom and walk-in interruptions; b) making sure teachers have enough materials needed to teach, such as providing the number of books and paper products quickly; c) giving teachers a voice and listening to their ideas in solving school-related problems, particularly those that directly affect them and their students, and, most powerfully; d) giving them positive feedback about what they are doing well. Just as teachers should praise their students, a principal needs to continuously provide sincere praise to the staff of the building. These suggestions will demonstrate to the faculty that teachers are respected as professionals.

I have worked in six different schools as a teacher and I have seen many disrespectful actions by principals, teachers, and students. I have seen principals reprimand teachers in the teacher's lounge in front of other teachers. I have seen principals reprimand a whole faculty during a staff meeting, even when every faculty member was not needing the reprimand. The principal can show that s/he respects her/his faculty by praising in public and reprimanding in private. Time is needed to construct trust and respect, but trust can be demolished in a few seconds.

Respect needs to be present among the faculty. Teachers need not be best friends but a friendly collegiality should exist. In order for trust and respect to foster, teachers need to know one another on a personal level. This is difficult to achieve when educators teach in isolation. Isolation is a teacher's enemy. The best way to garner the type of collegiality and respect needed in a school, is to have teachers working with one another; or team teach. This is one reason why team teaching is good for teachers.

### Teachers respecting teachers.

Disrespect among faculty members is a disconcerting problem. Teachers need to talk directly to the person with whom they disagree. If the problem continues to be unresolved, then the parties involved should seek counsel with the principal. All too often, teachers will talk about another teacher in a disrespectful manner. This does a lot of damage to all concerned. I understand it is supporting for teachers to talk to one another about problems they may encounter, but talking about other teachers may create an uncomfortable environment, especially if the teacher being discussed enters the room unexpectedly.

One of the most difficult positions is when a teacher is caught in a gossip group. This is the teacher that doesn't say anything negative about others, but others come to her/him to complain. The teacher that listens is enabling the gossip to continue. This teacher needs to discuss their discomfort with the other teacher and tell her/him that there will no longer be an audience for their gossip. This type of confrontation is probably the most difficult, particularly if the two educators are friends.

Another form of disrespect that permeates many schools is known as, "the blame game." This is when one party blames another party for the lack of knowledge the students possess. For example, a fourth grade teacher criticizes the third grade teacher for not teaching multiplication facts to the students last year. Or a teacher blames low-income parents for their sons failure in school. Or a group of people blame whole language for students' lack of reading progress without providing concrete evidence.

### Respecting diversity.

One of the most dangerous types of disrespect comes to schools very subtly. It may be noticed within a joke among faculty members. It may be seen unintentionally in a teacher's delivery of instruction to students. It may be seen among students during recess. The principal needs to send a clear message to all members of the school community that racism and gender bias including sexual

harassment will not be tolerated. A principal needs to be very sensitive to these issues because often it is very difficult to recognize. The cultures of the students are quickly changing and no town nor state is exempt. Diversity is a strength. The principal needs to believe it, communicate it, and promote it. Principals will need to deal with staff that have prejudices and racist beliefs that need to be confronted.

We live in a racist society and relations between the races are deteriorating. Since staff are members of the same society that is racist, principals naturally will have staff with views that will be harmful to children. I have heard many remarks from teachers about minorities in general and about our children and their families specifically that shock me. I am convinced that racism in our schools is an explosive issue that needs attention. If teachers have such views, then I wonder how these beliefs are unintentionally communicated to the children. I know that they must have a detrimental effect on all our children of color.

Corporate executives and public service workers have been reprimanded, sued, fined and even terminated because of racial, off the cuff, remarks. Legal problems and boycotts have plagued businesses. Principals need to make race and gender equity issues a continual topic of discussion, so similar problems don't interfere with the business of educating children.

Teachers and principals need to continue to show respect to children they serve. I believe it is the teachers responsibility to model and discuss respecting adults and their peers, respecting the law, respecting other people's property, and respecting nature. Modeling is very important so that the students know what respectful behavior looks like. Many teacher's hold this discussion within the context of school rules. But rules are often explained at the beginning of the academic year, and then forgotten. Or, after a fight between students, a teacher will lecture the students on respecting each other. However, an on-going dialogue about respect should be common in every classroom and a part of this dialogue should include recognition of those that are displaying respect.

### Respecting children.

Students learn best when they are in a safe and comfortable environment. One of the best ways teachers can model respect to their students is by refraining from yelling at them, especially in front of their peers. Again, praise in public and reprimand in private. If teachers expect this kind of respect from the principal, then the teacher must reciprocate by applying this advise to their students. Yelling to students may be detrimental to student's self-esteem and an educator's effectiveness in several ways.

Regardless of the age of the students, a habit of yelling at one student may embarrass and humiliate them and cause them to dislike the teacher and school. Depending upon how popular the student is, it can also create friction between the teacher and the whole class. Sometimes other students will behave poorly to show solidarity among the class against the teacher. If the teacher disrespects the students, students will often disrespect the teacher.

There is a strong push to get students ready for school before they enter kindergarten. In as much as this may be true, I believe schools need to be ready for all types of learners. I strongly believe that schools need to respect a student's unique learning styles. Since each child is unique in a special way, they learn in a uniquely special way. One teaching approach does not fit all students. This is why team teaching is good for students. When one teacher is not able to reach a student, then their team member may have a different idea or approach. No matter whether teachers team teach or teach in isolation, all teachers need to be knowledgeable and skillful at accommodating several learning styles within their classroom. The teacher is, after all, responsible for teaching all the children in her/his classroom, not just the ones that pass the tests.

Teaching the curriculum and teaching the students are two different acts. Teachers of the curriculum often will have desks in rows facing to the front of the room where the teacher's desk sets. The teacher is seen as the keeper of all

knowledge. Teachers of the curriculum will hold the teacher's edition in one hand and a piece of chalk in the other. S/he will stand in front of the class and lecture. This is known as "talk and chalk". All students will be on the same page of the text following along with the teacher. Regardless of the fact that some of the students can not read the text and several others already know the information and could probably teach the teacher a few facts. Then the teacher may hand out a worksheet to everyone to complete. Those students that struggle to read, sit there facing failure. Those students that already know the information think the work is boring. Both types of students often find themselves in trouble with the teacher for misbehavior. Ninety percent of the talk will come out of the teacher's mouth. Students are assessed according to how well they do on the test, not according to how much they have learned. Those students that already knew most of the information continue to get A's and feel good about themselves. Those students that can not read, continue to get F's and continue to feel like failures. This system focuses on a student's weaknesses and is disrespectful to the child.

I believe teachers need to teach students using the curriculum as a guide or a helper. Teachers that teach students use as many other books and resources as possible to help the student reach a better understanding. Teachers that teach students usually will have their desk in the back of the room. The students will sit at tables or desks joined together for cooperative activities. Teachers are seen as facilitators and students are seen as constructors of their own knowledge. Teachers that teach the students help students make connections between the child's world and their experiences to the new learning. Teachers that teach students make learning meaningful for the student which in turn will motivate them to learn more. Teachers of students will introduce new experiences to students by providing field trips, inviting guest speakers, involving the students in hands-on math activities and experiments in science. Teachers that teach students use discussion groups and peer conferences when analyzing literature or writing compositions. Teachers of



students use a variety of teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and peer helpers. There may be a parent volunteer or a paraprofessional tutoring a student that needs extra attention. These teachers try to individualize learning by providing centers, computer work, or independent/group projects. The teacher of students will often pretest students to find out their current functioning level. Then s/he will provide flexible grouping to accommodate the learner. Finally, the teacher of students will utilize alternative assessment techniques to measure student learning. Portfolios are common so learning growth can be easily seen. Rubrics are attached to student's work, so the student knows exactly what was expected. The teacher views her/himself as a learner as well. S/he is always problem solving to find solutions to students' needs. This type of classroom is highly respectful of the student as an unique learner (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1996).

#### Respecting parents.

The public schools have often neglected its most valuable resource: the parents. Parents of upper-middle class communities are often seen as a nuisance and are used in traditional roles such as PTA, shelving books in the library, or room mothers planning parties. Parents of inner-city community schools are often absent and are criticized for their lack of involvement in their child's school. There is a lack of respect for the parents in many schools because there is a lack of understanding of the parent role and needs within the context of educating their child.

Parents need to be involved with their child's education. When parents are involved, the child does much better at school, no matter what the family's socioeconomic level (Swap, 1993). The level of parent participation at school and how the parents are engaged are in the hands of the principal. The principal needs to provide the parents an opportunity to communicate their personal and community needs and structure a plan to meet those needs within the goals of the school.

Parents will feel respected when they are given opportunities to meaningfully participate in their community school. Parental participation may look different from parent to parent and from school to school.

Parents may be equal members of the school's governance body. They would be actively engaged in investigating curriculum changes, contributing to improvement of the discipline policy, and making suggestions on how to increase parental involvement.

Parents may need the school to be a resource hub for their family. The school could be a place for mother and father to go to check out educational activities and games to enhance home learning. Just as the public library is a place to check out literary materials, the community school could be a place for parents to check out learning materials.

The community school could also serve the parents well. The parents could come to the school to join a parental enhancement group. This can provide parents needed support and information about child rearing strategies. The parent could also come to classes held at the school to enhance their job related skills. Instructors from the university or community college could hold needs specific classes. All these ideas give a clear message to the parents that they are needed to be involved at their child's school and they are respected.

#### Students respecting one another.

The most important message that educators want students to learn is that they need to respect one another. This is certainly an arduous task. Just about everywhere a person looks there is rudeness, apathy, and disregard for others. All one has to do is take a drive on the highway or walk around in a mall. Schools must rise above the callousness and train students to be respectful to one another.

Conflict resolution is a valuable devise for all children to learn. This is a program in which students resolve arguments with their peers with little intervention from adults. This gives students confidence in solving their own

problems without running to another person for help so often. The program encourages students to use I-statements and how to avoid words that make the other persons hostile or defensive. Conflict resolution requires the persons involved to listen to different points of view and restate the other person's feelings. Such skills need to be taught and practiced otherwise they will not be used when a conflict does arise.

Although love and respect are ambiguous concepts, they can be defined specifically by examples. I believe that love and respect are necessary ingredients in a quality school, where students' respectful behavior is as important as their intellect, where teachers' positive relationships to parents, students, and one another are as important as their instructional delivery, and where the principal's character and virtue is as important as her/his leadership and vision and day to day management style. When the people in schools reflect upon their interdependent relationships with one another, a community will form.

### Knowledge and Skill

A good principal looks into the future and tries to make predictions. Certain trends should guide the principal in formulating a vision of what an elementary school should do for its students, parents and community. There is only one reason why a principal should do this. A principal needs to formulate and then articulate his/her vision so that the children can be better prepared for a successful future. I would like to describe three trends in America that have implications for our educational institutions.

### Quality Teachers

Above all other reform initiatives, there is one that is more important than any other. If education has any chance of improving, quality teachers are the key. A teacher's expertise is the most important factor in student achievement. What teachers know and do is the most important influence on what students learn. In

the last fifteen years, there has been a great deal discovered about teaching and learning.

Expert teachers are knowledgeable in child development and how children learn. They create lessons that connect the students' experiences and interest to their new learning. They are able to make subject matter interesting and are able to present it in a variety of ways for all learners. They know how to diagnose student problems and build on students' strengths. Effective teachers have strong knowledge about their subject matter, student learning, and teaching methods (NCTAF, 1996).

According to Porter and Brophy (1988), there are six characteristics to effective instruction:

1. Teachers promote learning by communicating to their students what is expected and why. Expert teachers explicitly state what the students will learn and how it is related to their lives.
2. Teachers who accept responsibility for students outcomes are more effective. When the learning process breaks down, expert teachers reevaluate the situation and try alternative teaching strategies until students reach the teacher's expectations. The same holds true for student's misbehavior.
3. Teachers promote learning by providing their students with strategies for monitoring and improving their own learning efforts and with structured opportunities for independent learning activities. Metacognition is the ability to monitor one's own thinking and learning. All learners, whether they be students or teachers, need self-monitoring strategies to be independent learners
4. Effective teachers not only know the subject matter they intend their students to learn but also know the misconceptions their students bring to the classroom that will interfere with their learning of that subject. Expert teachers not only have to make connections between student's knowledge and experiences to the new learning, but need to confront any misconceptions about their knowledge that may interfere with new learning.

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5. Published instructional materials usually contribute to instructional quality.

Although published materials have their faults, clearly, quality materials aide expert teachers with their delivery.

With instruction so important, one would think that schools are placing staff development as a top priority. Unfortunately, in the past, staff development has been characterized as one-day workshops that had very little effect on teacher's instructional skills. In fact, staff development days are far between. Nationally, U.S. school districts invest little in continuous staff development for their teachers and spend much less of these limited resources on unproductive practices. Estimates of professional development support range from 1% to 3% of districts operating budgets. In addition, teachers have little to say about the topic of the staff development that they attend (NCTAF, 1996).

The way districts train their teachers need to change. Teachers are told they need to lecture less and structure their class for active learning, but yet the majority of staff development classes lecture teachers as they take passive learner roles. District's staff development programs are criticized for being short in length, lacking vision and neglecting follow-up. Showers, Joyce, and Bennet (1987), analysis of a review of staff development illustrate the following points:

1. What the teacher thinks about teaching determines what the teacher does when teaching. In-training teachers, therefore, we must provide more than "going through the motions" of teaching. Teachers need to be reflective about their practice.
2. Although all teachers can take useful information back to their classrooms when training includes four parts: a) presentation of theory and research; b) demonstration of the new strategy; c) initial practice in the workshop; and d) prompt and on-going feedback about their efforts.
3. Teachers are likely to keep and use new strategies and concepts if they receive coaching (either expert or peer) while they are trying the new ideas in their classrooms.
4. Competent teachers with high self-esteem usually benefit more from training than their less competent, less confident colleagues.
5. Flexibility in thinking helps teachers learn new skills and incorporate them into their repertoires of tired and true methods.
6. Individual teaching styles and value orientations do not often affect teachers' abilities to learn from staff development.

7. A basic level of knowledge or skill on a new approach is necessary before teachers can “buy in” to it.
8. Initial enthusiasm for training is reassuring to the organizers but has relatively little influence upon the learning.
9. It does not seem to matter where or when training is held, and it does not really matter what the role of the trainer is (administrator, teacher, or professor). What does matter is the teaching design.
10. Similarly, the effects of the training do not depend on whether teachers organize and direct the program; although social cohesion and shared understandings do facilitate teachers’ willingness to try out new ideas (pp. 79).

### Diverse Populations

The demographics in America are changing as they have never before. There are more older Americans now than ever before. With advanced medical technology, citizens are living longer. Along with larger numbers come political power. Public schools will need this segment of the population. These are the people that vote for or against bond and levy issues. These are the people that vote for representatives that support or destroy public education. It is an understatement to say this demographic group is vital to education. Therefore, principals need to keep their older community members involved with school events and share information about what is going on in their neighborhood schools. Public relations is most vital to this segment of the population. Another segment of the population that continues to grow are the minority groups.

If demographic trends continue as they have, minority populations, particularly African American and Latino, will continue to grow rapidly as Anglo populations increase at a much slower rate. In many inner-city schools across the nation, the minority student populations are the majority. This has many implications for our schools and their principals.

As the Spanish speaking population increases, so does the need for bilingual workers. Often Anglo citizens complain that they wish that Latinos would learn English when they come to this country. Unfortunately the issue is more complicated than just learning English. There have also been initiatives making English our national language and over thirty states have passed such laws making

all state business conducted in English. This has been controversial. The reality is that Spanish is fast becoming a language spoken in many communities across the nation, especially in the South and Northeast. In America 3 out of 4 language-minority students speak Spanish.

As the Latino and Spanish speaking cultures increase, it will become necessary for future citizens to be bilingual in Spanish and English. This trend is very predictable. In states such as Texas, California, Florida, and New York, much of the work force is already bilingual. As a principal, encouraging and promoting a multicultural perspective is not enough. The productive citizens of tomorrow will need two languages, even those living in predominantly white states because: a) the children of today may be living in a multicultural setting as adult workers; and b) the historically white states, such as Iowa, are fast becoming more culturally diverse with time.

Since acquiring a second language takes at least 7-10 years and the optimal age for learning a second language is 8-12 years old (Lessow-Hurley, 1990), I believe all children in the elementary schools should learn Spanish and English regardless of their first language. Although only 1% of elementary schools offer a second language for English speaking students, there are two methods for English speaking students to learn a second language used in schools. First, schools teach the second language during a special time during the day. Often it is for a half an hour taught by a specialist, similar to music or art taught by their respective specialist (National Association for Bilingual Education [NABE], 1993).

A second form of second language acquisition for English speaking students are called two-way bilingual programs. Two-way programs occur when LEP (limited English proficient) students and English speaking students attend the same school. In two-way bilingual programs English speaking students are immersed in a second language alongside LEP children who are native speakers of the second language. The strength of this approach is that it aims at additive bilingualism for all the



students involved (Lessow-Hurley, 1990). Two-way schools usually have four characteristics: a) a non-English minority language is used 50% of the curriculum; b) in each period of instruction, only one language is used; c) preferably both English and non-English speakers are present in equal numbers; and d) the English and non-English speakers are integrated in all lessons (NABE pp.484, 1993).

LEP students who learn English in two-way bilingual programs learn English at a faster rate (they reach the 50th percentile on standardized tests after 4-5 years in both languages) and acquire long term academic achievement by sustaining gains well into the secondary level (Thomas, W. & Collier, V., 1995).

Two-way bilingual programs have specific performance objectives: a) language minority students will become literate in their native language as well as English; b) language majority students will become proficient in a second language while making normal progress in their English language development; c) all students will make grade level progress in the academic content areas; and d) all students will develop positive self-image and attitudes toward other cultures (Shabka, 1993).

Learning another language will help students become better prepared for the future, however, language alone will not improve relations between diverse cultures. Students and staff need to become proficient in other types of communication. Staff members especially need to be trained in cultural sensitivity. Schools that are trying to establish trust among the community can ill-afford wrong messages unintentionally given by teachers and principals because they are not aware of cultural differences (Rucci, 1991). Principals serving in multicultural schools need to be aware of high and low context cultures when communicating; otherwise miscommunication may occur (Gougeon, 1991).

In high-context cultures certain variables convey a stronger message than actual words. These cultures value interpersonal relationships, they are very sensitive to body languages, and need clear, denotative language (Warner & Winter, 1992). High-context cultures are also slow to change. They may expect schools to support

unity of people and suppress individuality (Gougeon, 1991). For example: greeting, timing, physical setting and age are valued characteristics for the Japanese culture. Maintaining eye contact and responding without allowing time for thought shows disrespect (Warner & Winter, 1992).

High-context culture groups may feel alienated if advanced English skills are used and if emotional interpersonal aspects are not addressed (Gougeon, 1991). For instance, Latinos need a smaller personal space than do Anglos, which may lead Latinos to compensate by trying to move closer. As Anglos keep stepping away, Latinos may perceive the stepping back as an insult and thereby create unintentional conflict. If Anglo educators are aware of these cultural differences, then they are able to control their urge to step back for personal space. Whenever disagreement occurs, especially, with Asian parents/children, saving face is an important aspect of their culture. For example, during a conversation, students and parents of high-context cultures will often nod their heads to say they understand or disagree (Rucci, 1991).

In low-context cultures such as North America and Europe, directness and candidness is valued (Warner & Winter, 1992). Changes are more widely accepted. Schools are expected to stress individuality and emphasize oral and written communication (Gougeon, 1991).

### The Whole Child

Too often institutions in our society want to repair one part of the person when something goes wrong instead of looking at the whole individual. This piece-meal approach can be seen when doctors treat the physical ailment but are criticized for disregarding the emotional response that may follow the surgery. Likewise, many schools see their sole purpose as providing academia to students regardless of the social and emotional status of the student. After all, need we look further than to take notice of a district's standardized test scores to judge whether they have been successful at teaching? How often have we failed at remedying the problems of a

child without considering other factors? A young child is having difficulty learning to read. So educators provide some sort of federally funded program to “fix” the child. But the child usually continues having academic difficulty throughout their education. A child disrupts class. The student is sent down to the principal’s office. The unwanted behaviors continue. The child is suspended. The unwanted behaviors continue. The child is staffed into a behaviors disorder class where there are other children with similar or worse behavior problems and misbehaviors are modeled on a daily bases. The unwanted behavior continues.

In the ideal situation, I believe that parents and schools should form an educational partnership from the day the child is born. Teachers and parents can work together for the benefit of the children. Programs such as Parents as Teachers (PAT), where a teacher comes to the child’s home soon after they are born and demonstrate strategies and techniques to the parents that can increase the child’s intellect and improve behaviors as the child grows older. Such home visits continue on a regular basis, perhaps once a month, as the child develops, until preschool age. These programs are available to all parents of infants and toddlers in Missouri no matter the economic status of the parents. Such programs take a proactive stance. They recognize parents as the most important teachers in a child’s life. They see parents as fundamental to the child’s education.

Developmentally appropriate preschools must be available to parents as the educational partnership continues. Public schools need to invest in quality preschool programs especially in low-income neighborhoods, where affordability and quality are rare. Once such reputable program is High/Scope. High/Scope value developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment procedures; teaching teams that are trained in early childhood development; administrative support that includes curriculum leadership; classes that have two adults and fewer than 20 children; and systematic efforts to include parents in their children’s education (Cohen, 1993).

Once the child reaches grade school the partnership link must not weaken.

Schools together with parents need to assess the child's academic and social/emotional needs and strengths. Many of today's classrooms do little to meet these needs or challenge these strengths. Classrooms are fostering ineffective, passive instructional models. In fact, about 70% of all teachers continue to lecture to their students (Goodlad, 1984). This is the least effective teaching model. Children learn best when they are interacting with their environments. They need to be active participants in their learning (Bredenkamp, 1987). Recent brain research has implications for educators as well. Children learn when they have hands-on experiences, interdisciplinary instruction, and opportunities to connect their own life experiences to their learning (Cohen, 1995). Gardner (1985) bases his Multiple Intelligence Theory on learning behavior and has much in common with brain research. His theory proposes that intelligence is not one dimensional. He suggests that people have seven intelligences with one or more dominant.

Regardless of the research source, there is growing evidence that children learn in many different ways and need varied experiences. Whether the classroom is self-contained, team taught, literary based, or has multi-age grouping, teachers need to be cognizant of the latest research on learning and effective teaching practices. This information needs to be shared with parents so they can start changing their attitudes about what learning is supposed to look like. Since most of our parents were taught in traditional classrooms, they may become suspicious or critical if their child's teacher does not teach in traditional methods.

Schools need to become a second family that connect children and their parents to the teachers and staff. A family that has a common interest in the child. Problems are solved by asking, "What is best for the whole child? How can teachers and parents come together and construct a foundation for a successful child?" A place where everyone will become a community of learners and teachers.

### A Community of Learners and Teachers: A Vision

A vision for the future is vital for a principal. It guides the principal. A set of long-range goals provides the principal and staff a better focus. There are so many worthy investments in education as well as plenty of distractions. A vision helps the principal to avoid those distractions that are not a part of the school's plan. Even those that seem worthy at the time should not be pursued unless the vision is revisited. The vision helps the principal and staff to prioritize what they really want for their students from all the other endeavors, however deserving they may be.

I have discussed many of my beliefs and philosophy of education. My vision would include a school in which love and respect are shared and valued by teachers and modeled for students. My vision includes a celebration of our cultural heritage. A manifestation of this awareness will be the teaching of a second language beginning in preschool for all students and teachers. I would like to see public schools supporting partnerships with parents beginning with the birth of a child and through preschool education. My vision would focus on quality teaching as its center piece. Although there are many roles that the principal plays, such as disciplinarian and public relations manager, I see myself as an instructional leader.

#### Instructional Leader

Good schools have good principals that are instructional leaders. An instructional leader knows that the best way to improve students' learning is through good teaching. Instructional leaders are committed to improving instruction. I want to structure the teacher's day so that instruction is valued:

1. I would like to observe classrooms frequently. I want to be familiar with what goes on in every classroom. This will help me when I need to evaluate teachers. This will also help me assess the school's instructional needs.
2. I would like to schedule lunches, specials, recesses, and other similar activities at times that will leave large instructional blocks of time for the teachers

and students. So often teachers are left with 10-15 minutes of fill time. This time is too small for quality instruction.

3. I would like to cut the number of interruptions during the school day. Teachers are interrupted by intercoms, visits from other staff members delivering messages.

4. I would like to provide teachers opportunities to talk to one another in a professional setting. This can be done by scheduling planning periods at the same time, structuring professional study groups, encouraging peer coaching, and providing on-going staff development.

5. I would like to see schools become centered around the child's academic, social, and emotional developmental needs.

A part of being an instructional leader is a principal who is visible. I want to be a very visible principal. Visiting classrooms, walking the hallways, supervising the playground and lunchroom, talking with teachers before and after school, and getting to know many of the children by their first names. Visibility is very important to the teachers and the students.

Instructional leaders often possess similar attributes or skills: a) they are sensitive to the needs of others; b) they explain the reasons for their actions; c) they involve others in important decisions; d) they are open to criticism, without being defensive; e) they are willing to admit mistakes and to make changes; and f) they are honest and fair in interacting with others (Gorton & Schneider, 1991, pp.328).

Much of what a principal does during the day centers around how s/he treats and communicates with other people, therefore the principal needs a repertoire of effective communication skills. Effective communication is argumentatively the most important variable for principals.

### Effective Communicator

Regardless of how complicated the process, there are many ways to communicate effectively. S/he must not only concentrate on the meaning of words,

but also upon the meaning of behavior (Loccisano, 1992). Proficient communicators have several characteristics in common:

1. Effective communicators are able to choose their actions from a repertoire of behaviors. The principal must consider their goal and the goal of the message receiver.
2. Effective communicators must understand the other person's perspective. By understanding another person's point of view, the principal will be able to communicate more effectively with them. This also includes providing staff members opportunities for feedback.
3. Effective communicators construct a variety of frameworks for viewing an issue. Principals need to frame the behavior of others in alternative settings or ways of thinking. For example, do not assume just because a faculty member is quiet during a meeting the s/he does not care about the issue. There may be other reasons that they are quiet. Perhaps an one-on-one discussion with them will reveal how they really feel about the issue.
4. Effective communicators need to self-monitor their behavior. This will allow the administrator to change her/his behavior depending on how well a certain strategy is working. For example, if the principal is facilitating a meeting and her/his goal is to encourage the input of faculty, the administrator needs to monitor the amount of talking s/he is doing during the meeting.
5. Effective communicators tend to communicate better when they care about their relationships. Principals need to nurture her/his professional relationships (Geddes, 1995).

### Time Manager

I have seen many very good principals at the mercy of time. A vision is a much needed commodity, but without time management skills, the principal spends his/her days on day to day menial tasks. The days turn into weeks and months and years and the vision is lost. Certainly, the principal needs to address pending

problems, but must not become so overwhelmed with putting out fires that s/he becomes a manager instead of an instructional leader. I want to be a good manager as well as an instructional leader.

One time management strategy comes from Stephen Covey (1994). He creates a time management matrix divided into quadrants (see Appendix). Effective principals spend the needed time in Quadrant I, solving problems that fast become crisis. Therefore a school leader needs to be well versed in crisis management. Ignoring these problems or treating them without much thought can lead to enormous mistakes.

The best way to become proactive is to spend most of the remaining time in Quadrant II. By spending more time in Quadrant II the quantity and magnitude of the crisis will decrease. Because Quadrant II deals with things that are important, but not urgent, it becomes the heart of effective management. In contrast, I have seen many principals with admirable long-range goals that never leave the ground because her/his leadership is stuck in Quadrants III and IV.

Three years ago I entered the program wanting to be a principal because I thought I could do a better job than many of the principals with whom I have worked. I also wanted to improve student achievement beyond the walls of my classroom, and I thought that the best way to have a positive influence was to be a principal.

Three years later, I continue to have the desire to be a school leader, but I now have a greater understanding of the skills needed to become an effective principal. I have acquired a foundation needed to build upon. Knowledge such as curriculum improvement, effective teaching strategies and ways to evaluate them, connecting technology to student learning, the importance of staff development, and how to open the school doors for more parental participation. All and much more are important for principals to know. But yet I learned more than prescribing facts and figures to problems. I became aware of the human element of being a good leader.



I am more conscious than ever about the importance of building relationships with people. Effective leaders have a special influence on people because they sincerely care about them. They are able to communicate an atmosphere of trust. They actively listen to those around him/her. And in turn, something phenomenal happens. People change their attitudes and behaviors, not because the principal tells them to, but because they choose to. What once was an idea of the principal's is now a shared vision for the school.

I do not have any disillusionments that my vision as described in this paper will become real. It would become my vision forced upon others and it would be doomed for failure. But like any evolutionary process, as I share ideas with staff and they share ideas with me, a shared vision will surface for the school. (A vision that is as individual as each child that attends the school.) A vision that is formed from the best ideas of teachers, support staff, parents, students, the community, and the principal.

Appendix

The Time Management Matrix

Urgent		Not Urgent	
I	Activities: Crisis Pressing Problems Deadline-driven problems	II	Activities: Prevention Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning
III	Activities: Interruptions, some calls Some mail, some reports Some meetings Popular activities Proximate, pressing matters	IV	Activities: Trivia, busy work Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities

Important

Not Important

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