

1992

A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Tara A. Beau
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1992 Tara A. Beau

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beau, Tara A., "A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay" (1992).
Graduate Research Papers. 2032.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2032>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe my feelings about education and the role of the principal. I will begin by discussing some of my values and beliefs about education, then I will explain how I, as an administrator, would demonstrate these values and beliefs.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

By

Tara Beau

July 1992

This Research Paper by: Tara A. Beau

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY
SCHOOLS: A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

7-10-92

Date Approved

Robert H. Decker

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Norman McCumsey

7-11-92

Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

7/16/92

Date Received

Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

The purpose of this paper is to describe my feelings about education and the role of the principal. I will begin by discussing some of my values and beliefs about education, then I will explain how I, as an administrator, would demonstrate these values and beliefs.

Values and Beliefs

One of my primary values is the importance of education. I believe that education is as important as other necessities to sustain life. I feel people have an innate drive to learn. I use the term education synonymously with learning. According to Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary (1981), learn means "to gain knowledge, or understanding of, or skill in, by study, instruction, or experience" (p. 1286). Similar in meaning is the word educate, which means "to provide with information" (p. 723). Learning, both in school and out, reflects a desire to make our lives meaningful. We are constantly learning, although not necessarily attending school.

The purpose of schools is to educate all students, in order that they may become functioning members of society. This includes those who have a strong desire or ability

to learn, as well as students with little academic talent, students with learning disabilities, students with physical handicaps, or students who have little motivation to learn. There are great advantages to teaching all students. In order for the United States to continue to compete in a world market we cannot afford to give up on any of our citizens. Our citizens must be educated if they are to make intelligent decisions on living in a global society. There are also disadvantages if we do not educate all students. As pointed out by Davis and Thomas (1989), many of our social problems are the result of inadequate education. I believe that all students can and should learn. I also believe it is the responsibility of schools to teach all students. Not all students can succeed at the same task, or to the same level, but every student has the ability to succeed. Our job as educators is to create an environment that ensures success for all.

Since all students have the ability to learn and learning is important to the continuation of our society and to the life of the individual, I believe it is the responsibility of American schools to find the means of educating each child. This may not be

the same methods previously used in American education. Levine and Havinghurst (1989) sight evidence which demonstrates that today's students are vastly different than they were 40 years ago. There is an increase in the percent of children living in poverty, an increase in teenage pregnancy, and an increase in single parent families. Combined with the changing job market and advances in technology, the world our students live in, and will work in, is vastly different from 40 years ago. Since the student and his world have changed, schools must also change to meet the needs of these students.

I think the principalship is a position which has a major impact on student learning. My primary reason for becoming a principal is because I feel it is the best way for me to put my beliefs and values, with regard to schools and education, into action. Some of the fundamental areas that demonstrate this impact are: vision; educational leadership, which includes curriculum and teacher evaluation; management; and school and community relations.

Vision

I believe an effective school is one that teaches all of its students. These schools are made up of teachers, parents, students, and administrators that are working together to help each individual student work to his or her maximum potential. These schools need to have principals who are strong instructional leaders. As discussed by Fullan (1992), this does not imply an autocratic leader who has a rigid vision and forces all staff to have that same vision. A strong instructional leader works with the staff and the community to develop a vision for the school that is shared by all. This vision should be the guiding force for all that goes on within the school.

The principal has a vital role in the creation and implementation of a school's vision. Tom Peters (1987) has some good ideas on what encompasses a good vision, creating a vision, and living the vision. I agree with him that the school's vision must be clear and challenging, stable but constantly subject to question, and prepare for the future while not ignoring the past. I also strongly agree that the principal must live the vision and be

constantly bringing it to the attention of the staff and the community. When Mr. Peters discusses creating the vision he talks of one person creating it after getting suggestions or ideas from others. This is where I disagree with Mr. Peters. I think the principal must have a broad general vision about education. You must have an idea of where you are going or you cannot lead others. I feel however, that when it comes to creating a vision for a particular school, it is vital for the entire staff and the community to share that vision. The only means of creating a vision that all share, is for all to have input in creating the vision. By this I do not mean people give suggestions and then the principal creates the vision. I feel all, or a representative from all groups, should work together in its creation.

This does not imply that you need to create a completely new vision each time a new parent, student, staff member, or administrator comes to the school. A discussion of the school's vision should be a part of the orientation process for new parents and students. New staff and new administrators should be told of the school's vision as part of the

hiring process. If their personal vision is vastly different from, or in opposition to, the school's vision, I do not feel they should be hired.

There will be modifications to the vision with time because a vision must look to the future. If the vision never changed it would cease to be a vision. If it is to be the guide for the school it will be constantly challenged when decisions need to be made. It will need to be adjusted or adapted to meet the needs of an ever changing world and a changing school population.

Educational Leadership

Curriculum

Many studies have been conducted to advise educators on what is best for students. Some of these, like the Carnegie Report (1989), have had a positive impact on education. This report emphasizes the need for; teachers and administrators trained to work with a particular age of students, parent involvement in the school, a core academic program, and ensuring success for all students by the use of a variety of instructional techniques. This study has promoted the growing middle school movement which emphasizes a group of teachers

working together with a common group of students. It emphasizes teaching the whole child both affective and academic. It has caused people to readjust their thinking about teaching this age of student.

Another report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1984) also has had a strong impact on our nation's education, but not necessarily for the better. This report emphasized standardized tests, curriculum requirements with more time spent on the basic courses prescribed by the report, and more rigorous and measurable standards. It concentrated on what should be taught and completely ignored how to teach. It emphasized a college preparatory curriculum for all and ignored how all students were going to accomplish this. Its basic premise was that, if kids just try harder and do more, they will succeed.

Another study by John Goodlad (1983) took an indepth look at what schools are for, what schools are asked to do, and what schools do. This study pointed out that there is a poor climate in many of our nation's schools. This poor climate, as noted by student boredom and a negative relationship between teachers and students, leads to an

inequitable access to knowledge. Goodlad (1983) also found that instruction rarely went beyond mere possession of information. There was little evidence of an application of this knowledge.

A principal must be able to read the huge volumes of material that continues to come out about schools. Principals must research who is conducting the studies, what the make-up of the group studied is, and how accurate the findings are. Principals must then be able to learn from the valid useful reports and not allow the influence of the poor reports to have a detrimental influence on the school.

A strong instructional leader must have high expectations of both students and staff. An instructional leader realizes that there is no one way for all students to learn. Therefore principals must have a broad enough base of knowledge of the learning process to evaluate a wide variety of teaching styles and techniques, in order to help teachers find the best methods of teaching the individual students. The principal must, while relying on the expertise of the teachers in the different curricular areas, keep up with the current

trends in each curricular area and encourage teachers to do the same. The principal must encourage both students and staff to work to their utmost abilities and must provide the resources to accomplish this. This means providing inservice and training within the school, as well as encouraging teachers, and providing opportunities for, attending workshops and classes outside the school.

Evaluation

The principal must be aware of what makes an effective teacher. Berliner (1983) suggests that teachers plan well, spend more than 50 percent of their time teaching, monitor students during guided practice, check for understanding, give positive feedback, and make students responsible for their actions and their grades. Rosenshine (1986) found that the research on effective teaching suggests teachers should; tell students the goal of the lesson, review previous material, present the new material, allow time for guided practice, give feedback, and allow time for independent practice.

The primary purpose of teacher evaluation is to improve instruction. Principals must know what makes a good teacher if they are to help teachers

become better. I feel that summative evaluations, although they must be done, are not nearly as important as the formative evaluation. McGreal (1983) discusses a variety of evaluation models ranging from Common Law models, with a major emphasis on summative evaluation, to Naturalistic models, which do not actually exist in school settings. He spends considerable time discussing the goal setting model as a cyclical approach to improving teaching.

A good formative evaluation includes meeting with the teacher before the observation to discuss what is going to happen during the lesson. This is a time when a teacher, if there is sufficient trust between the teacher and the principal, will identify areas for improvement and ask the principal to specifically observe those areas. The principal and the teacher will also discuss what goals that teacher has for becoming a better teacher. The purpose of the observation is to make that teacher better, to find what they are doing well, and to help them in whatever area the teacher wishes to improve in. During the post-evaluation conference the principal discusses with the teacher what was

observed. There is usually a series of pre-evaluation discussions, observations, and post-evaluation conferences. The biggest disadvantage to this evaluation method is the time required to observe, conference, inservice, and keep records.

Another method of improving teaching is through peer coaching. Garmston (1987) discusses three models of peer coaching. There are several advantages to peer coaching including a deepening collegiality among staff members and helping teachers to think more deeply about teaching. Garmston suggests that administrators have a vital role in peer coaching. They must help select the coaching model, provide training for coaches, model positive coaching behaviors, and demonstrate that they value peer coaching. A good method of showing that they value peer coaching is for the principal to request teachers to practice peer coaching when the principal is giving an inservice. Principals must ensure that teachers know when coaching is taking place and when the teacher is being evaluated. I believe that a good peer coaching

program can be a great help to an administrator in improving the quality of education in a building.

Management

By management I am not referring to managing people, I am referring to managing the smooth running of the school. According to Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie, and Hurwitz (1984) the secondary school principal is out of his office at least 50 percent of the time. During this time principals are in classrooms and hallways meeting with staff about a variety of needs within the building, or outside the building interacting with superiors, parents, board members, or other community members. The principal must ensure that teachers have the supplies necessary to perform their job. This implies a clean, safe environment as well as the books, paper, and other supplies necessary. The principal must be aware of board policy and state and federal laws that effect his school.

Stephen Covey (1989) looked into the habits of what are considered to be effective people. He discusses methods which he feels would make people more effective. I agree with Covey that, for principals to be effective, they must find some

means of managing their time and prioritizing the tasks that need to be accomplished, whether it is Covey's method or not. A principalship is a very demanding position and, if principals are going to continue to be effective, they need to find a way of balancing the needs of the job with their own personal and family needs.

School and Community

The parents and the community are an important part of an effective school. The principal must make all people in the community feel they have an interest in the school. The principal must ensure a continuous public relations program to increase citizen understanding of the educational needs and practices of the school. This public relations program is a two way process of communication. It communicates the role, objectives and accomplishments of the school as well as interpreting public attitudes and encouraging public involvement. Kindred, Bagin, Gallagher (1990) point out that the public relations process consisted of both the day to day activities of the staff, parents, pupils, and people in the community, as

well as a planned and continuing series of activities for both sending and receiving messages.

The principal must be aware of both the internal public made up of teachers, students, and support staff, and the external public consisting of parents, nonparent members of the community and members of the business community. A school that has a poor climate is not going to function as an effective school, nor is a school going to be effective if the community is not supporting it. Kindred et al. (1990) suggests several methods for improving relations between the community and the school. One of the best methods of ensuring good relations is to let people know about the successes within the school. Acknowledge the problems but focus on the successes. Take the public's concerns, especially about discipline, seriously. Use language that is understood by the listener. The school must work with the business community and make every effort to involve non-parents in the school.

It is vital for not only the school, but the school district, to have a well developed written community relations program. The principal is

responsible for ensuring that the school's plan is part of the district's plan and that the two work together to provide communication between school and community.

Conclusion

An effective principal is one who works to make a school where students learn. The most important qualities of an effective principal are: a concern for both students, community, and staff; a knowledge of what makes a good teacher and a good school; leadership skills; the communication and managerial skills to make a school run smoothly; and the desire to continue to learn.

I feel that I have the concern for students, staff, and community. I already possess a strong desire to learn. I would hope that I will have the other skills necessary to make a good principal.

References

- Berliner, D. C., (1983, September). The executive functions of teaching. Instructor, pp. 28-40.
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century (The Report of the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents). Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Covey, S. R. (1989). The seven habits of highly effective people: Restoring the character ethic. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Davis, G. A., & Thomas M. A. (1989). Effective schools and effective teachers. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Fullan, M. G. (1992). Visions that blind. Educational Leadership, 49(5), 19-20.
- Garmston, R. J. (1987). How administrators support peer coaching. Educational Leadership, 44(5), 18-26.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1983). A place called school: Prospects for the future. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kindred, L. W., Bagin, D., & Gallagher, D. R. (1990). The school and community relations (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Levine, D. U., & Havighurst, R. J. (1989). Society and education (7th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

McGreal, T. L. (1983). Successful teacher evaluation. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Morris, V. C., Crowson, R. L., & Porter-Gehrie, C., Hurwitz, E. (1984). Principals in action: The reality of managing schools. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1984). Meeting the challenge of a nation at risk. Cambridge, MA: USA Research.

Peters T. J. (1987). Thriving on chaos: Handbook for a management revolution. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Rosenshine, B. V. (1986). Synthesis of research on explicit teaching. Educational Leadership, 43(7), 60-69.

Webster's third new international dictionary of the English language (unabridged). (1981). Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam.