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A vision for administering schools: A reflective essay

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A vision for administering schools: A reflective essay

Abstract

Education can be restructured through strategic leadership, curriculum, evaluation, collaboration, vision, site-based management, technology, reflection, finance and life 1 long learning. Following are some of the points on how a personal vision on restructuring in education may be a success. This vision could be a framework that guides me and others through the many daily situations faced in schools, and it will provide direction in a less random and more thoughtful way. Barth (1990) wrote: Expanding the vision within the school house is an enterprise that will create schools with room enough for all of us to live and work and have our children learn. When we create schools that, we value, for our children and for ourselves, we will have created schools of value to others as well. (p.516) This vision will be a set of long-term planning ideas that would address what 'should be' achieved in schools based on the individual needs of the school.

A VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SCHOOLS

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

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and Counseling

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of

Arts in Education

by

Christine M. Beumer

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Introduction to Administering Schools

Education can be restructured through strategic leadership, curriculum, evaluation, collaboration, vision, site-based management, technology, reflection, finance and life long learning. Following are some of the points on how a personal vision on restructuring in education may be a success. This vision could be a framework that guides me and others through the many daily situations faced in schools, and it will provide direction in a less random and more thoughtful way.

Barth (1990) wrote:

Expanding the vision within the school house is an enterprise that will create schools with room enough for all of us to live and work and have our children learn.

When we create schools that, we value, for our children and for ourselves, we will have created schools of value to others as well. (p.516)

This vision will be a set of long-term planning ideas that would address what 'should be' achieved in schools based on the individual needs of the school.

Strategic Leadership

In order to accomplish a vision for a school the leader will have to develop a site-based strategic plan. The principal will need to identify the trends that affect the school. Herman (1989) stated:

The keys to successful strategic planning include: involving stakeholders, scanning for relevant data, identifying critical success factors, developing vision and mission statements, doing an analysis of the site manager's supports and constraints, arriving at strategic goals and objectives, developing action plans and allocating resources, and arriving at monitoring structures. (p. 23)

Completing a needs survey, communicating with community and school personnel, allowing two-way communication in and out

of the district are ways to start this process. Trying to build a bridge between the school and community through communication may create an environment for continuous educational and life-long learning. The school can house the programs and use resources to eliminate barriers between all agencies, businesses, and community members that are a part of the district plan for reform.

Being proficient in leadership, supervision and administrative management can make a difference in the restructuring effort. The leader needs to use her/his knowledge of teaching and learning practices, child growth and development, general knowledge, and commitment to children to lead others. The principal is a key factor between the community and school image. S(he) is the one that can enhance a sense of harmony and purpose between the school and community with her/his skills and knowledge. Observing, talking and meeting with staff and community regularly in structured and nonstructured events will enhance the leader's

knowledge of the needs of the school and community population. This leads staff members and students toward achievement of goals. Elementary and Middle Schools Proficiencies for Principals (1991) quotes, NAESP's Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools:

Outstanding schools are never satisfied that all is well. They are continually seeking to improve. The same is true for the administrators of those schools. As leaders of leaders, truly proficient principals never stop learning and striving and growing. (p.19)

Political Trends

One must understand that the changes in education are driven by more than educational considerations. Political elements play an important role in the process. Ghan (1990) summarized trends in the state that have started the change process. These trends are demographic circumstances, aging of Iowa's population, and outmigration from the state. Historically, school restructuring is not new, but some of the

current restructuring forms are new. Reorganization, dissolution, and whole grade sharing are three types of government activities being taken seriously in the state. Monetary bonuses and tax breaks have been incentives given to districts involved in these types of restructuring. In general, if it were not for population changes or for low population, restructuring would not be a major issue. Schools are changing. Population/demographics, educational program, geography, and long term stability need to be issues of concern. Restructuring is a slow process that can cause turmoil and poor relations in districts. The state and leader must give guidance so that the schools can improve. Providing a network of support for parents may be one way for a district to address change in education. That way parents may take a more active role in educational choices for their children. Drawing on my experiences of teaching in two districts that have consolidated will also be a guide for me.

Reform efforts are off to a good start in many school systems. Murphy (1990) suggested:

Current reform initiatives will be more successful than previous efforts because: (a) the agreement on reform movement; (b) the agreement on reform strategies among key political actors (businesses, state governments, local education agencies, teachers unions, and so forth); (c) the changing nature of school organizations (the development of subsystems more tightly linked than in the past); (d) an emphasis on the use of developmental rather than redistributive policy mechanisms; and (e) shifts in the core values of education (away from egalitarianism, isolation, and conservatism within the teaching profession). (p.52)

Our district is starting the reform that the author suggests. Consistent with Murphy's suggestion; our school district will be consolidated with a neighboring district in the 1993-94 school year. Each building in our district provided input that

fostered the development of the mission of the district. We have a building-decision team that share ideas and make decisions with feedback from all school members. Making decisions in this collaborative fashion has benefited all. This group may expand in the future to include community members. Emphasis in group this year is on distribution of funds because of the threat of loss of state funds. Through input school members take ownership and pride in the school which influences their behavior. There are still issues in the school that need to be addressed to allow productive growth for all. Clearly defining the responsibilities of the group and principal's decisions may help foster this growth. This will be one way to provide an opportunity to learn skills to help meet demands placed on the district, leader, teacher, community and the students. For restructuring to advance beyond governance and control, to improve teaching and learning, programs must ensure teachers have knowledge and skills to work with peers and students. Setting up schedules that are flexible will be a

way to help foster the development of teaming both in and out of the classroom and school. Allowing access to information will allow students, teachers, parents, community members, and administrators to work cooperatively to set up individualized, experienced-based plans to solve problems. Creating a learning environment where students use higher-order thinking skills to prepare them for a global world.

Another district level team that is in place is the VISTA team. This group has worked throughout the 1992-1993 school year to determine what its role will be. A subcommittee was formed and took information from the current 1992-1993 meetings and presented a proposal to the team. Next year the team will meet monthly instead of bi-weekly. Subcommittees of curriculum, Phase 3, and staff development will meet monthly and bring information back to the team. By the creation of these subcommittees VISTA may better address transformation. This may take place because each building

will choose members to represent themselves instead of the superintendent.

A major problem faced in schools is time. The key to solving this problem is effective time management. Having a vision with meaning is one way to manage time. If everyone has ownership of the vision then the team knows the direction it is headed. Allowing planning time to bring teams together is one thing I will do to ensure ownership of the vision. I will bring teachers together in grade, building, and district level meetings. Sharing my own beliefs when appropriate may also give direction to those who are wondering where we are going. Talking with people creates bonds toward a common vision. I want to work in an atmosphere where an open system is encouraged and community service is enhanced. I want to make things happen for students, staff and community.

The role one takes to bring business and schools together in our communities is vital. Van Deusen (1991) tells, "Children should contribute to what is studied, as well as the regulation

and operation of the school. In this way, children will come to take charge of their own learning and begin to learn about democracy in action" (p. 60). Students need to be a part of the building and district teams by being allowed input into school decisions. Meeting with students in student centered meetings may begin to build this network. Leaders need to bring all the agencies together to move in a direction that is not the usual. They will need to bring them together in public and private planning sessions. Creating schools that teach all children demands energy and creativity from all. Creating a high-quality early childhood program with all working together may create a community atmosphere of equitable and excellent education for all our children. World Class Schools: The Iowa Initiative (1990) stated, "What at one time we considered basic skills are no longer adequate in an information society," (p. 3). We need to pool our resources and give students the outcomes to succeed in the present and future. School and public agencies will have to pool ideas, so appropriate services

can be combined where possible. Schools need to expand their staff development and curriculum so that problem solving, cooperative learning, out-come based education, and site-based skills are incorporated in the classroom. Students need to be given the same empowerment as the teachers, administrators, and parents. The schools of the future need to be the center for all support agencies working to meet demands of children's needs. When building and remodeling of schools takes place local agencies and schools need to plan together to see what can be incorporated in them. The school district needs to have representation on the local city planning team. Colleges, vocational schools, and local districts need to team together in courses they provide. This will provide more opportunities and interest for regular and at-risk populations in our schools.

Organizational Structure of Schools

The traditional dominant organizational culture of school places great emphasis on the specification of procedural rules

and regulations, on hierarchical control systems, and a need of centralized decision making. Restructuring calls for a change to an equalizing the distribution of power, as consensus and collaboration are accepted as norms in place of bureaucratic direction and control. There is an expectation of creating a professional work environment, through collegial and collective management at the school site level. With consensus and collaboration ownership of missions, goals and objectives takes place. When ownership of these takes place the chances of implementation increase. Only when implementation occurs will districts see growth and development in their plans. I want to help students, staff, and community members see their relationships between the vision of personal and educational goals.

No singular approach to management will address each school's unique mission and goals that will simultaneously maintain the unity and integrity of the school system as a whole. However, an examination of characteristics common to

practice and innovations generated and found to be successful may reveal an underlying genesis in contemporary research and theory that can be applied within each unique district. Using the appropriate management style with each person and setting, and staying aware of factors that affect individuals on a daily basis will help a leader in her/his efforts to maintain a quality school. I want to start interactions with students, staff, and community members by giving them a chance to share information in an 'around the table' fashion. Where each one has the chance to express her/himself. I want them to know they are the solution not the problem to educational transformation.

Deming's Influence on Schools

In a quality improvement theory Dreyfuss, Cistone, and Divita (1992), lead us to:

Perhaps the most widely and recognized set of principles related to the concept of restructuring that has been advanced by W. Edward Deming, in whose name the most

coveted business prize in Japan, if not in the world, has been designated the Deming Prize. (p. 78)

Application of Deming's first point, "Create constancy of purpose for the improvement of product and service," (p. 81) in supervision can be thought of as a means to redirect supervision's role from checking on teachers to a primary role of continually stimulating teachers.

Deming's second point, "Adopt a new philosophy," (p. 81) can be done by inculcating and reinforcing a sense of values devoted to excellence in workmanship and service.

The third point Deming makes, "Cease dependence on mass inspections," (p. 81) involves a "required recycling" to improvement of the process that is responsible for the observed results. One needs to move away from looking for defects and move toward looking for successes.

In point four Deming suggests, "End the practice of awarding business on price tag alone," (p. 81) there is a need for the development of long term relationships with

individuals and agencies that can supply the best quality supervisory support. This may bring about access to the best materials, service and support.

Point five by Deming, "Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service," (p. 81) administration must be dedicated to the search for improving quality. They must recognize what they can achieve through the supervision process.

Deming's sixth point, "Institute job training and job retraining," (p. 81) is to provide effective linkages between supervision and staff development activity. This leads teachers to integrate new methods into their classrooms.

In Deming's seventh point, "Institute leadership," we need to conceptualize the role of supervisors as facilitators, leaders, helpers and diagnosticians and provide training to improve supervisor's skills in these areas. Then the principal may hold the tools to guide educators forward.

Point eight by Deming, "Drive out fear," (p. 81) tells us to promote personal and professional feelings of security among school staff through open, respectful, and appreciative supervisory environment. This is a critical point with the limited resources schools are faced with.

The ninth point by Deming, "Break down barriers between staff areas," (p. 82) establishing collaborative and mutually supportive and complementary goals may lead to a team approach. Sharing between staff will increase their effectiveness as teachers.

Deming's tenth point, "Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and work force targets," (p. 82) means to avoid top handed down ideas. One may build these through a team approach to problem solving and quality improvement.

The eleventh Deming point, "Eliminate numerical quotas," suggests avoiding minimal quotas. Performance judgements should be based on quality and effective applications of sound methods of practice. Using student and staff products instead

of traditional tests and evaluations may be a more accurate evaluation of the school's mission. Authentic measures of goals may have more meaning to teacher and student.

Point twelve by Deming, "Remove barriers to pride of workmanship," (p. 82) states that supervisors should strive to ensure that personnel have guidance, tools, equipment, materials and support services required to do an excellent job. Providing teachers with models, internships, observations, and mentors will be a start in the right direction. Technology is a means that can lower isolation and increase communication among those interested in education and educational methods. These tools can build a support network through interactive technology.

Deming's thirteenth point, "Institute a vigorous program of education and retraining (focused on quality)," (p. 82) helps a district center on its mission. All participants in the supervisory process, including management, must be provided with the insight and skills required of a comprehensive quality

improvement effort, and a well prepared infra-structure must be formed to provide overall direction and support to the systemwide improvement effort. Education devoted to improvement is essential in transformation.

Deming's final point, "Take action to accomplish the transformation," (p. 82) stresses that a well-prepared supervisory infra-structure must be in place to provide overall direction. This direction of long range goal setting and action planning by this participatory group is essential.

Deming points out that to move forward in education we must have a constancy of purpose we can accomplish this through long-range planning. Districts must adopt a new philosophy. All policies and procedures have to be consistent. These policies and procedures have to reflect the point of view of students, staff, and community. To build quality now we need to do it right the first time. Starting quality education at the primary level. To improve the entire system we have to

look at data and analyze it. Then we may have a paradigm shift and reach our vision.

Political Involvement in Schools

Lepley (1992) stated, "The conception you can bring with you into the year 2010 is that our state's commitment to quality education for every person remains as strong as it is today," (p. 1). This is a thought that I can take with me as I move forward. We can use what works in education and move on into the future. When centering beliefs on what is good for kids we avoid getting stuck in our own paradigms. We want our paradigm to open up opportunity not to be a threat. This allows us to see the school as a place where all can come together as learners to develop. The school can be the coordinator of a lifelong learning service. Flexible schedules, mentoring, discussion, technology, outcomes, integrated curriculum, developmentally appropriate activities will help provide skills for each child to succeed. Each district will be unique providing for a choice in education. Choice provides links in

cooperative learning to motivate all and regenerate interest in quality public education. When interest is regenerated teams can plan together in meetings to build foundations of support for education transformation.

Financial problems have brought the National, State and Local governments together to address key issues in education. It seems that the goals of all three governments are in place. These National and State goals are reflected in the district goals. Students success could be the key to keep them together. Staying aware of and involved in political issues transforming schools will be a role I will take in my leadership position.

Technology

New organizational directions bring us to address communication through technology. Barriers need to be removed. Ray (1991) reported, "Restructuring ultimately depends less on technology than it does on people," (p. 10). However, technology is one tool we can invest in--in the

development of human resources which are the most important ones a school has. We will probably not completely understand how technology helps restructure schools, but it can be a proactive tool if schools use it to support the outcomes they have already identified. Leaders can foster innovative role changes through experimentation with technology. This need not be an untapped resource to help us meet our sociocultural changing society. It may be a key in the management of time.

I plan to use forms of technology to enhance my communication with students, parents, and community members. Constant interaction with these tools can decrease barriers. I want to see technology available to train students and staff. Building a network through local businesses may be a vital means for funding.

Curriculum

The teacher is another key in the restructuring of schools in the Nation. How do we get the teacher to change when the door is closed? How is this behind the door ignorance

changed? Curriculum is thought to be a means to bring about change. Wiggins (1987) stated, "We hope teachers will guide students through the factual mire helping them to become thoughtful and seeing the questions that lurk behind the 'answer'" (p. 4). Giving teachers time to decide what aspects of an idea to cover will ensure an open door policy. There will be set outcomes developed that all are aware of. Teachers will be able to address those items of curriculum that are vital. One may also address the mastery of objectives in the curriculum through a change in the traditional school calendars of the past. Shortening the time between instruction breaks in the calendar may enhance learning.

I believe evaluation is the tool to improving curriculum. Teachers need to be given feedback by students, teachers, parents, community members, other districts, and administrators to enhance their lessons. Evaluation has one purpose the improvement of instruction. Through time the teachers will build trust in their environment. When this trust

occurs they will be able to grow professionally. Then they will be able to set goals for themselves with assistance. I will try to be fair and consistent in my assistance through evaluation. I will try to consider their needs when giving them assistance in improvement through positive feedback. Helping them see their strengths may be the first step in helping them look at areas of improvement.

I believe it is our responsibility to provide all students with an equitable, quality education consistent with the demands of and increasingly diverse society. All children can learn and should be provided opportunities to develop their full potential. Developmentally appropriate instruction should and can actively engage students in the learning process. The home, school, and community need to collaboratively share in the responsibility for educating the whole child for lifelong learning. Educational experiences should be appropriate enhancing each child's self esteem. Each child should have opportunities to learn in a variety of ways. All students need

to be a part of the regular education program. This can be done by the integration of all students into the most developmentally appropriate program. Team teaching may be one means to help address the needs of all students when they are integrated into the programs. Otherwise their needs may not be addressed because of the numerous responsibilities placed on the teacher. Special education and regular education teachers teaching together in the classroom may provide the best support for the individual needs of the student.

If we provide students with an equitable, quality education; they may be able to interact with the world and identify and solve problems, communicate ideas, express feelings, and demonstrate understanding of concepts. They may demonstrate through their behaviors an understanding of the relationship between physical and mental domains, attitudes, dispositions, and skills appropriate for life and future learning, the importance of setting goals and be able to develop and implement plans for achieving them. Students will

understand the interdependent nature of groups and society and demonstrate the skills to collaboratively interact as group members. Students will exhibit creative and critical thinking in a variety of settings. Setting up school and community service programs may provide this link.

Reflection

As leaders in education we have the power to work with peers to shape the future, and a vision to change the world with our society. By being sensitive to the needs of others we can guide them into an educational recommitment. Reflection is the practice of analyzing our actions, decisions, or products by focusing on our process of achieving them. In writing and talking one can bring together thoughts of past, present, and future simultaneously to understand how these actions affect our decisions, for this reflection will guide us in future action that affects others. By drawing conclusions one can begin to understand the dynamics of the cause/effect relationship that occurs between her/his actions and peers. Reflecting on my

work experience as a custodian, waitress, factory worker, sheltered workshop supervisor, summer camp counselor, recreation assistant on a rehabilitation and psychiatric unit, special and regular education teacher, I try to bring my diverse experiences together. These positions allowed me to work with a variety of groups in many situations and roles. Roles such as being low person on the "totem pole" of a task to running a staff meeting.

All these experiences have led me to the conclusion that to run an effective school children have to come first. I will involve staff, parents, students, community and outside agencies in goal setting. To be a listener and expand on ideas presented is one way to facilitate collaboration between all those working toward the success of kids! Knowing the staff, parents, students and community will allow me to set the stage and reach consensus on outcomes. If outcomes are achieved motivation is bound to occur because of positive feedback. Barth stated (1991):

On the other hand, if we learn to look on each hectic occurrence in school as an opportunity, to seek the 'good news' in each event, and to focus on using each occurrence to further our own vision, it may take longer to extinguish a particular fire. We may continue to strive to be closer to our vision than before," (p. 516).

You can never lose sight of what you believe. I will use my values as a means to guide actions and measure success.

Having values in place is vital for the principal's leadership role to be effective.

Assessment

How will we measure what was done to make school transformation a success? What will the true test be? Wiggins (1989) suggested, "To design an authentic test, we must first decide what the actual performances that we want students to be good at," (p. 705). By continued collaboration and evaluation we will obtain the answers to the test without guessing! We will be able to restructure schools with a future

paridigm. Evaluation will continue to be difficult because of other trends that will be at the school site and local, state and national level of governments. The use of a portfolio may be a tool for all to use to guide their own personal development.

The use of Herman's questions:

What are we trying to accomplish? Who is to do it? How is it to be done? How will we know if it has been accomplished? When will it be measured and what resources are required to carry out this plan? (p. 26)

will help us address issues of change. Change is continuous. A leader-principal must be a strategic planner to lead in today's complex and dynamic school environment.

Financial Influences on Transformation

A leader must understand the finance structure of a school to get adequate funds to support the planning efforts of the building team. Developing ways to adequately meet the finance needs of the school is a challenge. Ornstein (1990) suggests that school boards have to make cuts before taxes can

be raised to support education. Boards are doing this, however they are looking to administration for help. Administrators are looking for teacher assistance in the process. Ornstein states that in the 1990s districts will look at class size, updating old buildings, energy economies, administrative and teacher layoffs, and state budgets. Updating buildings is becoming more important, however it is very costly. Innovative planning may be one way in the future to bring in additional state and federal funding.

Districts can come up with small ways to save money. However, the largest cost they have is their personnel. To offer curriculum to meet state standards they will be limited in the amount of cutting they can do in this area. Therefore, state support and control of schools may increase. We will see more schools merge because they cannot afford the personnel they need to meet standards. Additional state support will be difficult considering the budget problem they already face. Principals will have to work with schedules to use teachers to

their fullest teaching potentials. Hiring teachers with multiple certification may enhance the educational opportunities available for students.

If the state is going to be successful in raising taxes with tax payer support, legislators are going to have to work with schools to communicate to the public need for additional funds. They may have to consider raising income taxes since it is the fairest of taxes. They may have to go one step further and look toward having all state agencies working together to meet the individual needs of children in school districts. This consolidation of all state agencies would need to take place with public meetings and interagency cooperative planning. Press coverage that presents education in a positive light is another means of communication that needs to occur.

Chesler (1991) gives schools five ways to consider reducing costs. Two included were renegotiating the shared costs of health insurance and paying your staff not to use medical benefits. These are ways for the district to save

money. This type of incentive is coming into districts slowly. However, if they really want to save programs they need to offer incentives like this. Why not offer the teacher an alternative to the insurance if she is already covered under another health care plan. Teachers, administrators, and boards need to work together to address these saving incentives. Schools will need to seek assistance from insurance companies and other agencies to consider other possible savings.

Conclusion

The teachers and students in my school will be special individuals with personal needs and talents. I want to meet those needs and help them reach their full potential and become positive contributing members of our team. This can be done through open team planning.

My teachers and students will be full of questions. I want to give them the chance to respond enthusiastically. I want to give their questions and answers dignity and respond with more information to foster a thinking, critical

atmosphere that encourages self-esteem. Success breeds success; so I will try to facilitate and generate a challenging environment. My role is to be there when I'm needed, and back off when discovery and experience direct their interaction and exchange of ideas. I want to create an atmosphere where each person is recognized as a contributing team member.

Leaders will need to gather information from their team and use strategic leadership methods to transform the areas of curriculum, evaluation, technology, and finance. Then our schools will have the tools they need to provide a vision to meet the needs of all its publics.

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