

1994

A vision of secondary leadership : a reflective essay

Rodney J. Chamberlin
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1994 Rodney J. Chamberlin

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



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chamberlin, Rodney J., "A vision of secondary leadership : a reflective essay" (1994). *Graduate Research Papers*. 2263.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2263>

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.

A vision of secondary leadership : a reflective essay

Abstract

The educational challenge of the 21st century is to achieve higher levels of learning for all children.

A VISION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:

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

Rodney J. Chamberlin

May 1994

This Research Paper by: Rodney J. Chamberlin

Entitled: A VISION OF SECONDARY LEADERSHIP:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

Robert H. Decker

4-13-94
Date Approved

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Patricia R. Krysinski

4-18-94
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Robert H. Decker

4-25-94
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational Administration and Counseling

The educational challenge of the 21st century is to achieve higher levels of learning for all children. (Thurston, Clift, & Schacht, 1993). Laurence Cremin, as cited by Howe, wrote:

The aim of education is not merely to make parents, or citizens, or workers, or indeed to surpass the Russians or the Japanese, but ultimately to make human beings who will live life to the fullest, who will continually add to the quality and the meaning of their experience and to their ability to direct that experience, and who will participate actively with their fellow human-beings in the building of a good society. (p. 228).

If schools today are to meet the challenges mentioned above then we, as principals, need to provide the leadership that will allow these challenges to become reality. Throughout my studies, I have identified several roles I believe to be essential to effective leadership. In this paper I will discuss the principal as a communicator, motivator, manager, and instructional leader. It is the purpose of this paper to reflect on these roles and to share my beliefs about the role of the principal in leading an effective

school so as to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Dispersed within the text of each role I will also discuss some qualities that I feel are important for an effective principal to have in order to meet the challenges of education today and tomorrow.

Role of Communicator

Communication is important if a school is to be effective. School administrators probably engage in communicating more often than any other process. To persuade, instruct, direct, request, present, stimulate, or develop understanding, administrators must communicate (Gorton & Schneider, 1991).

Communication means that a message not only was sent but also received and responded to in a way indicating that it was understood. Communication is not effective if you are not understood how you intended to be understood. Ubben and Hughes as cited in Gorton and Schneider (1991) proposed four questions which administrators can utilize to assess their communication techniques.

1. If the message was received, was it read?
2. If it was read [heard], was it understood?
3. If it was understood, was it understood in the right spirit?

4. If it was understood in the right spirit, will it be acted on in a positive manner? (p. 70)

Communication is a two-way process. In order to be an effective communicator you must also be an active listener. It is important when receiving information to make sure you understand the intent of the communication received and respond in a way that indicates the message was understood.

Modeling behaviors and expectations is probably the single most important form of communication to all publics. "Actions speak louder than words" is a much used saying but very applicable to principals and how they communicate beliefs and expectations to their staff, students, parents, and community. An example of the powerful communication of modeling is cited by Blase and Kirby (1992) in their discussions of the power of praise. Teachers, whose principals used praise frequently and sincerely, found themselves emulating the principal's positiveness with their students and with each other. I believe the effective use of praise and sensitivity could help smooth the rough edges in times of anxiety or uneasiness.

In addition to modeling good effective communication, the principal must have the ability to:

(a) write messages clearly and concisely for their intended audiences; (b) utilize facts and data and determine their value in communication; (c) use current technology to communicate; and (d) demonstrate skills in nonverbal communication (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 1991).

Communication can be a very effective tool in creating and keeping a positive cohesive environment. The image a principal projects whether it be verbally, nonverbally or written forms the dominant perception of the school on the part of students, staff, parents, and the community.

For administrators to be effective, they must communicate effectively with the various constituencies within the school district. Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher (1990) suggested an effective principal will identify key communicators and engage in one-on-one conversations with these people to inform the community about what is going on in school or to get the pulse of the community on important issues. It is also essential that the principal speak effectively to large groups of people and articulate beliefs, values, needs and/or concerns of the school persuasively and clearly. People are more likely to support a school if they

understand its mission, goals and accomplishments (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 1991). Effective use of the mass media is also important in communicating to external publics. Knowing who to contact and how to relate to that person helps the flow of information to and from the school.

Schools are made up of human beings with different backgrounds, agendas, and values. The quality of the communication between these people depends largely on the ability of the leader to demonstrate these skills and foster them in others. I feel it is of great importance that the principal have the ability to communicate high expectations to the staff, students, parents, and the community. I believe these expectations are reinforced through repetition, clarification, and consistency (Blase & Kirby, 1992). As a principal I hope to model effective communication and always "seek first to understand, then to be understood" (Covey, 1989, p. 237).

Role of Motivator

I have always believed that in order to motivate, one must be motivated. Therefore, I must first reflect on my own motivation for being in education and becoming a principal. My desire to become an educator

started when I was a young lad with my inner desire to help other people achieve success. I was fortunate to be given the ability to be a leader and to be mathematically inclined. With this given ability I chose to become a math teacher and coach, hoping to make a difference in the lives of others, not just mathematically but socially and morally. I feel that I have made a difference in the lives of many students but I feel that there is more that I can do. This is my main motivation for becoming a principal.

Being a principal I can affect the lives of so many more students, maybe not always directly but sometimes indirectly through my motivation and influence on staff members. As Campbell (1990) stated "positive teacher morale translates into more productive teachers, which in turn translates into more productive student learning" (p. 4).

We, as principals, need to understand that people are the most valuable resources in our schools and motivating these people is the key to successful leadership. I believe that to be a successful leader you need to enhance self-esteem and make others feel good about themselves. Such things as listening to ideas and involving them in the decision making process

can help make teachers feel important. Sometimes just a pat on the back or a note saying good job can lift a teacher's spirits. Other times a motivational tape could be well worth the time spent during a teachers' meeting or inservice.

Campbell (1990) states that one of the most important ways to improve staff morale and instruction is to provide faculty members the opportunity to visit other schools and classrooms. If this is true, what a terrific way of improving morale and instruction at the same time. During my 11 years as a high school teacher I have often wanted, but never received, the chance to observe what other teachers do in their classrooms. As administrators, we need to find ways to provide teachers the opportunity to observe and dialogue with other teachers, whether it be a visit to another school or simply a visit within the same school. Imagine a doctor not ever having the chance to observe a colleague performing his or her role in such a manner that allows them a different insight into techniques and/or content that will then allow for their own learning and growth (Campbell, 1990). The same should be true for the teaching profession.

I feel that it is not only important for me to motivate my staff, but it is also very important to motivate the students. The principal, along with the staff, needs to create a positive atmosphere where students can feel good about coming to school and learning. Little things such as greeting them in the hallways in a positive manner and showing them that you sincerely care about their education can go a long way toward making a student feel good about school. To accomplish this, I feel principals must be visible and assessable to the students. This means getting out of the office and into the classrooms whenever possible. This is where my strong desire to become an instructional leader takes over.

Role as Instructional Leader

Instructional leadership may be defined as those "actions undertaken with the intention of developing a productive and satisfying working environment for teachers and desirable learning conditions and outcomes for children" (Gorton & Schneider, 1991).

Instructional leadership as defined by Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelley, and McCleary (1990) is the initiation and implementation of planned changes in a school's instructional program, through influence and

direction of the various constituencies in the school. I believe instructional leadership begins with an attitude, an expressed commitment to student productivity, from which emerge values, behaviors, and functions designed to cultivate, facilitate, and support student achievement. Leadership implies keeping sight of long-term goals and guiding the school in that direction (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986). Instructional leadership requires vision, flexibility, and common sense. Leaders know where they want to take an organization, and they move others toward that vision. We must be able to transform ideals into actions to help schools become places of learning that can make a difference in the lives of children (Payzant, 1987). "We must also understand that the only constant in education will be change, and that we must anticipate change and make enough sense of it to guide our schools into the future" (Dr. Doud class discussion [Introduction to Educational Administration, 27:201]).

Pellicer et al. (1990) observed several important characteristics of instructional leadership.

1. Instructional leadership is a shared responsibility. For schools to be effective there must

exist a high level of satisfaction among all the players of the school. Instructional leadership is not limited to a single person or position in a school system. Faculty and staff must have a role in the decision making process of the school. We need to understand that positive changes occur when people have opportunities to come together, to share problems, and to seek common solutions. Not all staff members might be excited about shared decision making but I believe there are teachers in every school that could and should be given the opportunity to share this leadership.

2. Instructional leadership is situational.

Instructional leadership is manifested in many different forms depending on the circumstances in a school. The type of leadership required in one school or situation may not fit, or be required, in another. In one school or particular situation you might need to take a strong leadership role to move a staff toward a new paradigm, but in another you might only need to provide the time and resources for them to run with the schools shared vision.

3. Instructional leadership is planned.

4. Instructional leadership is enhanced by a common purpose or mission. Principals, teachers, students, and parents all need to know and understand the primary purpose of schooling and this primary purpose must be student-centered. I believe we need to take advantage of every opportunity to remind students, teachers, parents, and the community at large that the primary purpose of the school is to promote student learning and that everyone must dedicate his or her efforts to this purpose. Schools in which the primary purposes are constantly showcased seem to enjoy a more trusting and respectful working relationship among staff, students, and the community.

Parents and community leaders can contribute significantly to a successful instructional program. High levels of parent or community involvement can expedite student achievement, cause greater awareness of community issues, and foster increased satisfaction between the school and parents. One strategy for increasing the involvement of parents and the community in the educational process is by making use of a volunteer program in which parents and/or community members volunteer to spend a couple of hours a week helping out in the school. This can come in various

forms such as helping students on an individual basis, reading to a particular group, leading discussions on a particular subject, or by just helping a teacher take care of some classroom chores.

5. Instructional leadership involves risk taking. One of the most important consequences of an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in a school district is an atmosphere where there is a willingness to take risks. "Instructional leaders take risks, not because they are foolhardy or careless, but because they know the effect of risk-taking behavior on others" (Pellicer, et al., 1990). We need to carefully consider both the desirable and undesirable consequences of our actions and make informed decisions. We also need to encourage our staff members to take similar risks.

6. Instructional leadership is characterized by informed behaviors. It is important that you get the facts so you don't make impulsive decisions that you will have to reverse later. There is nothing that can ruin the credibility of an administrator quicker than flipping back and forth on decisions because they were made impulsively. Instructional leaders behave in such a way because they know that these informed behaviors

are likely to have a positive effect on teachers or students, and ultimately a positive impact on the instructional program.

7. Instructional leaders know what they believe. Instructional leaders must work hard to stay abreast of issues and knowledge affecting students and schools, to form beliefs about these issues and facts, and to let these beliefs guide them in all their decisions. We need to make sure that we keep up on the current trends in education by reading about and researching these trends. Educational Leadership and Phi Delta Kappan are just a couple of resources that can help you to keep yourself informed. Other ways of keeping yourself informed include going to meetings and/or conventions or just picking up the phone and calling another principal and talking about such trends.

8. Instructional leaders are aware of how important it is to start off right. A honeymoon period of opportunity may exist for a new principal and it is important for the principal to act decisively during this time otherwise the challenges might become stronger as time goes on. I do feel that it is not a good idea to attempt to make a lot of major changes in the first year. You need to spend that first year

assessing where you are at and identifying what changes need to be made. I feel you need to ask questions to find out how the staff, students, and community feel about the school and where they would like it to be in five years. According to our class discussions during secondary school administration, among others, three main questions that are important to ask are: (1) What do you like about our school?, (2) what would you like to change in our school?, and (3) how do you see our school in five to seven years? It is during the second year that you start to implement changes, with the third year being a time of continued implementation and evaluation.

9. Instructional leaders always make decisions in the best interests of their primary clients - the students. We must recognize the individual needs of all students, including those who are at risk because of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and/or abilities.

10. Instructional leaders do not ignore problems; they relentlessly seek them out and deal with them. They realize that real problems never go away, they just continue to grow until they become unmanageable. We must understand that the function of school leadership is to solve problems, not avoid them.

11. Instructional leaders pay attention to the little things. As Dr. Decker informed us, "it is the little things that will get you" (class discussion [Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction, 27:215]).

The main point of instructional leadership as found in recent literature is to develop and foster effective schooling (Willis & Bartell, 1990, p. 121). We as instructional leaders need to recognize the importance of fostering a positive climate in the school through shared purposes that break down barriers between people and promote mutual respect and trust.

The role as instructional leader includes four basic areas: (a) curriculum, what students are to learn and what teachers are to teach; (b) instruction, atmosphere and experiences used by the teacher to provide success for every student; (c) staff development, opportunities for participation in professional and personal growth; and (d) supervision and evaluation of teacher and student performance based on the school's mission and high expectations.

Curriculum

An effective principal "assures that the curriculum specifies what students are to learn, what skills they are to master, and what values, attitudes

and habits they are to acquire" (NAESP, 1991, p.10). Working with staff and community to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of that student population is essential for any instructional program. It is important that the curriculum reflect the values and goals of the community. If there is "no buy in" or relevance to the curriculum on the part of the staff and community, it probably will not be successful. As a principal you need to support the implementation of the curriculum by seeking out adequate resources to help with the implementation. These resources could include money, personnel, materials, and time for preparing and implementing the curriculum.

Instruction

Effective principals "lead the way toward creating a learning environment in which teachers truly teach and students truly learn" (NAESP, 1991, p.11). Students should be active in the learning process. The simple fact is that students learn by doing. Instruction also needs to be relevant to the students own life experiences otherwise they will not see the relevancy of learning the material, thus creating a lack of motivation.

Staff Development

If we truly are to be instructional leaders, then part of our responsibility is to ensure that teachers are developed to their fullest potential. Staff development is one means to this end. For staff development to have any impact on the school we must take into consideration the teacher as an individual and what his/her needs are. We must also consider the school as an organization. What is the overall commitment to the development plan? To have commitment, the staff needs to have some ownership to staff development.

Supervision and Evaluation

During our discussion of supervision and evaluation Dr. Decker gave us a couple of premises about evaluation that come to mind at this point.

1. The only known basis for the improvement of anything is evaluation.
2. The evaluation in education should be designed to insure the improvement of teacher effectiveness (Dr. Decker class notes, [Supervision and Evaluation, 27:215]).

Effective principals use a variety of techniques and strategies to assess classroom instruction, student

performance, progress toward achievement and curriculum goals and effectiveness of the overall instructional program. Principals also have to be effective at inspiring teachers at all levels of skill and experience to acquire new competencies and experiences. One method I will use to assess student performance is to be in the classrooms as much as possible. In our discussions on Monday nights as our car pool group traveled back and forth to class, we got into a discussion of how often our current principals visit our classrooms. I must say that I was disappointed with our new principal in that it was February before he ever made it to my classroom. This will not be the case when I become principal. I will try to be in every classroom within the first two weeks of school. I feel this can help send a very important message about how important education is to me and to the students. One method that was brought up during our discussions is a five by five method in which the principal tries to be in five classrooms for five minutes each day. I am not sure that you can get this done on a daily basis, but it is sure something to shoot for.

Role as Manager

The role of manager is no longer a separate function distant from that of an instructional leader. One of the easiest most direct way for a school principal to exercise instructional leadership is through the managerial tasks he or she engages in every day (Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990). Donmoyer and Wagstaff identified seven managerial tasks that can have a significant impact on teaching and learning and can influence instruction. I will briefly discuss six of those tasks. Of the six tasks listed below, I feel two of them carry a double label as tasks of instructional leaders and managers. These two tasks include hiring personnel, supervising personnel.

Scheduling

One of the easiest ways administrator can influence teaching and learning is through scheduling. Scheduling decisions are often based on tradition or political considerations rather than on educational criteria. Scheduling almost always affects what happens to students in classrooms, whether it be positive or negative. We need to be aware of the educational impact of scheduling decisions and work to ensure that the impact is positive.

Articulating Policies, Rules, and Norms

A principal can also use a school's policies, rules, and norms to influence what happens in classrooms. Policies, rules, and norms can directly influence classroom activities by ensuring that there is adequate time in the school day for teaching and learning. Unnecessary interruptions need to be eliminated. Principals need to project to the students, teachers, and parents that academics are important. We can begin to do this by getting personally involved in the student's education. As I stated before, we need to visit classrooms each day and occasionally take part in discussions. The most important thing is to just be visible.

Hiring Personnel

One of the most direct ways a principal influences instruction is by hiring the teachers who deliver it. We need to work hard to hire teachers who are competent and committed to the education of students. As Donmoyer and Wagstaff (1990) stated, "principals who care about instruction realize that hiring decisions are among the most important managerial decisions they must make".

Supervising Personnel

Principals are not only involved in the hiring of personnel, they are also involved with the supervision of those who have been employed. According to Dr. Doud, supervision is the key administrative function between effective principals and less effective principals (Dr. Doud class notes [Introduction to Educational Administration, 27:201]). Successful principals have considerable influence on what happens within their buildings. We will be held accountable for this function and therefore, as I stated before, we need to be monitoring what is going on in our buildings and reinforcing good teaching practices.

Coordinating Pupil Services

Another important managerial task as defined by Donmoyer and Wagstaff (1990) is coordinating pupil services. Pupil services, if appropriately implemented and managed, can help students resolve difficulties and make learning more likely. These services include counseling, guidance, health services, and placement in special programs.

Budgeting

Budgeting is another managerial task that can have a tremendous impact on a school's instructional

program. We need to make sure that we base our budgeting decisions on maximizing student learning. As we discussed in Seminar (Administrative Applications in Field Settings [27:289]), getting staff, student, and community input on educational needs and goals can help determine the priorities when it comes to the budgeting process.

Conclusion

Leaders come in many different shapes and sizes. They all have their own style which makes them unique. It was the intent of this paper to reflect on my beliefs about the role of the principal in the educational process. Educational leaders need to be strong in the professional skills of communication, interpersonal skills, organizational management, and leadership skills. As you probably picked up through this paper, I also believe that visibility is very important in the success of an effective principal. It will be my responsibility as a leader to involve the entire staff, working together to foster a positive school climate where students feel good about attending and teachers feel good about teaching. My role as a "leader of leaders" will be to inspire others to do

their best always and in all ways. I would like to close my paper with a short poem about a leader.

A Leader

A Leader is --- Best when people barely know he exist. Not so good when people obey and acclaim him. Worse when they despise him. But of a good leader who talks little when his work is done. His aim fulfilled - they will say "we did it ourselves" (Dr. Decker class notes [Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction, 27:215]).

References

- Blase, J., & Kirby, P.C. (1992). Bringing out the best in teachers: What effective principals do. Newbury Park, NY: Corwin Press.
- Brown, D.E. (1985, January). Moving toward excellence: The principal. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), New Orleans.
- Campbell, L.P. (1990). How to improve teacher morale and school effectiveness. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 326 948)
- Covey, S.R. (1989). The seven habits of highly effective people. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- De Cicco, J.M. (1985, January). What is effective school management. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), New Orleans.
- Decker, R. (1992, Summer). [Lecture to class: Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction, 27:215]. Sioux City, IA: Western Iowa Tech.

Donmoyer, R. & Wagstaff, J.G., (April, 1990).

Principals can be effective managers and instructional leaders. NASSP Bulletin, 20-29.

Doud, J. (1991, Fall). [Lecture to class:

Introduction to Educational Administration, 27:201]. Sioux City, IA: Western Hills AEA.

Gorton, R.A., & Schneider, G.T. (1991). Instructional Leadership. In P.L. Tavenner (Ed.), School-based leadership: Challenges and opportunities (pp. 319-347). Dubuque, IA.: Wm. C. Brown.

Howe, H.II. (1993). Thinking about kids and education. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 226-228.

Johnson, W.L., & Snyder, K.J. (1990). Leadership for productive schools. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 329 014)

Krug, S.E. (1993). Leadership craft and the crafting of school leaders. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 240-244.

Lugg, C.A., & Boyd. W.L. (1993). Leadership for collaboration: reducing risk and fostering resilience. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 253-258.

Maehr, M.L., & Parker, S.A. (1993). A tale of two schools - and the primary task of leadership. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 233-239.

Midgley, C., & Wood, S. (1993). Beyond site-based management: empowering teachers to reform schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 245-252.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). (1991). Elementary and middle schools proficiencies for principals (rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Parker, S.A. (1993). So now you're a school leader - what should you do? Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 229-232.

Payzant, T. (1987, February). Making a difference in the lives of children: Educational leadership to the year 2000. Proceedings of the annual convention of American Association School Administrators, New Orleans, LA.

Pellicer, L.O., Anderson, L.W., Keefe, J.W., Kelley, E.A., & McCleary, L.E. (1990). High school leaders and their schools. Volume II: Profiles of effectiveness. (Report No. ISBN-0-88210-238-9). Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 139)

- Rallis, S.F. & Highsmith, M.C. (1986, June). Effective schools: A review of the "Great Principal": Questions of school management and instructional leadership. Phi Delta Kappan, 68, 300-304.
- Thurston, P., Clift, R., & Schacht, M. (1993). Preparing leaders for change-oriented schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 259-265.
- Willis, D.B. & Bartell, C.A. (1990). Japanese and American Principals: a comparison of excellence in educational leadership. Comparative Education, 26, 107-123.