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JoLeen Eiklenborg
University of Northern Iowa

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Administrative leadership vision: A reflective essay

Abstract

Education is in a time of great debate, change, and growth. Iowa schools are trying to implement the New Department of Education Standards established in 1989 and new legislation enacted by the Seventy-Third Iowa General Assembly in 1989 and 1990. As we deliberate, another transformation labeled, "The Iowa Initiative for World-Class Schools", is under study (Lantor, 1991; Lepley, 1991)

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP VISION

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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JoLeen Eiklenborg

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Robert H. Decker

June 25, 1992
Date Approved

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Norman McCumsey

6-26-92
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

7/9/92
Dated Received

Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

Education is in a time of great debate, change, and growth. Iowa schools are trying to implement the New Department of Education Standards established in 1989 and new legislation enacted by the Seventy-Third Iowa General Assembly in 1989 and 1990. As we deliberate, another transformation labeled, "The Iowa Initiative for World-Class Schools", is under study (Lantor, 1991; Lepley, 1991).

While there is much dialogue about sweeping renovations in school governance, curriculum and accountability, there will likely be no substantive alteration of a community's infinite responsibility to provide a school environment that enables students to acquire basic skills and encourages an attitude of life-long learning. While we can not predict the future, the history of the past decade clearly shows shifts in social, economic, and demographic conditions. Since schools reflect the society in which they exist, schools likewise have attempted to adjust to the changing needs of society.

There is good reason to think trends now considered

contemporary will continue and even accelerate in the era of expanding world economy and world competition. The demands on schools and education will undoubtedly increase as they will be expected to provide United States citizens with the genius and expertise to excel as the world strives for a higher "quality of life."

The administrator must realize that the quality of his/her leadership is crucial to the success of the school. An effective principal plays a major role in the successful transformation of the school. My philosophy of leadership and educational administration has evolved through coursework and practicum experiences where I have gained valuable insight into the condition of education. The building principal is the key person in educational transformation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the various attributes and roles necessary for the principal to be an effective educational leader. An effective educational leader has a vision of an exemplary school. The administrator is a

director for positive growth in the school system, through proper leadership and vision.

Leadership

An administrator must realize that the quality of his/her leadership is critical to the success of the school, and therefore should have four characteristics to be an effective in the leadership role. Manz and Sims (1990) and Dull (1981) describe four dimensions of leadership: 1. The Visionary role which is the comprehensive mental model of effective schooling, goal setting, communicating the schools academic mission, and becoming an instructional change agent. 2. The Improver role, copes with strengthening the weaknesses of staff, deals with empowering staff, training and modeling for faculty and guides others to lead themselves. 3. The Facilitator role listens and affirms to staff, coordinating and aligning the curriculum, teaching, and assessment of faculty. 4. The Evaluator role monitors instruction programs, gather information, assesses teacher performance, and scrutinize

students performance. These characteristics are closely affiliated with successful schools (Manz and Sims, 1990).

Principals must take an active role in leadership. They must be the leader of leaders. Leadership skills contribute to the initiation of change and the ability to motivate staff and students. Education needs leaders that provide vision and translate that vision into reality. The principal cannot accomplish the goals and objectives of the school without empowering others. Sergiovanni (1987, 1992) describes active leadership as enabling others, or empowering others, to be leaders. Faculty empowerment fosters collegiality, ownership, and effective decision making within the school, thus promoting accountability at all levels. By implementing a shared leadership plan, principals can develop and utilize the leadership traits of all teachers.

To meet the changing needs of our society and schools, the role of the principal must be redefined so these educational leaders can devote more time to preparing schools

for the change and challenges of the next century. A transformational leader allows for teacher empowerment, which decentralize the decision making process.

Principals must first acknowledge their role as instructional leaders, and support the myriad of activities that directly support this role. The first reason chosen by principals that hinders or prevents time to work on instructional improvement is discipline, followed by resistance from faculty to new ideas on instructional improvement (Trump, 1987).

One approach to eliminate faculty resistance to change is to empower teachers (Goodlad, 1994). Site-based management will make more inroads in the educational process if shared decision making is linked with job satisfaction and commitment, and proves to be beneficial (Sergiovanni, 1984). A prudent administrator includes teachers, students, parents, and members of the community in the decision making process when appropriate.

Today's principals are action-oriented and capable of thinking and responding immediately to continuous barrage of activities (Hetzel, 1992). The most effective principals are able to utilize their leadership roles within the situational demands of the principalship. Effective principals need to have a comprehensive and long range view of leadership.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals, states that candidates for principalships will face more stringent selection procedures and standards than their predecessors, especially with pressures on principals to have greater collaborative decision making, problem solving and conflict management skills (Poston, 1992). The most effective principal has a clear vision to dictate the decisions made to operate the school.

Vision

Visionary leadership is a prominent trait of performing administrators (Dull, 1991; Manz and Sims, 1990; Chance,

1990). Effective school leaders have broad visions that are clear, active, ambitious and performance-oriented, and create conditions to help them realize their goals.

In describing the dominant qualities found in a visionary leaders, Chance (1990), states that visionary leaders are guided and motivated by personal values. They have an intense commitment to the achievement of goals that they identified as important for their organization. Leaders develop a sense of common purpose and direction among all members of their organization. They are organizational innovators and consistently focus on a future that represents something better.

Considerations in developing a vision for a school (Chance, 1990), includes both professional and personal visions. Professional vision focuses on the ideal school, effective assessment of strength and weaknesses within the school system, anticipates accomplishments for students and faculty, while being cognizant of external factors in the

community. Personal visions include his/her own personal and professional values, leadership style, personal assessment of total organization, and strengths and weaknesses of oneself.

The principal must continuously ask the probing questions that go to the heart of the teaching/learning process, which enables him/her to maintain the emphasis and focus necessary to foster school improvement, and thus continue to proceed toward attaining vision of the school.

Visionary principals acknowledge their role as transformational leaders; all other activities must directly support this role. A transformational principal nurtures the emerging faculty leadership while cognizant that the leadership role creates a common understanding of the school culture. The teachers feel empowered, the combination of focused effort and collection of data give the teacher feeling of efficiency, which motivates them to voluntarily work for intrinsic rewards.

Visionary administration should address several key questions in the areas of curriculum, communication, school culture and climate. All four areas interact within each other and represent the heart of the school. The soul of the school is the curriculum. Opportunities for interdisciplinary units, refine or revision the on-going process, outcomes oriented classroom practice should be identified and described by the principal. Technology, coaching/peer mentoring, mastery learning, diverse teaching/learning styles strengthens the on-going process of developing a curriculum.

Effective communication is a two-way process. The term effective communicator ranks high on the list of role expectations for administrators (Manz and Sims, 1990; Dull, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1991). The process of people sharing thoughts, ideas and feelings with each other in commonly understandable ways is of optimal concern to effective principals. The key words in communication are sharing and commonly understanding. There are numerous channels in

which communication travels through the school organization. Memos, notes, telephone calls, or meetings, as well as non-verbal communication all play a role in insuring common messages. Selecting the channel of communication enhances the clarity of the meaning, the impact of message and ensures the message sent was the message received.

School culture refers to the organization's values and norms; where as, school climate is the way people feel about the organization. School climate is a major indicator of the quality school life. The principal's modus operandi determines or dictates the positive climate in the building. The climate influences the school's ability to change and excel (Sergiovanni, 1987). The development of morale and a healthy school environment are crucial outcomes of leadership. The attitudes, beliefs and values of the students, faculty and staff are brought together in one building, whereby the principal is the main contributor to influence the positive climate. An administrator must be willing to relinquish some

responsibility for shared leadership to be successful. When one feels like a major contributor, morale and attitudes improve (Maeroff, 1988).

The school climate effects teachers, staff and students expectations regarding behavior. Positive behaviors promote a clean, neat and well maintained learning environments, in which everyone feels better and puts forth more energy to maintain the standard. A sense of a family, is created whereby all participants care about others in the school. In such a positive environment, classes are student-centered and utilize a variety of learning styles to enrich and remediate the learners' outcomes. The faculty and staff are receptive to students' thoughts and ideas. High expectations are established for the student, staff and faculty. The school's goal would be to reach everyone's maximum potential; the community would reflect the same objectives.

Female leadership

The 1990's is the breakthrough decade when women will achieve positions of leadership throughout corporate America and education (Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1990).

Women currently make up 40 percent of the management sector of business, half of all scientists and one-third of the managers in advertising, marketing and public relations (McGrath, 1992). Similarly, more women will be appointed as school principals and superintendents in the decade ahead, opening up tremendous career advancement opportunities to women in education and provide a vital new leadership needed to reform education in America (McGrath, 1992).

According to a survey by Gotwalt and Towns (1986), women who do become leaders in education tend to exhibit similar characteristics to men in the same positions. These women demonstrate that they know the unwritten rules about accepted behaviors and experiences that are rewarded in the system. Through organizations and networking, women are

beginning to ask the "right questions" and learn what they need to know about career advancement paths and leadership. They have identified successful leadership qualities and skills, and develop mentoring to strengthen their position.

Successful female leaders demonstrate high level of skills in communications, problem solving, organizational savvy, team building, instruction and curriculum (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 1987). The male superintendents expressed confidence in their ability to manage the operation of facilities and finance, but male superintendents admitted their greatest needs for improvement in administration are in the areas of communication, implementations of new instructional systems, curriculum development and teacher evaluation. Striking about these areas of weakness is that they are precisely the areas of strengths exhibited by women leaders.

Administrative women tend to possess more expertise than men because they have had more experience in the

classroom (McGrath, 1992). Female principals are focused on people-oriented styles while male principals are more task-oriented (Porat, 1985). Both men and women should find their range of styles that best fit their leaderships strengths. A principal must avoid becoming locked into one leadership style (Sergiovanni, 1987).

The most critical period of an administrative career is the first year on the job. Post-preparation assistance for beginning administrators could take various forms. Leaders of educational administration have reestablished the values of mentoring, shadowing, field-based seminars as well as networking, to establish a foundation of administration support (Daresh and Playko, 1991). All of which would focus on the goals of providing individualized assistance to the novice administrator.

A successful principal is an effective motivator of faculty, staff and students. The key to motivating staff members is interpersonal skills and competency on the job.

In motivating students, a principal must show that he/she really cares about the students by using every opportunity to positively interact with students individually or in small groups. An effective principal gives the school direction, a sense of oneness, and a willingness to work for the common mission established for the school.

According to the National Association of Elementary Schools Principals (1990, p. 2), "Quality schools are never satisfied that all is well. They seek continually to improve, to find better ways of meeting the needs of their students, and the community". My role as an administrator is to be a positive role model to students, faculty and staff, as well as motivate and challenge all personnel to attain the school's mission goals and objectives. If I achieve excellence in this role, I will make the school the best learning environment for everyone.

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