

1994

A preferred vision for administering elementary schools: A reflective essay

Jill M. Grimm
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1994 Jill M. Grimm

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



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Grimm, Jill M., "A preferred vision for administering elementary schools: A reflective essay" (1994).
Graduate Research Papers. 2449.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2449>

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 elementary schools: A reflective essay

Abstract

The American Schools will be taking on a new look in the next few years. Restructuring is the buzz word of the '90's in education. Restructuring means educating students with different patterns, varying structures, and multiple options, all in recognition that there are many paths to excellence, including conventional ones.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY 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

Jill M. Grimm

May 1994

This Research Paper by: Jill M. Grimm

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

Robert H. Decker

March 29, 1994
Date Approved

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Patricia R. Krysinski

March 31, 1994
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Robert H. Decker

4-13-94
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

The American Schools will be taking on a new look in the next few years. Restructuring is the buzz word of the '90's in education. Restructuring means educating students with different patterns, varying structures, and multiple options, all in recognition that there are many paths to excellence, including conventional ones.

We know people need a reason to change and they need to believe change will provide more of something they want and value (Jenkins & Phillips, 1992). Administrators are going to be taking on a new role. I am experiencing authoritarian administrators and I am seeing this trend change to a facilitator role. I cannot continue to wait for someone to give me permission. No one needs permission to dream. No administrator needs someone else's approving hand to think reform. Informing ourselves is the first step to reforming our educational system. If teachers and administrators do not have the knowledge and skills needed to create new learning environments and teach challenging curriculum, the goal of restructuring will not be met (David, 1991).

Reform is the answer. With a larger number of families linked to education and low confidence level in those families, our reform process is more difficult but also more necessary (Carroll, 1991). Our options are unlimited. The reputation of public education can be restored by leaders who are willing to work with the people and for the people. An educational administrator needs to be an advocate for the staff and the community in which they are serving and working. Reform is a time to take risks and make changes. It is a time of trial and error. Reform is a time to reflect on the past and look to the future!

Personal Characteristics

Developing a person's mind to their fullest potential is my number one goal. I want to produce people who are capable of doing new things and not just producing the same old things. Programs that produce honorable citizens who are economically self-sufficient are essential. If I build the positive character in individuals and strengthen their self-concepts I will see more productive, passionate and sensitive citizens. For staff to

instill this in students, they too need to personally feel this. By reorganizing and having a shared decision-making system between teachers, community and administrators, then the process can begin. The shift needs to be from a traditional monitoring and regulatory agency to more of a service center for its school. When I refer to service center, I mean all of the leaders and facilitators affiliated with a particular school. They need to shift their focus of working with staff. They need to serve their peers and not just watch over and point out the improvements that need to be made. Leaders can be of great service to staff and students. Leaders need to be involved and really get their feet wet instead of looking down from above.

It is both an exciting and frustrating time in education. We need people who are truly dedicated and believe in what they are doing. Common decisions, goals and objectives are what will get us there. I need to accept responsibilities and help lead our educational system to a state of success.

The bottom line is children. That is why I am here. I can not lose sight of the curriculum, reform and restructuring of what we are all about. I constantly need to remember the children. If I am not there for them, I should not be there at all. The excitement needs to be continually growing. Building my knowledge base will strengthen my skills to better reach the children. Never being satisfied with what works but always finding ways to change and move forward, keeps our minds sharp and our hearts in the profession. The environment plays a key role. A good administrator can facilitate a positive environment so the above things can take place. I am an advocate for children, and I must not forget it, for if I do, it is time to leave education!

Professional Values

Community of Learners

A good school is one where everyone is learning (Barth, 1990). "Teaching as telling" and "learning as recall" are now being replaced by individual and team learning opportunities that engage students, provide authentic and challenging tasks, offer

choices and multiple answers and allow flexible grouping and scheduling depending on the activity (David, 1991). This relates to employees in the educational system and the students. The system needs to change from an all-encompassing bureaucracy into a series of service centers that support and help facilitate innovation (Hirsch & Sparks, 1991). Administrators can make a choice to run the old way of dictatorship and continue to stand still, or choose to reform and look at a different way, so that everyone is considered a decision maker. Change takes hard work and you need a dedicated staff to implement reform. I believe in continuing education for all and this could be the first big step for reform. If our minds are in it and we are studying current research, our schools are bound to be improving. Children are not the only learners in the building. Outside of the building, it is the parents' and community's responsibility to keep current. I feel the community can really work for us but we must work for them, too. We need a real commitment from everyone!

Shared Decision-Making

As an administrator, I need to look at the individual school I am associated with, and devise a plan that will help it, instead of the central office dictating a program that is to be implemented by all. Effective decision-makers start with opinions not facts (Drucker, 1966). The central office can no longer monitor and dictate but they need to be a service center to everyone in a facilitator type of role, helping individual buildings. Administrators can be the generators in the organization. I can generate new services to offer and work toward building a better system. Teachers need to be given input. As Byham (1988) stated, Zapp! happens when a teacher's leadership ideas are taken seriously or when a principal invites help in solving school matters. Choices of innovative projects can be offered to enhance programs and facilitate building developments. As administrators and peers generate services and "market them", we will not have 16 different people doing the same thing. It can be processed by conducting a consensus decision-making. Administrators can refuse to do things which will

foster staff to find new strategies and ways to accomplish their tasks. Administrators need to give some of the responsibility to the staff members and be a facilitator or resource person for them to come to when they are working through their problems. Leaders should serve others, not be served (DePree, 1989). Leaders help people grow and reach their true potential. Leaders also cannot order people around but can help inspire and show them ways to improve. A key question administrators can ask is, "What are we doing now that we can quit doing so we can do what we need to do?" Hirsh and Sparks (1991) really present some key points that encompass a strong basis for elementary school administrators! If we have the knowledge of these, then we can begin to facilitate educators and our customers. Zapp! ignites people to go after daily challenges and boosts the quality of education, student and parent satisfaction and personnel productivity (Byham, 1988). Is this not what any acting administrator would want?

Administrators are spending more time as planning facilitator and members of improvement teams, either at the district level or school level

(Hirsh & Sparks, 1991). Priorities need to be established and then action taken. Effective executives focus on the result of their work rather than the work itself. "To ask, 'What can I contribute?' is to look for the unused potential in a job." (Drucker, 1966). I need to have a vision and a goal to strive and work for. Long-range planning and implementation is very important. Administrators and employees need to stay on the cutting edge and be the experts. I can serve as a source of knowledge on issues affecting education today. Our customers are in the driver's seat. New and better services are added to improve the services offered to schools and their population. Honesty is the best policy. Leaders need to be friendly critics, act responsibly and provide critical input throughout the educational process. Leaders do not inflict pain; they bear it (DePree, 1989).

We often times forget to say thanks in education. Recognizing noteworthy individuals is a way to celebrate success. Recognition and celebration make the efforts all worth while. The reformation of the future is a time to drastically

change the education profession. Among these great changes is the collegial school atmosphere, providing recognition both financially and non-monetary rewards. This idea was also mentioned earlier, in the Hirsh and Sparks (1991) component that foster a good administrator. The building itself will change and become a place that holds autonomy, flexibility and responsibility by all! For all of this transformation to unfold, there needs to be better personnel. They can plant the seeds to help children find joy and safety in their school experience (Harvey, Frase & Larick, 1992). Commitment to students is the biggest priority for educators today. Administrators need to make tough decisions to make this process work. Leaders need to be firm and strong and "bite the bullet" when moving forward with decisions.

Leadership is making happen what you believe in. The more reading I do, the more questions I ask and the more visionary I become. My vision of a great school is one in which everyone inside its community is inspired to learn and grow. It is one where a productive "buzz" fills the halls and classrooms. It is one that is inviting and people

are excited to enter. It is one where "Zapp!" is being exchanged everywhere.

Partnerships

The focus of the school district is the child and how they learn. Educational leaders possessed with a creative insight into the 21st century and prepared with the skills to invent new school systems are capable of preparing all people for life in the learning society (Harvey, Frase, & Larick, 1991).

The public school site will be seen as a focal point in the community. Partnerships with business will develop further. The partnership means organizations working together are greater than the two of their individual parts (Hanson & Richards, 1991). It needs to be a mutual partnership where both groups win. They can assist each other in fulfilling their purpose of working together. Synergy is almost as if a group collectively agrees to subordinate all the old scripts and write a new one. Synergy requires a high degree of trust and cooperation, a win/win philosophy, the ability to value our differences (Covey, 1989). Both groups

need to come with their needs and what they are able to share and then the two groups can decide if the partnership will be profitable for all of those involved.

For reform and change to take place, I really believe the community as a whole needs to be offered some responsibility. They consequently need to take on some of the responsibility. We can not fully prepare our students for the future. We need their help. They have the most current knowledge of technology and job training. Why are we not tapping this very precious resource, now? We need to form a strong partnership and dedicate ourselves to it and not just talk about it!

Personal Professional Vision

A love for kids is the base for a successful educational vision. There is a shortage of joy in the schools today. Staff are not always excited to be there and students are not either. Research shows that organizations with a joyful atmosphere are more successful at achievement than those who are not joyous. It is so important to make our educational structure a happy and exciting place.

Educators and administrators must show and foster this idea, for it to carry over to our children. The more excited we are, the more successful we can be! For an administrator to be successful, they need to do the right thing. Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things (Covey, 1989). If I can clearly see the point of my profession, then the ethical sense of day-to-day practices will become more evident (Green, 1987). I must be product oriented while involving people, customers, and organizational culture, and task oriented involving time, and assignment of work (Hooper, 1992). If I can manage all three of those aspects, I can be functioning in a managerial and leadership mode. Both of these concepts need to work together for effective administration to blend and work successfully.

Reflection is a quality that a good administrator should be able to do. Through reflection, we develop context-specific theories that further our own understanding of our work and generate knowledge to inform future practice (Killion & Todnem, 1991). I can reflect, to analyze my thoughts and actions, to make more

informed decisions of the future. This is valuable in day to day decision-making as well as long-range planning.

Schools need to move in a collegial direction. They basically need to be a service center and a facilitator, instead of a dictator. They need to turn to their customer, the community. Quality and excellence can be shown and defined by describing and sharing quality work that students have accomplished. We need to set examples of excellence, so students do not begin to accept the "ordinary". With quality examples, we can strive for a higher level of excellence and continue to drive forward.

Major school improvement programs need to begin with agreement by all parties. The clearest, most self-evident moral voice is the voice of sacrifice (Green, 1987). I need to make some sacrifices for things to begin moving in the direction that I have planned. The doors need to be open with collegial faculties using research and site specific information by studying and improving instruction. There is no prescription for making connections among different approaches, but I must

figure out how to do so if comprehensive restructuring is to take place (Joyce, 1991). A few people are saying that we can do better! Excuses are constantly blocking our road to improvement and reform. I have to stop making excuses and move forward with the idea that I can do better. There needs to be a vision. I should spend a great deal of time residing in the future. Executives with vision can mentally journey from the known to the unknown (Hickman & Silva, 1984). I always need to be questioning, and looking for better ways to educate our children of tomorrow!

As I look back at experiences through my program, I saw administrative interviews as very helpful. You can read all the articles and write all the papers but actually talking to someone who experiences it day to day is the most insight you can get. As I think back on a couple of interviews, I saw many styles of leadership as well as all the responsibility that goes with the job. It is an all day job. Your whole heart needs to be in it. They all seemed to hint on the idea of select and neglect and prioritize your activities. There are always more monkeys clambering for

attention than we have time to manage (Blanchard, Burrows and Onclan, 1989).

Summary

As I reflect back on my course work, there are a number of things that made a real impression on my views. The Barth article that is referred to in my references, was such an inspiration. I felt like I wanted to share my vision with everyone. We need to personally develop our visions and take time to reflect on our thoughts (Barth, 1990). He came very close to many of my visionary goals. A vision for good schools rests in the idea that a good school is one in which I would like to teach or be a principal and one I would like my own children to attend (Barth, 1991). This hits home as I have a kindergartener starting school next year. Everything that goes on in my current job, I have a tendency to reflect on the idea, "Is this something I would like my children to experience?" I know the same would hold true if I were in a principalship. My classroom has always been one that I hoped my children would experience. It is natural for me to want the best for them. As

an administrator, I would ask myself, Is this the school climate I would want for my own children to experience?

The thing that impressed me the most about the program is that you do not have to be a principal to gain and implement many of these skills and insights into education. As I was reading and doing assignments I could always apply it to experiences that I was dealing with at the time. It has kept my mind fresh and kept me on my toes, especially during a time of shared decision making. Leadership, management, reform and restructuring are for everyone, not just the principal of the building. All teachers, parents and students have a role in these to some capacity!

No matter what our job is, we need to take care of ourselves or you will burn out. Play is for the body, what a good attitude is for the mind. We can have a perspective that can build us up or beat us up. We can choose our attitude (Johnson, 1985).

I believe we need to make some major changes in education today. I am excited that I can be a part, in major time, for restructuring. Even

reading and studying about it helps me, personally, even though I have not seen big district changes, yet. I am motivated and excited about children and their growth through education. Children are a sponge, ready to soak up information. I have learned through my teaching experience, the unique and wonderful qualities of children and would like to instill and spark that enthusiasm in educators today and future educators of tomorrow. We are stuck in a time of, "It has worked, why change?"

As an administrator, I would like to have a chance to instill values, excitement and the true love of children back into educators and the community. What counts we say to young teachers, is learning to learn, not coming to know, and knowing one thing is no more important than knowing another (Green, 1987). Children are our most valuable resource. More than anything that budgets or curriculum can dictate to us, is the relationship and respect we owe to our children. I am deeply dedicated to education and children. As an administrator, I feel I can pass on this commitment and be a forerunner in the movement of reform and restructuring that can move our children

forward into the future with a positive self-concept and the idea that they can be whatever they want to be.

Open minds, open hearts, and a dream for tomorrow will drive us all to success. I want to be a part of this! We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are (DePree, 1989).

References

- Barth, R. S. (1990). A personal vision of a good school. Phi Delta Kappan, 71, 512-516.
- Blanchard, K., Burrows, H., & Oncken, W. Jr. (1989). The one minute manager meets the monkey. New York: Morrow.
- Byham, W. C. (1988). Zapp!: The lightening of empowerment. New York: Harmony.
- Carroll S. (1991). Market education to your customers. The School Administrator, 48(7), 37.
- Covey, S. R. (1989). The seven habits of highly effective people. New York: Harper & Row.
- David, J. (1991). What it takes to restructure education. Leadership, 48(8), 11-14.
- DePree, M. (1989). Leadership is an art. New York: Doubleday.
- Drucker, P. F. (1966). The effective executive. New York: Harper & Row.
- Green, T. F. (1987). The conscience of leadership. In L.T. Sheive & M.B. Schoenheit (Eds.), Leadership: Examining the elusive (pp. 105-115). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Harvey, T. R., Frase, L. E., & Larick, K. T. (1991). Can school leadership transform to face the future? The School Administrator, 49(6), 8-13.
- Hansen, D. E., & Richards, D. (1991). The evolution of school-business partnerships. The School Administrator, 49(1), 16-19.
- Hickman, C. R., & Silva, M. A. (1984). Creating excellence. New York: New American Library.
- Hirsch, S., & Sparks, D. (1991) A look at the new central office administrator. The School Administrator, 48(7), 16-19.
- Hooper, D. (1992). Success depends on leaders' "Whole brain" thinking. The School Administrator, 14-17.
- Jenkins, K., & Phillips, J. (1991). Reforming schools need work, not waivers. The School Administrator, 49(1), 29-30.
- Johnson, S. (1985). One minute for myself. New York: Avon Books.
- Joyce, B. R. (1991). The doors to school improvement. Leadership, 48(8), 59-62.

- Killion, J. P.. & Todnem, G. R. (1991). A process for personal theory building. Educational Leadership, 48(6), 14-16.
- Porter, T., & Wildmen, L. (1991). It's time you used "Quality Control" in your school. The School Administrator, 48(9), 39.