

1992

A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Jim Jarchow
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1992 Jim Jarchow

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



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jarchow, Jim, "A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay" (1992).
Graduate Research Papers. 2607.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2607>

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 preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Abstract

Education has been a large and important part of my life for many years. I took my own education pretty much for granted, at least through the high school years. This seemed to be a common attitude. It was an attitude, however, that started to change during my college years, during my years of preparation in the field of education.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Jim Jarchow

December 1992

This Research Paper by: Jim Jarchow

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY
SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

Robert H. Decker

10-28-92

Date Approved

~~_____
_____~~
Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Patricia R. Krynski

11-2-92

Date Approved

~~_____
_____~~
Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

11/6/92

Date Received

~~_____
_____~~
Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

Education has been a large and important part of my life for many years. I took my own education pretty much for granted, at least through the high school years. This seemed to be a common attitude. It was an attitude, however, that started to change during my college years, during my years of preparation in the field of education.

My attitude toward and feelings about education have continued to evolve during twenty-one years as a classroom teacher. Part of the change in my attitude has come from within, the result of my own maturity, experiences, and growing awareness. The other part of this change, however, has come from without, a result of the changing community, society, and world in which I, and my students, live. Our world has undergone great international and local economic change. The constant technological advances continue to alter our world. Yet, the greatest changes I have seen directly have been within our own schools and the composition of the student body which now finds that, ". . . 25% will be from minority groups, half will come from single-parent families, and 25% will live in poverty" (Clinton, 1986, p.208). Somewhere along the way, education has taken on a more serious meaning, has become a more complex issue, and has even become a meaningful responsibility for me.

For twenty-one years I have found the field of education to be challenging and rewarding. The classroom had become

an exciting opportunity to influence, motivate, guide, and challenge others toward an appreciation and acceptance of their own educational development. I was satisfied with my role in the education process and enjoyed the interaction with high school-aged students. It was, however, the development of an understanding of the complexities involved within a school as well as the sincere feeling of responsibility to ensure a learning environment for my students that eventually lead me to desire more and finally to explore the field of administration.

I certainly did not rush into the decision to become a principal, and even as I entered the master's program, I had some reservations. My first class was Introduction to Educational Administration. Dr. James Albrecht often stressed that the best reason to be in the administrative field was because one felt s/he "could make a difference." This was exactly what I was feeling. While I enjoyed what I was doing, I felt I could be "doing more"; I felt I could be making a "greater difference." Dr. Albrecht's class reassured me that I had made the right decision and was the start of an exciting journey toward the principalship. Along the way I have also come to agree with Roland Barth that:

It is not the teachers, or the central office people, or the university people who are really causing

schools to be the way they are or changing the way they might be. It is whoever lives in the principal's office (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986, p.3).

My concept of the principal has been a continually growing one. I honestly did not look at becoming a principal as a way to "the good life" or as an easy way out. On the other hand, originally I did not appreciate the complexities and responsibilities of the position, either. I now realize more fully that principals cannot, and do not, function alone, " . . . nor could they be effective without considering the multiplicity of complex and often interrelated elements that make up the fabric of school life -- and which frequently become problematic to effectively leading and managing schools" (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986, p.224). Leading and managing a school. What a demanding responsibility; what an exciting opportunity!

My earliest perceptions of the principal's role dealt mainly with the role of manager. I still feel very strongly that upon arriving as a new principal at a school, the management responsibilities will be the primary areas I will establish. The reason I say this is that a school must first and foremost meet its major responsibility of educating the students. The first step toward this goal is the establishment and maintenance of a positive school climate.

This includes operating the building smoothly, coordinating activities, and ensuring that students and teachers feel safe. Proper management skills benefit the students since, ". . . a good school environment is one that enhances students' learning and development" (Rutherford, 1985, p. 32) and benefits the principal, too, because ". . . the principal must be able to solve the manageable problems or s/he will not be principal long enough to aim higher" (Heller, 1985, p. 43).

Knowing the importance of proper management, but also realizing that it is just one of the hats principals wear, the use of technology is a must in accomplishing many management tasks and also in freeing the principal to devote attention to other areas. Dr. Robert Decker's Technological Applications in Educational Administration class has been invaluable in personal and professional use. The extent of technological implementation varies with individual school budgets, but I firmly believe that administrators and staff that work in the offices, ". . . are the people who realize some of the promise of increased and more effective service from the new technology" (Brown, 1984, p. 18), and I also realize they ". . . encounter the fear, confusion, uncertainty, and other difficulties which the introduction of technology can imply" (Brown, 1984, p. 18).

With the proper formulation of policies and procedures,

the use of technology can be effectively implemented into the school. A systematic plan involving personnel in a bottom-up approach, using coordinators, training time, rewards, and a lot of two-way communication and positive support will certainly pay dividends in the administrative areas of attendance, student record keeping, accounting, inventories, and scheduling (Brown, 1984, p. 17). The positive possibilities far outweigh the negatives.

Technology certainly has its place in the management of a school, but so does the human touch. It is vital to keep the two where they belong. Dr. Norman McCumsey's School Laws class really was an eye-opener for me. This class stressed the importance of keeping up with federal and state legal codes, as well as working with local school district policies. The legal management of implementing negotiated contracts, recruitment and staff selection, administering instructional budgets, and so much more emphasized that while technology is a tool, the human element cannot be replaced. Dr. McCumsey also emphasized that the human element had better know what s/he is doing according to the law, be sensitive to the rights of all individuals and groups, and be flexible enough to incorporate this understanding and sensitivity into policy and action within the school.

A last area of management also begins the entry into the role of leadership. The principal is crucial as a liaison

between the school, staff, students, and community. As Arthur Wise said about today's principal, "The principal must be someone who can work with teachers as peers and who can work effectively with parents and the rest of the community. So the principal's job requires facilitative and consensus-building skills" (Wise, 1992, p. 53).

After twenty-one years as a classroom teacher, the philosophy of site-based management is very attractive to me. Within the school it is very important that the principal maintains the philosophy that while ". . . instructional policies may originate at the federal, state, or local level and may apply across the entire district, the individual teachers have the responsibility and the autonomy to make instructional decisions in their own classrooms" (Rallis, 1988, p. 644).

It is truly a step toward meeting the demand of education when, ". . . schools recognize existing resources and use them to the fullest -- specifically, the management skills of principals and the instructional leadership of master teachers" (Rallis and Highsmith, 1986, p. 304). I agree that, ". . . effective principals are those whose management protects and enables others to provide developmental leadership" (Rallis and Highsmith, 1986, p. 304) because it is the principal who must encourage and motivate teachers to provide leadership for their school and then must continue to

foster this leadership. Within each school the attitude toward and ability to develop site-based management varies, yet the key is that the potential is there in every school if the principal ". . . creates an environment in which procedural obstacles to innovation are removed, an environment in which teachers are treated as professionals who can themselves improve instruction" (Rallis and Highsmith, 1986, p. 304). When this type of environment exists and teachers become empowered, the school has a great opportunity to become a more effective school and a school in which reform can take place.

My concept of the principal as manager has not faltered, rather it has deepened and became stronger. What has developed, however, is a more realistic understanding that the principal also has many other important roles and that these roles overlap, intertwine, and eventually must work together. In dealing with the roles involved as principal, one will constantly encounter decision making and role playing that lead to assigning values to the facts presented and, ". . . not only do decisions require assigning values to facts and making judgments regarding course of action, but also often include a moral component involving the application of competing standards of goodness" (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986, p. 226). It is here that the principal is torn between standards, responsibilities, expectations, and equity

and must develop a diverse balance to all of it (Dagget, 1991).

It is obvious and has been brought out in many classes, that only through the development of vision can one take on the demands of educational leadership. I feel particularly strong on this point because I am very much a person who has gotten where I am because I have had visions of the way things could be, whether in academics or athletics.

I believe that vision is a, ". . . conception of what might be, what could be, perhaps what should be -- rather than a projection of what will be" (Barth, 1988, p. 639). Without vision how can one lead? Where would one lead to? All leaders, and certainly an educational leader, ". . . must be a 'visionary'; s/he must be able to see and communicate possibilities and to transform them into beliefs that can be shared by everyone in the school" (Rallis and Highsmith, 1986, p. 303).

Through the master's program, I have become much more aware of the leadership role of the principal. Because of this awareness I appreciate but do not agree with the statement that, ". . . most principals are trained as managers and are simply not prepared to meet the school's needs for instructional leadership" (Rallis and Highsmith, 1986, p. 301). While I do not agree with this statement, it does concern me very much.

Educational leadership concerns me because today it is portrayed not only as desperately needed, which I agree with, but also as the "glamour" element of the principal's role. I am concerned that vision is not enough and that reform sometimes is done for the sake of change or the "splash" effect! My concern is that we not forget the real objective in education is to create effective schools and that these schools best meet the diverse educational interests and needs of the students. Reforms must be focused on the students and must always lead to effective, appropriate learning for all students (Rutherford, 1985, p. 32).

While I have already stated my belief in site-based management and the crucial importance of vision, I feel educational leadership must begin within the individual's personality. From one's personality must come the positive and enthusiastic ability to:

. . . translate visions into goals for their schools and expectations for the teachers, students, and administrators; establish school climates that support progress; and intervene in a supportive or corrective manner, when this seems necessary (Rutherford, 1985, p. 32).

While vision is the crucial beginning to educational leadership, there is much, much more involved in making that vision a reality.

Dr. Les Huth, in his Administration of the Secondary School Curriculum class, stressed that while every school has the same mission, each school attempts to accomplish that mission in its own way and has its own place along the continuum toward that accomplishment. One must know the school s/he is working with in formulating a vision. Every school exists in its own tradition and community history. Each school is different as to what is possible to achieve, and the vision for each school may be different, yet the outcome must be to improve the educational and organizational quality to best serve the educational interests of the children. In other words, the start of educational leadership is a vision to reach the fullest potential of what is possible for that school (Gorton and Schneider, 1991, p. 325).

Both Dr. Huth and Dr. Decker stressed in their classes, the need for and the usefulness of conducting a needs assessment to determine student, faculty, staff, and community desires and concerns. From the needs assessment one can more accurately determine the direction and time line for a school since ". . . schools must first perceive a need to change and then get ready to implement new ideas. It can take several years for innovations to become routine and fully established" (Clinton, 1986, p. 210).

Educational leadership is impossible without effective

and constant two-way communications. This includes determining and communicating short, intermediate, and long range goals, allocating sufficient resources, making decisions fairly and expressing this effort to those involved. A principal that is visible and models the ideals being communicated and developed is one that shows his/her publics that there is more than lip service being given to the vision created. Also, the principal as leader must be supportive of the staff in his/her efforts to create positive change within the school and individual classrooms (Heller, 1985, p. 44). After all:

. . . an instructional leader is someone who speaks for teachers, establishes the direction of instruction, knows and interprets research findings, demonstrates and explains 'best' practices, takes risks in instruction, works well with and supports teachers, encourages sharing, spreads a sense of where the school is headed instructionally, and helps teachers assess and evaluate their impact (Rallis, 1988, p. 644).

It is the focus on instruction which is most demanding, yet inspiring, to me. Since Dr. Huth's Administration of the Secondary School Curriculum class I see the area of curriculum in a totally different way. Dr. Huth's own enthusiasm for the topic was contagious. His emphasis on

on the fact that the focus of instruction comes from the established curriculum has left a lasting impression on me. I understand the need for a balanced concern for all subject matter and activity programs. As an educational leader it is crucial to study, evaluate, and work with the instructional staff to implement current programs in education which remain consistent with the goals and objectives of the school district.

Along with my increased awareness of the importance of the curriculum, perhaps the most informative area of study was in Dr. Decker's Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction class. I entered this class viewing supervision and evaluation as a necessary but uncomfortable and negative responsibility for the principal. My perceptions of this role have changed, and I now see the supervision and evaluation role as an opportunity to show my desire for and interest in quality teaching and effective instruction. I realize that effective principals are those who take the time to discover what is going on in the classrooms.

Dr. Decker's class helped illustrate that ". . . effective principals look for positive features and then directly and sincerely recognize and praise the teachers responsible for them" (Rutherford, 1985, p. 34). The variety of methods used in monitoring helps create a non-threatening atmosphere. Along with the formal classroom observations,

informal methods like walking the halls, ducking in and out of classrooms, and attending departmental meetings can keep the administrator informed and let his/her faculty know there is legitimate interest in and support for their instructional efforts.

In the formal observation routine, the entire process from pre-observation conference through the observation and post-observation conference can and should be approached as a positive opportunity to improve instructional strategies and techniques. I especially intend to work with all my teachers in setting continued professional improvement commitments as part of the supervision process.

Dr. Decker's class also emphasized the absolute necessity for maintaining accurate records and documentation. During this class it was also reassuring to work with the responsibilities of the administrator who spotted problems and took the necessary corrective action. Whether this action is in the form of support, assistance, intervention programs, or eventually dismissal, this administrative responsibility must be a top priority and professionally performed, if the educational integrity of the school is to be maintained.

A final reflection on the principalship is on the growing role of the administrator in the area of community

public relations. I enjoyed Dr. McCumsey's School and Community class very much. My feelings have long been that education is a people business. The development of oral and written communications is as crucial now as at any time in our history. The ability to work not only with the publics within the school, but equally well with those outside the school has always been important, but now it may well be a necessity for the survival of the school.

Outside the school the principal must be able to generate interest and support from an aging and often apathetic society. With the financial burdens facing education, the public's support is a must. Students, themselves, point out the need for ". . . improved classrooms, better learning materials, more teachers, improved maintenance, and new construction" (U.S.A. WEEKEND, 1991, p. 4).

To gain the interest and support of the public and business community, the principal must educate them to the importance and relevance of the mission of the school. This belief in the school's role and function may allow the outside public to help create, share, and build the on-going vision of the school through their involvement of time and effort, as well as money.

This growing intermediary role in public relations is one I enjoy performing. I am a "people person" and really look forward to this type of interaction. Today's principal

must strive to be aware of his/her community. He/she must maintain an awareness of the factors outside the school which affect the school. The principal must be able to go to the community's publics as well as bring those publics into the school. By creating advisory committees or volunteer groups, the principal also creates opportunities to inform the public about school programs and services, to interpret learning programs and board policies, and to maintain an open line of communication and involvement with the community ("Principals", 1980, p. 1).

In a world of sweeping economic change, continually advancing technology, less unskilled labor, and more international competition, the job of the principal continues to become a greater challenge. The role of our schools continues to grow and become more complex as the student population changes in its demographics. Society's changes in family structure and moral and ethical standards have resulted in the need for earlier sex education, drug education, breakfast programs, programs for teen mothers, suicide prevention guidance, day care facilities and many more expectations of today's schools. "The instability of today's family structure, drugs and all the problems of city living have made life for a student more hazardous. The schools have to be restructured to take in that environment" (U.S.A. WEEKEND, 1991, p. 5).

Often, along with mandated standards, assumed new responsibilities, and necessary additional programs and personnel, there is little, if any, financial support. There are constant and growing expectations, but little support toward the realization of these expectations. Rather, critics are quick to point to the schools and scream, "Our schools are failing!"

Why, then, would one ever desire to be an administrator in the educational system? I believe it starts with a belief in and commitment to the young people in this country; a belief in the importance of preparing the next generations for adult life and an active, productive role in their community, society, and world.

This awesome undertaking will require dedicated, visionary leaders that are prepared to see what good exists in education, yet knowledgeable and bold enough to strike out the areas of failure and incompetence. Not only must they strike out, but then must create, build, and replace with challenging, relevant, stimulating reforms. These reforms must stress independence, coping skills, problem defining and solving, and thinking skills. As Ngoe Ho, a ninth grader at Mountain View High in suburban San Francisco stated, "Schools should be a place where we get ready for life. We'll need to know how to work, how to take care of ourselves, and how to stay healthy" (U.S.A. WEEKEND, 1991, p. 5). Certainly "The role of

the principal must change as both the community and education itself change" (Goldman, 1966, p. 28). Principals must lead not only in bringing change to education, but guaranteeing and managing that change to a meaningful and successful conclusion. They will need to use all the traits of judgment, organization, sensitivity, communication, and leadership ". . . to bring together materials, resource persons, teachers, and pupils in a positive relationship so as to effect intellectual development and social growth in the learners" (Goldman, 1966, p. 14).

The future challenges in education may be viewed in different lights. Certainly education leaders will need ". . . the ability to see the enterprise as a whole; recognize how the various functions of the organization depend on one another, and how changes in any one part affect all the others" (Goldman, 1966, p. 11). This concept may discourage or frustrate some, but we all must remember that we are not taking on the challenges of the future alone. Along with all the other abilities needed, perhaps the one we need to exercise most is patience. Reform and eventual success will take time and will have its failures.

I personally am more excited about the role of principal in education now than when I started the master's program.

I agree with Arthur Wise when he said that today's principal should ". . . be feeling a great sense of anticipation and excitement as to what the future has in store" (Wise, 1992, p. 53). With this attitude we can be prepared to lead and manage the transformation of American schools.

REFERENCES

- Barth, R. S. (1988). Principals, teachers, and school leadership. Phi Delta Kappan, 69 (9), 639-642.
- Blumberg, A. & Greenfield, W. (1986). The effective principal: Perspectives on school leadership. Newton, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Brown, D.J. (1984). The change to administrative computing in schools. AEDS Journal, 21(3), 17-30.
- Clinton, B. (1986). Who will manage the schools? Phi Delta Kappan, 68(4), 208-210.
- Dagget, W. (1991). Videotape Lecture. Five Season's Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.
- Goldman, S. (1966). The school principal. New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc.
- Gorton, R. A. & Schneider, G. T. (1991). School-based leadership challenges and opportunities. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publishers.
- Heller, M. (1985). Principals in high tech age are the non-replaceable leaders. NASSP Bulletin, 69(484), 43-46.
- "Principals." Code of Iowa (1980): 1.
- Rallis, S. (1988). Room at the top: Conditions for effective school leadership. Phi Delta Kappan, 69(9), 643-647.

- Rallis, S. & Highsmith, M. C. (1986). The myth of the "great principal": Questions of school management and instructional leadership. Phi Delta Kappan, 68(4), 300-304.
- Rutherford, W. L. (1985). School principals as effective leaders. Phi Delta Kappan, 67(1), 31-34.
- U.S.A. WEEKEND. (1991). Des Moines, Iowa: Gannett Co., Inc.
- Wise, A. E. (1992). Principal's role to become more demanding as school transformation occurs. A Bulletin Special, 76(541), 47-55.