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## A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

Randy Alan Mead  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

### Abstract

Close examination of the area of education clearly reveals that one must be considerate of many crucial areas. Society has become global in nature and people come from a very heterogeneous background. Analysis of documents regarding goals for U.S. schools reveals a steady evolution from the narrow academic skills to a far wider array of concerns (Goodlad, 1983b). One very important piece of knowledge to be internalized concerning education, is that it is a very complex institution. There seems to be no panacea on the horizon that individuals can begin to implement that will have a significant effect upon this institution. It is just too complex an area to be dramatically changed in a simplistic fashion! It also seems that those who realize this fact are individuals who have a deep respect for the institution and continually examine its needs and progress toward a better way to educate people. There are many good ideas, systems, and studies that contain valuable information, that when put together provide progress in education. It is important to realize that these ideas need to be examined in order to sift out the ideas that would work best for a particular situation .

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:  
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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The Department of Educational Administration  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of Arts in Education

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by  
Randy A. Mead  
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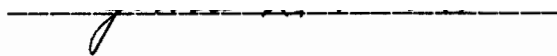


Advisor/Director of Research Paper

James Doud

6-26-91

Date Approved

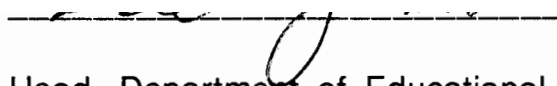


Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

7/2/91

Date Received



Head, Department of Educational  
Administration and Counseling

Close examination of the area of education clearly reveals that one must be considerate of many crucial areas. Society has become global in nature and people come from a very heterogeneous background. Analysis of documents regarding goals for U.S. schools reveals a steady evolution from the narrow academic skills to a far wider array of concerns (Goodlad, 1983b). One very important piece of knowledge to be internalized concerning education, is that it is a very complex institution. There seems to be no panacea on the horizon that individuals can begin to implement that will have a significant effect upon this institution. It is just too complex an area to be dramatically changed in a simplistic fashion! It also seems that those who realize this fact are individuals who have a deep respect for the institution and continually examine its needs and progress toward a better way to educate people. There are many good ideas, systems, and studies that contain valuable information, that when put together provide progress in education. It is important to realize that these ideas need to

be examined in order to sift out the ideas that would work best for a particular situation .

Much is also being learned about people as they are developing in our complex society. A major emphasis is being placed upon developing schools that provide for the needs of twenty-first century learners through curriculum (Cunard, 1990). This complexity demands that people involved in the educational system be very sensitive to the needs of the learners. Because of this complexity, it is much more difficult to determine the effect of various types of instructional practices. This complexity also presents many more possible concerns to the leaders of education. Lifestyles are much more fast paced and, therefore, people seem to be much more diversified and fragmented in their pursuits in life. Future leaders in education must concern themselves with the changes that are taking place throughout the society to be effective in their positions. Such issues as environmental hazards, high technology, broken families, a global society,

economic uncertainties, and ethic responsibility have had a profound effect upon the society and upon the people within the society. The focus of this paper will be to examine some areas that need continual consideration within education to make it a more effective institution. It is increasingly easy to maintain a narrow focus because of specialization, yet it becomes imperative to get the "big picture" in order to progress in an effective way as a developing leader in education. The changes upon the institution and upon the people within the institution will be the emphasis throughout this paper.

#### Importance of Vision ×

Many changes have been recommended for education in recent years. Individual states have been given the responsibility to make sure that the taxpayer's dollars are being utilized to provide the best possible education for all students. Surrounded by such issues as outcome-based education, at-risk programs, school restructuring, site-based

management and teacher empowerment, the educational leader must have a clear understanding of the goals of the institution. School leaders must be capable of formulating long-term plans for development of individual schools in accordance with the guidelines set up by the state (Goodlad, 1983a). Planning, reviewing, and evaluating must be done on a regular basis to insure a clear path toward the vision. This vision should be shared by the participants and leader within the organization. An effective leader will seek to establish a vision that reflects the community, himself, and those within the organization. Cooperative relationships among all of those involved are keys to an effective process. Clearly implied within this process is strong leadership on the part of the principal. Extensive knowledge on the part of planners is also very important in this ongoing process.

Within this process, I think a balance needs to be achieved in the areas of accountability and the flexibility of instruction. Meeting the needs of all of the students is vital



as we progress in our complex society. Educators must be given choices, yet be held responsible for the results of their teaching (Glickman, 1990). The goals of the district must allow for this very intricate balance to form. Balance is one important key to the issues facing leaders in education.

Strengths of various people within the organization need to be utilized effectively to improve the entirety of the organization. With this utilization of others should come a realization of the needs of others within the organization. These needs then can more easily be met by the leader if a cooperative environment is created (Bennis, 1984). A sense of trust and cooperation are necessities to effective management. With this sense of trust and community, members of the organization can commit toward a clear vision of the organization (Bennis, 1984). This system of cooperation ensures the best possible outcome for the organization because people are being utilized to their maximum potential!

Principals and other educational leaders must have the vision to provide the goals that will provide for a balanced system of education. We can ill-afford to be tossed about by trends that swing back and forth from choice and accountability. The important aspect of vision is to have a keen sense of what the potential of the school is and to choose the direction that's going toward this potential (Gardner, 1985). Time must also be allowed in the educational system in order to effectively accomplish these goals.

#### Leadership Importance

Administration has typically been divided into two basic categories: (a) management, and (b) leadership. As I first entered the area of educational administration, I looked at these two areas as being one entity. I also began my program of study with a very segregated idea of management and labor. Much of my previous experience comes from the area of industry which historically has seen a clear division between management and labor. This division still exists in

some industries as well as some educational institutions.

I thought of a good administrator as a good manager. This manager was believed to be a good organizer, a good communicator, and one who could supervise well. I thought that managerial skills were the most important qualities of educational leadership. The reason I believed this was because managerial skills were these tangible skills. It has seemed much easier for me to think of a good administrator as one who is well organized and knowledgeable within education, than one who possesses leadership skills such as ethical responsibility, humility, and genuine concern for others. A leader must also be teachable and fair, seeking to be of service to others. Managing was the part of the job that has come easy for me and, therefore, I felt more comfortable thinking of leaders as mainly good managers.

Within my teaching experience, however, I began to realize the importance of leadership. I began to realize that one must go beyond the managerial skills and learn to be a

strong leader. I saw that students needed not only a good manager, but they also needed a good leader. Enlightenment has come to me in the area of education by focusing more attention to the area of leadership. Within this focus, I also began to more fully realize that leaders must not be condescending. Leaders need to set the proper example and show genuine concern for others. I began to see that leadership involves allowing others to be leaders! In no way do I mean this to relinquish total responsibility and accountability of the administrator. The talents and skills of people need to be tapped to allow them to grow and the organization to develop in a favorable way. This growth should benefit all within the organization because it provides a sense of self-worth for those within the school. The effects of this leadership are that people feel significant and there is a real sense of community (Bennis, 1986). People learn to work together toward the achievement of goals and they become committed to the vision.

Because of the complexity of our society, the demand is very great to provide leadership and management in a way that meets the needs of the people, as well as the needs of the organization. The ability to balance the needs for both is possessed by an effective leader. Many management models of past years have omitted this balance and have not provided for the needs of the employees.

The leadership role is being reconceptualized as we progress in society. Greater emphasis is being placed on shared decision-making and employee leadership development. Teacher empowerment can seek to maximize teachers' potential while facilitating leadership (Cunard, 1990). The principal must still have knowledge of what is going on to make delegated responsibilities effective. Staff must also be given authority and accountability as long as they are working within the parameters of the vision previously established.

This delegation approach would allow the school a high degree of autonomy by placing responsibility and authority at

the school level. Here the individuals should be able to better provide for the needs of the organization. Improvement can occur if the school decisionmaking is shifted from centralized, "top down" administration to individual school control directed by the principal, staff, students, and parents. The needs of individual schools can more easily be met, while still maintaining continuous dialogue concerning roles at the district and school levels. This involves a shift from the hierarchical system to a model emphasizing involvement of those affected, but where the educational leader sets the agenda and inspires those within the organization to work together in pursuit of the objectives.

Principals must learn to work alongside staff and not above them! A principal must realize that superiority is not part of his/her job description! Decisions need to be made utilizing experts, and this often implies the teachers and the students. Individuals are given more responsibility to make the organization run more productively. This means involving

more workers to lighten the load, while making sure perfection is sought. The principal will be a stronger leader because those working with him/her will be stronger. The principal must learn to rely upon others strengths to be effective. So much can be accomplished when the leader is surrounded with expertise, and responsibilities are delegated accordingly. The key to making this work is an energetic, humble leader and a cooperative staff. I firmly believe that most would be willing to cooperate if strong leadership were present!

A balanced leader must cause the organization to work in desirable ways. The centers of effective schools are strong effective principals who are fair, consistent, capable, and visible (Swymer, 1986). A positive school climate is created when a principal is visible. Schools are made up of human beings who don't check in their vitality at the schoolhouse door. Principals must learn to spend more time around the building where the action is (Cilo, 1989). In this style of leadership, time must be spent with those who also make a

difference: the teachers and the students. Teachers must be allowed the opportunity to experience new and creative ideas. The principal must be interested in what is going on in each and every classroom and must show that by being visible when possible!

### Active Student Involvement

In today's world, Purkey (1970) suggested there should be only one type of school, that which accounts for the individual differences of students, as compared to traditional schools in which the student is expected to adjust to the school system. All too often, schools are places where students face rejection and failure with little active participation in the classroom setting. Teachers need to use activities involving manual skills to promote intellectual development (Goodlad, 1983b). Students need to be cast into an active role within the classroom as well as the entire school. Communication skills must be developed throughout the curriculum to provide skills necessary for life.



Teachers need to see students in much the same way as teachers want administrators to see them. Students need to be considered as thinkers, and developed as such. This gets to the "how of curriculum." Students should be taught to do such things as analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply information in all disciplines. Success must be an integral part of this active role as a student, yet school should be challenging for students. The different strengths of students must be utilized and developed by teachers. Such areas as cooperative learning and peer teaching are excellent ideas to further develop the talents of students. These approaches help reduce the threat of competition, while providing success for the students involved. Discipline problems don't occur as often in classrooms where the student's needs are being met (Glasser, 1987).

The role of the principal is to create this sense of community within his/her own staff members and then go on to inspire them to realize the need for students to be able to

have the same sort of vision. This is the essence of education. Not only can people in the organization cooperate among themselves but they can also teach and allow others to do the same. By inspiring them and developing their strengths and potential, all can experience a sense of community. Students' strengths also need to be utilized so that they may learn from each other and respect each other. Principals play a key role by inspiring teachers to see the potential of such methods as active student involvement and peer tutoring.

Inservices are an excellent way by which staff can develop skills to meet the needs of students. Staff developer plays a key role by allowing the staff to learn new instructional methods and techniques. The principal can cause the organization to grow in desirable ways if the staff development is matched to the needs of the organization.

Leaders should promote higher-order thinking skills, active learning, and encourage more parent involvement, for the improvement of student performance (Anrig & Lapointe,

1989). People need to be taught to think! Unfortunately, some of the most sought after characteristics in people are those that can't be taught out of a textbook or measured by a basic skills test. Certainly, a balanced approach toward the measurable and the immeasurable abilities should be a strong consideration of the classroom teacher and others involved in the teaching /learning process. Various teaching and learning styles need to be explored and utilized to meet the needs of the students. The educational system needs to work hard to do all that it can to accommodate individual differences among learners (O'Neil, 1990). The principal must continually convey this philosophy by asking what can be done to improve learning. Along with this continual process of trying to improve the system will come revision of goals and evaluation procedures to lead to the vision previously established.

With this active participation and cooperation, a sense of purpose will permeate those involved. Everyone must feel that he/she is an integral part of the system and understand

why they come to school in order to remove the barriers that inhibit growth. Those working with the lives of adolescents need to constantly be aware of the complexities of the individuals they are working with, in order to provide them an environment that will allow them to have maximum growth potential. This learning will provide students with much more than the basic skills of education.

#### Effective Relations

An educational leader must always be aware of the relationships that he/she has to maintain with the community, the professional staff, support staff, and the students. Leaders are looked to as examples to follow and the leaders in education are no different. This is by far the most important characteristic that a leader can develop throughout life. One must set an example of professionalism in the way he/she treats other people. This example must be present in all facets of the person's life in order for him/her to be a great leader. This leader must be the one on staff who works the

hardest and the smartest with concern and respect for others. This leader must continually analyze decisions to examine how they might affect other people.

Equal time and respect needs to be given to the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the young and the old, in order to develop as a person concerned about the education of all people. He/she must deal with pressure in a controlled fashion not seeking to demoralize anyone. Proper judgments, in these times of pressure, are important in dealing with people.

Communication is also a vitally important attribute for one to possess as an educational leader. Persuasively communicating with various constituencies must be a characteristic that the principal continually works on. Along with this persuasive side must also come a personable personality. The position of principal demands a well-rounded individual who is concerned about bridging the gaps that exist between administrators, students, parents, staff and the

community. Parents need to be actively involved in the education of their children. Some keys to this involvement are appropriate recognition and constant communication. Positive reinforcement is an effective way to promote positive relationships and results within the system.

The position of principal is a very demanding responsibility which makes it mandatory to have a leader in the truest sense of the word. This person must deal efficiently and effectively with the school, the staff, the students, and the community on a daily basis. A strong value system can only help lighten the load when dealing with so many people and circumstances that demand strong judgment on the part of the principal. The complexity of the position continues to expand to areas in which few have had the proper training. Only with a strong ethical foundation can one continue to make solid judgments, given the complexity of the situations. The desire for continual learning and growth needs to be present in the mind of the principal. An attitude of

service and concern must also permeate the mind of this energetic, humble leader, because he/she is impacting the lives of many human beings!

The vision should be continually inspiring to everyone and should constantly remind the principal of the magnitude of his/her position. This should help the administrator to realize the impact he/she has upon the lives of other people. Many young minds are being impacted by this person directly or indirectly, and this should help the administrator to solidify his/her beliefs on a daily basis.

In light of this concern, Frymier (1987) suggests that school climate in effective schools is manifested in an ethical commitment by its staff members. The relationships are positive, honest, rewarding, and helpful. Teachers and administrators enjoy one another and are concerned about other people's welfare. Teachers don't consider themselves better than students and administrators don't consider themselves better than teachers.

I strongly believe that I will be able to lead with a proper vision developed within the organization. A proper vision is the foundation for leadership. With the vision in place, people can more easily see how they fit into the purpose of the organization. People's strengths can then be developed by a strong leader who wants the organization to run in a desirable way. These strengths can first be developed through proper leadership, and then inspiration can be passed along to continue to develop the staff within the educational organization.

The students' strengths must also be developed in much the same way that the staff's strengths are utilized and developed. The administrator must be instrumental as a catalyst in this development. Positive relations must be of concern throughout this entire process. Effective relations must be a top priority in order for a leader to accomplish the vision.



With these ingredients, I will be confident in providing a positive learning environment that provides equal opportunities for all students! These ingredients need to be the focus of leaders in education to insure that the potential of every person within the organization is achieved!

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