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

Michael W. Morrison  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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

### Abstract

Less than eight years ago, I stood in the Central Lee High School gymnasium listening to speech after speech of how our class is the future and how we are the leaders of tomorrow. These speeches came from people who have been down the road to success and from some of my fellow classmates, who I felt, stayed up late at night writing what they knew their parents wanted to hear them say. My biggest concern at the time was why we could not have high school baseball practice on Sundays. If I wasted a day of opportunity for improvement, I was going to fall behind. It is funny how at that age, trivial things seem to take on major importance, and as you grow older and more mature your priorities change.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Michael W. Morrison

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Robert H. Decker

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Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Norman McCumsey

*March 29, 1993*  
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Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

*April 1, 1993*  
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational  
Administration and Counseling

Less than eight years ago, I stood in the Central Lee High School gymnasium listening to speech after speech of how our class is the future and how we are the leaders of tomorrow. These speeches came from people who have been down the road to success and from some of my fellow classmates, who I felt, stayed up late at night writing what they knew their parents wanted to hear them say. My biggest concern at the time was why we could not have high school baseball practice on Sundays. If I wasted a day of opportunity for improvement, I was going to fall behind. It is funny how at that age, trivial things seem to take on major importance, and as you grow older and more mature your priorities change.

As I started college the next fall, baseball was still at the top of my list. I immediately went into the coach's office and asked when the first day of practice was and to state that today would not be soon enough.

Registration for classes was probably the moment of discovery. I had planned on being a computer applications major and working for a major corporation. After some conversation with my advisor, we decided I belonged working with young people. Teach? Me? Yeah, that's right. This was my first step down the professional road I am currently on.

I enjoyed a very productive college life. I was active in many activities trying to take on as many roles as I could. Things have not changed much. I was working towards becoming a better leader. At

that time, I just wanted to make things better. I was not working towards the secondary principalship, or was I?

I am where I am today for the same reason I sought out those other leadership roles. I want to make a difference. I seek to improve, or at least continue with the quality education we are trying to provide to our youth.

The one thing I feel has stayed constant in my life since my younger brother's death, my junior year of college, is the Serenity Prayer. It says, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference."

This one prayer gives me what I need to evaluate a situation and determine what route I should take. I believe in what is said in the prayer and believe that it applies more to life in general than any prayer, quote, pre-game speech, or words of wisdom that could ever be spoken.

My views of the secondary principal profession have not changed very much since beginning the program. The principalship does involve everything I had expected. I saw the principal as the leader of the school, evaluator of staff, public relations coordinator, and disciplinarian. The principal is all of these, but I was amazed at the amount of time being required of our building principal in attending meetings. The principal I work with is in meetings anywhere from fifty to seventy-five percent of the day. The majority of this time is

spent on the budget, program of studies, special programs, enrollment issues, and facilities.

The principal's job involves much more than I anticipated. I knew that it was about a sixty hour per week job with all of the activities and spur of the moment requests, but I did not realize that those last minute requests set back all of the day's chores. If I have realized anything differently at all, it is the need for effective time management.

There are many ways to alleviate the stress created by the hustle and bustle of the principalship. Pippel (1992) gives thirteen tips on time management. The one I believe is of utmost importance is deadline delirium. According to Pippel (1992), "A principal should make a quick list each day of the things that must be accomplished, followed by a 'wish list' of things you would like to complete and cross off each task as it is finished" (p. 36). I am a firm believer in making a list of things to do each day. I try to prioritize these items by importance. One way to tackle this is to set aside some time each day to work on the items that must be completed that day. I think it is perfectly understandable to accept only urgent calls or messages during this time. If you have a good secretary, your calls and messages can be screened.

My biggest concern about the principalship, at this point, is that I will not have any time to live my life outside of the school. I feel it is very important to leave work at the school as much as possible.

Personal characteristics of the individual are what most decisions are based on. A person's individual values and beliefs enter into many of the judgments he or she will make. This is probably more true for myself opposed to an individual who has been in the business for a longer period of time. Experience, the best teacher, allows the veterans to call on past practices for guidance. If you do not have the luxury of experience, you just have to do the obvious.

Many of the beliefs and values I have are based on my experience. I have to evaluate the situation at hand and make my own decision. When as a child, you ask a parent why some people do the things they do, a common reply is, "They do not know any better." This is one statement I assessed early in my life. I have always believed that everyone knows right from wrong. People do not always recognize this before a move is made, but many know if what they have done was a mistake or the right decision. In my opinion, I feel what separates people is how they handle themselves after the action.

People are important to me. I want people around me involved in the decision making and sharing the successes and defeats. Stephen R. Covey's book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (1989), emphasizes cooperation on habit six. Habit six is to synergize. When I think of this habit, I think of the great teamwork on the athletic field. I think it is probably emphasized there more than anywhere else. There truly are some lessons to be learned in cooperation. "Synergy is everywhere in nature. If you plant two plants close together, the roots



come together and improve the quality of the soil so that both plants will grow better than if they were separated" (Covey, 263).

Covey's statement puts into perspective how important it is for administrators and faculty to cooperate. We need to work together to improve the product we are selling. To clarify, that product is not the student. The student is the customer. The product is the education and the opportunity we provide. The business world loses sight of what schools are really about when they think we are a factory pumping out students to them, the so-called customer.

Communicating synergistically, according to Covey (1989), means that "you are simply opening your mind and heart and expressions to new possibilities, new alternatives, and new options" (p. 264). This goes hand in hand with being a great leader. If I have the desire for becoming a leader, I have to encourage others to think and ask, and I must be sensitive to their needs and desires. According to Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher (1990), "A leader who admits that mistakes will occasionally be made, encourages staff members to assume risks to try programs that will improve their schools" (p. 4).

The job description of a secondary school principal has expanded over the years. In the past the principal was viewed primarily as the disciplinarian and school manager. Today the principal is viewed as an instructional leader. He or she is expected to provide direction for the school and help that school become a strong educational institution.

To be an effective administrator in today's schools, I need to be a very dynamic individual. I must possess a variety of skills and qualities. I will be dealing with a variety of people, their attitudes, and their beliefs.

The quality that I feel is of the utmost importance is leadership. Guthrie and Reed (1991) define a leader as "an individual who accepts the authoritative expectations of others to responsibly guide the activities and enhance the performance of others" (p.10). I feel at this point I can guide an activity. The area I feel is the most difficult to master is enhancing the performance of others.

In order to enhance performance I feel you need to possess the characteristics of leadership stated by Guthrie and Reed (1991) referred to as "V-I-S-I-O-N" (p. 11). They state that leaders:

- \*Possess a vision of what their organization should be like.
- \*Know how to motivate and inspire those with whom they work.
- \*Understand the major operational levers that can be employed to control or change an organization's course.
- \*Are intensely sensitive to and continually reflect upon the interaction of external environmental conditions and internal organizational dynamics.
- \*Understand the fundamental components of strategic thinking that can be used to guide or alter an organization.

A principal must be a good leader. Leadership is the most important quality of the effective principal. It is the most frequently mentioned trait by experts. Leadership is listed first in Townsend-Butterworth's (1992) article about effective schools. "Effective principals are strong leaders with high but realistic expectations for their students and staff" (p. 40). These expectations should be very clear to the students and staff. If you want people to follow or work with you, they need to know their role.

Another key element of a leader is to be visible. As stated by Townsend-Butterworth (1992), "Strong principals are highly visible and know what is going on in the classrooms. They visit classrooms and talk to parents, teachers, and students" (p. 40).

Students and faculty will tend to shy away as they do not feel comfortable around you. The principal in our building rarely comes into the classroom unless it is for an evaluation. This really creates anxiety for many teachers that are not used to seeing the building administrator in their classrooms.

Our building principals and superintendent have stated at the beginning of the year for the past two years that every Tuesday morning they would be out and about in the halls and classrooms making themselves visible. Both years this lasted for about two weeks. They soon returned to their offices for one closed-door meeting after another.

This all comes back to two points. A principal must be a leader and must communicate well. If you tell the staff you are going to do something, be sure to carry through. If you fail to carry through time after time, people will stop believing in you. Every thing you say from that point forward will be accepted as just talk.

Failure to communicate well is probably the most common reason for an administrator to lose his/her job. Communication means much more than just disseminating information.

"Communication means that a message not only was sent but also received and responded to in a way indicating that it was understood" (Gorton and Schneider, 70).

Two-way communication may be the most effective method of communicating. It not only allows you to get the message out but you are able to get feedback easily. It also enables you to seek ideas and suggestions. If staff, students, and the community are confident in the communication process in the school, they will develop a sense of belonging and pride. They know their ideas will be heard and understood and will receive feedback. According to Parish and Prager ((1992), "Improving two-way communication will be rewarded with significant benefits: a greater sense of unity, a clearer sense of purpose, stronger employee and student morale, and increased parent and community support" (p. 39).

A school that has good communication with the community opens itself up for community involvement. West Delaware has made

efforts over the past two years to improve our communication with the community. We have used the radio and newspaper more effectively and have improved our newsletters. The radio station we currently use is only a year old, and we have noticed a great surge of interest in our school since that time.

We now have a volunteer program in the developing stage. This came about only after we felt we had developed interest from the community in the school. The volunteer program was my practicum project. Developing a program from the ground up is a long process. We did not have any form of volunteers in the school outside of coaches in our football program.

We were very fortunate at the time we started, one of the local banks was interested in becoming more involved in the school. Not only were they interested for themselves, they wanted to get the whole business community more involved. Our building principal, a colleague, and myself were the members from the high school to help develop the volunteer program. We started by conducting an assessment of the need for volunteers in the classroom throughout the district. All teachers were asked to fill out a form asking what they would use volunteers for in their classroom. They could have volunteers check papers, tutor, or even have them give presentations from business.

The local bank representative was working at his end. He was searching throughout the business community for volunteers. He was

responsible for compiling a list of people and what they could do. We then got together and tried to make some early matches. We were successful with a couple of matches early. We then went to the general public. We submitted ads in the local paper and on the radio. We found some people who were interested. A good response was received, and there are now volunteers in the school.

After more commitment to help is received, a catalog of volunteers will be compiled as a resource. This will give all of the teachers access to the volunteers in the community and what they have to offer. Developing a program like this takes a lot of time. It is important that the people in charge are patient with the development of the program. All of the parties involved in a volunteer program are equally important. All parties need to recognize that we are working together to provide a better education.

Administration of the secondary school is where the secondary principal spends most of his/her time. This involves the administration of the building. A great deal of tasks are covered in this area.

The principal may be required to handle discipline, which will take up a majority of his/her time. They are also expected to update, revise or maybe even create handbooks and guidelines for teachers, students, substitute teachers, non-certified staff and for athletics and activities. At West Delaware our principal involved staff and students

in making up these handbooks. This allows him to seek input and give people ownership in their school.

The principal is also responsible for the overseeing of funds. He/She may be in control of the money at the building level or may have to make requests to the central administrative office for funds. At West Delaware the principal designates the dollar amount to be used by each department and monitor all purchases from that budget.

There are three major areas of administrative practice at the secondary school that I feel are of the utmost importance. The areas are administration of the curriculum; administration of human resources involving recruitment, selection, induction, supervision, and evaluation; and community relations.

The administration of the curriculum is of great importance because it is the product you are disseminating to the customer, the student. The principal is responsible for seeing that the secondary curriculum meets the needs of all students. The curriculum cannot cater to the college-bound students only. According to Gorton and Schneider (1991), "The curriculum should provide for the needs of the low-ability and average students, as well as the academically talented. It should also provide for the needs of students with special handicaps, as well as the needs of other kinds of exceptional students" (p. 362).

It is important for the principal to know what the curriculum is. The principal should know the school's mission, beliefs, and outcomes if they are an outcome-based district. He or she should then work

along the mission, beliefs, and outcomes to determine if the curriculum aligns with them. Knowing how the course outcomes and objectives align with the school's mission and beliefs provides a principal with more direction in evaluation of the curriculum. In many districts, this would be the main function of the curriculum coordinator. In a small district, the principal may be that person.

Regardless of the size of the district, the principal has a responsibility to the members of the community to be an instructional leader. He or she is responsible for scheduling of courses, dropping or adding courses, and development of the program of studies. All of this must be done with the philosophy of the district in mind. According to Wells (1979), the principal is key to the curriculum process. "The principal is a central figure in setting goals for instruction and providing direction to the overall philosophy of education for the school" (p. 76).

Society today is changing rapidly. There are many demands placed on today's youth. The curriculum needs to reflect the major issues in society today. Gorton and Schneider (1991) say, "The essential point is that if the school is to prepare students for a constructive and productive life, the curriculum should reflect the realities of that life" (p. 363). Those realities are sometimes good and sometimes bad. Both need to be addressed.

Another issue in society that schools must keep up to date in their curriculum is the presence of technology. Our students will be



living and working in a world and a society that is oriented towards technology and computers. Today's curriculum will have to undergo a major overhaul in the area of technology. We must integrate technology into the curriculum rather than being a supplement to it.

Along with this integration comes the need for educating teachers. Teachers need substantial training, support, and time to integrate technology into the classroom. Technology alone will not give us a better educational product. A teacher capable of using the computer can enhance and improve the learning experience of students.

Ideally, there would be a computer on every teacher's desk with a telephone and modem. The school would be networked to allow for easier and more efficient dissemination of information. Each class would have access to the library card catalog from the classroom on computer. All record keeping of attendance and grading would be done on the computer with entry coming directly from the classroom.

Financing is the only foreseeable problem. Schools today are being asked to do more with less. Schools will have to seek other methods such as grants for funding their technological advances.

In order to make all of the necessary strides in technology and to continue to provide a good education to today's youth, we must have good teachers on staff. It is important that the area of human resources is continually evaluated and improved.

The first area of human resource administration is recruitment of staff. The first step in the recruitment process, according to Guthrie and Reed (1991), is the establishing of policy "at the highest level of school governance" (p. 326). This is usually the school board's responsibility, or the adoption of the state board's policy.

The next step is the planning process. This involves long- and short-range planning. It is important, if possible, to foresee any possible openings. These openings could arise from anticipated retirements, promotions, leaves of absence, expected expansion in a program, an increase or reduction in enrollment, or a cut in fiscal areas (p.328).

The third step in the process is the job description of all positions. This should be done periodically for every position in the building. It may require just a little revision, but it will be nice to have in the event of an opening. This will allow me to move quickly in the event of an opening.

The announcement of vacancies is the next step. Announcements should be made in an appropriate publication, which in the state of Iowa is the Des Moines Register. This allows you to draw a large pool of applicants. "The state of Iowa requires that a position be advertised for a reasonable length of time, usually thirty days" (Dr. Norman McCumsey, personal communication, July 25, 1991). This is required to allow the protected classes (women, minorities, and

handicapped individuals) to have ample opportunity to apply for the position.

My goal, as a future administrator, in the area of recruitment is to try to stay on top of foreseeable openings. This requires a good rapport with your staff. You need to know who may be seeking another position, retiring, or considering a leave of absence.

Foreseeability in this area, hopefully, will allow me to draw the best possible candidates into the selection process.

The selection process can be very time consuming and intense. It is vital to the success of our school that the correct candidate be selected. I was fortunate enough to have been involved in the selection process at my current school. It is a difficult process because you are making a change to the school and the staff. According to Drake and Roe (1986), "As in any system, a change in one (part) affects the other parts. The social-professional system of the staff is no exception, for every time a staff member leaves or one is hired, the total impact of the school is changed" (p. 321).

It is very difficult to predict how well an applicant will interact with the current staff. I may be able to predict the success of the individual candidate as an educator based on qualifications and credentials, but not their interaction in the current staff. A move to alleviate the problem is to involve more people in the selection process. Key members to include would be other faculty members in the department of the opening. I may also include some of the more

experienced staff members at large. These people may have a better idea of how an individual may adapt to the rest of the staff. Even with other people involved it is still very difficult to predict the success of interaction. Once we have made the selection of new staff member(s) it is the administrator's responsibility to induct or orientate the new individual(s). Orientation must involve more than handing over the key and teacher's manuals. It must include familiarization with staff, policies, expectations of job performance and procedures. All of these give the new teacher a sense of comfort and belonging. Guthrie and Reed (1991) state:

Through the induction process, necessary information is disseminated to new employees; they begin to develop a sense of organizational belonging, are given support and assistance, provided tangible evidence that they are valued by the school district, individual school, and community (p. 337).

All schools should set up a formal orientation program. Unfortunately, many times the new employee is just 'turned loose', left to fend for him/herself. My personal experience is one of being given a very average orientation. Familiarization with staff was, for the most part, done on my own. The only staff members I was introduced to were those I would be working directly with.

As an administrator, it will be my goal to make new employees feel as comfortable as possible in order to perform their duties to the best of their ability. This is extremely important when considering the impact that teachers can make on young adults. Once the teacher has

settled in and become familiar with the system I hope they will continue to strive for improvement as an instructor. Improvement can be stimulated by a desire to improve and can be enhanced and monitored through supervision.

The key to supervision is to remember what it is being used for. It is expected to be used to improve the productivity of the institution. There are six steps, according to Guthrie and Reed (1991, p.340), in supervision. The first step is trust building. There must be trust between the supervisor and the teacher. The teacher must know the purpose of the supervision. The next step is planning. Here you lay the foundation for the actual supervision. Communication must be made as to what procedures will be followed regarding lesson plans, objectives, techniques and teacher feedback.

The third step is the beginning of the continuous cycle. In this step decisions are made as to what type of observational techniques will be incorporated and the actual observation takes place.

Step four is the analysis made in reference to the observation. I will encourage the teacher immediately after the observation to document some significant points about the observation. This allows for a much more productive feedback conference, which is step five.

In the feedback conference it is important for the observed teacher to point out the areas where improvement is needed. The supervisor should be a resource of ideas and methods for the teacher to tap from. When the feedback conference is complete the development

of new plans takes place for the next observation. Once this is complete the cycle starts over at step three, observation (Guthrie and Reed, 1991, 342).

An excellent form of supervision is by the use of lead or mentor teachers. This will allow me to utilize the leadership skills of our experienced teachers. This creates an environment where I, as an administrator, can be a leader of leaders.

Supervision is outstanding in the respect that there is communication. As a supervisor I will have to rely on different styles of leadership. Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership theory is excellent in communicating ideas for improvement. According to Dr. D. R. Jackson, "Situational leadership is a staff development model" (personal communication, July 25, 1991). One area of situational leadership is the relation of the leader's power bases to the follower's maturity. The ideal situation, I feel, is to deal with mature individuals and utilize what is referred to by Hersey and Blanchard (1976) as "expert power". They state:

Expert power is based on the leader's possession of expertise, skill, and knowledge, which through respect, influences others. A leader high in expert power is seen as possessing the expertise to facilitate the work behavior others. This respect leads to compliance with the leader's wishes (p. 1).

However, as much as we would like to think, not all people we encounter in education are mature. If they are not at the maturity level I wish them to be, I must find a way to help them achieve that level. The behavior at this level will need to be relationship behavior.

This, according to Hersey and Blanchard, allows for two-way communication and providing socio-emotional support (p. 1). In order to improve the maturity level, I must increase the relationship behavior allowing for more responsibility on the part of the follower. Continuing to increase the responsibility with improvement will reinforce more mature behavior (p. 3).

The final stage of human resource administration is the evaluation of personnel. This should be a continuous cycle much like that of supervision. It is important to note however, that supervision and evaluation are different. Supervision is for improvement in effectiveness of the teacher and school. Evaluation is used as a measuring device. It may be used to determine a move on the salary scale, tenure, merit pay, and grounds for dismissal. Supervision can be carried out by mentor or lead teachers. Evaluation should not be performed by anyone other than those in administrative positions. A teacher should not be involved in determining the employment status of a current staff member. If in the supervision process a teacher ever feels as if the observation will be used for more than improvement in teacher effectiveness, then the trust has been removed and the supervision process destroyed. According to Oliva (1989) there is a definite distinction between supervision and evaluation:

Supervision and evaluation are quite distinct from one another and this distinction is recognized. Supervision is a developmental process which promotes continuing growth and development of staff members in the art of

teaching; continued and increased staff motivation; and an improved instructional program. Evaluation on the other hand is a management function designed to maintain organizational efficiency; establish standards for staff performance; and appraise staff performance (p. 53).

The major problem with evaluation is that it involves one person evaluating another. A formal evaluating tool is a must for data collection. There are two areas that should be evaluated. One is the "appraisal of the effectiveness of instructional skills and strategies chosen by the teacher" (Oliva, 1989, p. 428). The other area is the "assessment of the teacher's classroom performance" (p. 428).

Evaluation is a very sensitive area. Many items must be considered when evaluating. According to Oliva (1989), there are three items considered most often in evaluating "(1) instructional skills, (2) personal traits, and (3) professional attributes" (p. 431). I hope to incorporate these three into my evaluations of staff as an administrator. These three areas give a fair assessment of the evaluated instructor.

It is also important that the person to be evaluated is informed well in advance as to what is expected of them. They should also have some say in the planning of the evaluation. This will give the evaluation much more credibility. All of this can be taken care of at the beginning of the school year in a preparation conference with the administrator and the teacher.

Administration of human resources is a very complex responsibility. I will not be dealing with robots or machines. These are



people, with feelings, ideas, attitudes and aspirations. They need to be treated as if they are important to the system, because they are. They are extremely important to the success of the school system as a whole.

At parent-teacher conferences or student orientation I have heard parents say too many times how much they do not like to be there. Another common comment is that they have not been in this building since they graduated. It is important to build a solid relationship between the school and community. The community needs to feel welcome in the school. People usually avoid uncomfortable situations if at all possible.

There are many ways to keep parents and the community informed. We need to go the extra step past newsletters and articles in the paper. Parent and community groups need to be formed and made to feel that they have an input in the education of the youth of their community. According to Flaxman and Inger (1991), "Schools should give parents blanket permission to visit classrooms, use of the library, or talk to teachers or administrators" (p. 17). Good school and community relations are vital to the success of the school. This means more than packing the bleachers at the big game on Friday night.

The position of school administrator poses a big challenge for me. I am excited about the doors I have yet to open. I am also a little bit scared to open some of them. Education seems to be growing into a controversial profession more and more each day. However, through

my coursework and experiences I am more and more ready each day to face those new doors and challenges.

It is important to me to be successful. I also understand that I should not try to change the world or reinvent the wheel overnight. If I try to take on too many things early it may backfire. Change is a process which takes time. Often times, change within a school can take years.

I feel the best way for me to operate is to always consider if what I am doing is the best thing for young people. I want education to be a good experience for students. They should have fun in school and be challenged to do their best. I am looking forward to the day when I obtain my first secondary principalship and can begin to make a difference in education and the lives of today's youth.

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