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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools: A reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools: A reflective essay

Abstract

Education is a vital part of life. It begins the moment one enters this world and ends at their demise. Between that time, learning is an on-going process. Sometimes it is structured, sometimes it is unstructured. Sometimes it just happens as a result of experience. At any rate, we all can and do learn. This paper will reflect my values and beliefs regarding education, as well as, the characteristics of an effective educational leader.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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and Counseling

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Education is a vital part of life. It begins the moment one enters this world and ends at their demise. Between that time, learning is an on-going process. Sometimes it is structured, sometimes it is unstructured. Sometimes it just happens as a result of experience. At any rate, we all can and do learn. This paper will reflect my values and beliefs regarding education, as well as, the characteristics of an effective educational leader.

The degree of learning varies from learner to learner. For certain individuals learning is a simple process, it comes easy and happens with little or no effort, while other individuals have to work hard and really apply themselves for fundamental understanding. Some individuals learn in greater capacities. Their brain is like a sponge which soaks in any and everything it can. While others barely scratch the surface and need to be constantly reinforced and inspired. Though degrees of learning may vary, there is no one incapable of learning to some degree.

There are deterrents that effect the degree of learning. Aside from physical or mental handicaps or disabilities, there are simple basic needs that can deter the learning process. An individual who is unloved, neglected, never encouraged and always put down, cannot learn at the same level as someone who is not affected by these distracting factors. An individual who has had enriching rewarding experiences and understands the process of setting and reaching for goals, will obtain a higher degree of learning than someone who has only a narrow view and no perspective.

It is pertinent that educators and educational leaders understand these characteristics of learning. Efficient educators and leaders not only

understand but have made necessary preparation and adjustments to reach all learners. Devout educators and leaders should have a purpose and commitment to the field of education that goes beyond basic desire or even skill. It is a need of fulfillment. A need to be confident that the learner has learned what has been taught, and that the lesson has been taught adequately and effectively.

Beliefs and Values

When I decided to become an educator, it was because I believed I could make a difference in the life of the learner. Thinking back, a teacher or principal was not on my list of “what I wanted to be when I grew up”. It was in a moment of self-actualization that three things became relatively clear to me.

The first thing was that I had taught or shown people how to do things most of my life. I'd been a choir director and a musician at my church since the early years of my life. These positions were later joined by youth supervision and other auxiliary offices that were not only local but also at district and state levels. I'd had a constant thrust into leadership positions. “Sharrie can do that, she's the Pastor's daughter”. “I'm appointing Sharrie as the director of this auxiliary”. “Amen, amen Pastor, that's a good choice.” It never occurred to them that I may not have been capable of handling the position. Consequently, it never occurred to me either.

Secondly, I realized that I was a real critic of teaching styles and techniques. I loathe sloppy unstructured presentations. To me people who lack the knack for really reaching out to people have no business teaching. These realities have become even more apparent to me as I

reflect on how I to hated Sunday School because the teacher would always stand in front of the class and read to us what we could read for ourselves. Youth training sessions and mission circles were boring because the teachers lacked creativity and technique. Of course, they did not need to be trained. They were doing the Lord's work, and He knew they meant well. Unfortunately, He was the only one who knew it. I often wonder how many other young people were turned off by the "do-gooders" on their way to heaven. I'd be willing to bet that the percentage was high.

Then there were the preachers; the ones who never took time to prepare sermons. They satisfied passive congregations by screaming and yelling and playing on their emotion. They rattled on with no real beginning or end. They had nothing to say but no one could take more time than them saying it. I remember hearing phrases like "It's all in the Name of the Lord; God loves His people;. He wants what is best for you and He wants you to give Him your best." Something about all this just didn't add up. I serve an intelligent God who can only be limited by a limited amount of faith in Him.

My father, the Pastor, was a prolific speaker and a very authoritative administrator. Not only have I been raised with sermons that were structured and presented with distinct quality, but I've seen administration at its best. Now that I am capable of identifying a variety of leadership styles, I know that I prefer a much more liberal one than the one my father used. However, what he used worked for him. He pastored that particular church for 37 years until his death. I must use the style that works for me and fits my character.

The third and most important reality check for me was that I really wanted to do something about the first two. I wanted to see people love to learn and the teacher loving to teach them. Other than my own innate leadership qualities, the models I had observed, my spirituality, and my profound concern for people,(particularly young people), I was no more qualified than the teachers I'd had. I decided that before I could make an impact on the lives of others, I needed to make some changes in my own. So I enrolled in the education program at Upper Iowa University. As for those preachers, I decided I had better leave them to a higher power than I.

Upon entering college my perception changed. I went to college planning to learn all these new concepts and strategies. I went to develop the skill and ability needed to teach others. However, what I found when I got there was that they were teaching me things I already knew. They provided me with labels for strategies I had used for years. Using my own skill and prior knowledge, I found that I had underestimated my qualifications to be an educational leader. I began to feel more confident in my own ability. My past experiences in those leadership positions, my involvement with young people, including the raising of my own son, had given me the artillery I needed to survive this era in my life. College had allowed me to build upon my confidence. It also gave me a resource bank to draw from when needed.

Knowledge and Skills

Strong educational leaders are confident and secure in their own acquired knowledge. My father used to say that his personal confidence is inspired by his past experience. I didn't really know what that meant at

the time, but as I relate that statement to my subject, it confirms that a smart leader will always build from his/her experiences. I believe it relates specifically to confidence, self-esteem, and stamina. Leaders must believe in themselves and their ability to reach others. These characteristics must be apparent to the learner.

My classroom experience confirmed some basic principles I believe to be important. One of those important principles is classroom management. By the term *classroom management* [italics added] I not only mean the disciplinary procedures used for management purposes; I also include the climate, atmosphere, and attitude of the learning environment. I believe that the classroom teacher should be in control at all times. Learners should not be intimidated or inhibited from the learning process. The climate should display the attitude that everyone is expected to learn and that is the purpose for which they are present. The atmosphere should be conducive to a prevalent learning community. Learning should be interesting, challenging, and fun. A good teacher can make that happen.

Understanding and relating to the cultures and backgrounds of the learner is essential. A teacher cannot be effective when there is no perception of the world the learner comes from. Many problems come into view: the communication cannot be clear and concise; dialect and expression could be foreign; and instruction and the selection of materials could have little or no meaning to the learner. The teacher cannot even select effective strategies without knowing what will or will not affect the learner. Each student will bring a different set of playing cards to the table; an effective teacher will deal hands that allow everyone to play.

A good example of this was told by a friend of mine in a workshop. He said he missed a question on a test where the teacher asked him the color of a banana. His response was brown. Of course the correct answer was yellow, but he said that he had not realized that as a child. He said that by the time bananas reached the grocery store in his neighborhood they were brown. He was a little older by the time he saw his first yellow or green banana. I remember thinking at the time that this situation is a perfect example of how lack of knowledge about how a child's background can effect his/her learning. The culture of the student is an area that the teacher should explore.

Personal/Professional Development

I heard Ben Carson speak at a banquet recently. Ben Carson is the Chief Neurosurgeon at John Hopkins Hospital in Maryland. He is the first Black surgeon to successfully separate Siamese twins from the brain. His words are as follows:

When I wanted to interest a household,
I learned things relevant to a household.
When I wanted to interest a city,
I learned things relative to a city.
When I wanted to interest the world,
I learned things relevant to the world. (B. Carson, personal communication, . January, 1994)

As I shift my focus now to my own personal aspirations and expectations as an educational leader, I'd like to use Mr. Carson's framework which reads as follows:

When I wanted to interest a child, I learned things relevant to children. When I wanted to interest a classroom, I learned things relevant to the pedagogy of teaching. Now that I want to impact an entire system, it is imperative that I learn things relevant to the total educational process.

I believe the proficient educational leader has a clear understanding of the educational process and of his/her administrative responsibilities. Developing that understanding covers a broad scope of concepts. I am certain that learning begins when life begins; however, much learning has already taken place when a child enters the doors of her first school. Consequently, it is pertinent that the leader's knowledge base begins where learning begins. What a child learns prior to school, how much is learned, and how the child learns will have an impact on what, how much, and how a child learns in school and the child's readiness for school.

For purposes of this paper, I will refer to what a child learns, meaning the kinds of things the child has learned and what he/she has been exposed to, as an environmental issue. To discuss how much is learned, meaning the child's capacity for learning, I will refer to the issue of cognitive development.. I will consider learning styles and perhaps some motivational factors as to relating to how a child learns.

As a smart leader develops an understanding of the foundation of the learning process these areas must be considered. Each area inter-relates with the other. A common denominator which they all share will be discussed after presenting each individual issue.

Environment

My first reflection, as I consider the environmental issue, is based on the premise that parents (or families) are their children's first teacher. Students come from a variety of backgrounds culturally, socially, and economically. "Families differ in the extent to which they value education and educational institutions" (Green, 1992, p. 167). How families value education is important and dependent on one or all of these factors. Many alternate environmental needs take precedent over education and often "Some have a high regard for education: for others their children's schooling is a relived struggle amid more pressing concerns" (Edwards & Young, 1992 p.74).

Culture will have a great impact on learning. With culture comes a different set of values. Gardner in his theory of Multiple Intelligence maintains that there are many intelligences which are influenced from a variety of factors, with culture being one of them. Gardner asserts that "Family culture/factors determine which out of many 'M.I.' will be valued and amplified and which will be left to be dormant" (Green, 1992, p. 160).

Families with a high regard for education will provide enriching experiences for their children, both internal and external. Experiences open the doors to awarenesses and opportunities. Experiences allow children to grow and process. "An environment full of new and interesting stimuli provides the ideal circumstances for the fullest development of a child's intellectual potential" (Bernstein, Roy, et al 1991, p.37.) The rate of development for children with an abundance of experiences will be much greater than for those who have been sheltered.

For most families, culture will play a large role in identifying social

and economical status. Those roles are very prevalent in academic achievement. Gage & Berliner (1988) cited a study by Newman, Freeman, and Holzinger (1937) of identical twins reared apart in two different environments. The study showed a high correlation in differences between cultural environment and school achievement indicating that “differences in educational advantage and cultural level of the home does produce differences in IQ scores and educational achievement” (p. 66).

Cognitive Development

Competent leaders view this area as one of the most profound basis for learning. In the cognitive developmental process foundations are laid that will affect learning for a lifetime. How much a child can learn and how much a child should know in different stages of life are indicated in many professional theories. These theories can give the educational leader some relevant perceptions of the learner.

A theory, for example, by Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget describes four developmental stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational. In each of these stages behaviors evolve that extend and advance into other behaviors. Understanding Piaget’s theory helps one to understand “how children incorporate experience into their own very personal conceptions of the world; how children’s moral values develop sequentially; how imagination is formed and how it changes; how logical thought (such as scientific thought) develops; how the ability to categorize, generalize, and discriminate grows with experience; and how children learn symbol systems” (Gage & Berliner, 1988, p. 108).

Another example is that of Jerome Bruner. Bruner (1966), also cited by Gage & Berliner (1988), has developed a cognitive growth model

very similar to Piaget's. The Bruner Model describes three stages of development: enactive, iconic and symbolic. These stages present a domino effect in learning, and shows a substantial growth pattern in the cognitive domain.

An obvious perception of these theories and the numerous varieties of additional theories and studies offer the practical leader a broad scope. Understanding how learning takes place and how much the learner should know by school age is critical to understanding the total process.

Learning Styles

There are many questions that formulate when considering this topic.. Three which come to mind are the questions that ask; 1) what learning styles are I 2) how they are developed and 3) how they effect children who have not even started school?"

My own perception of learning styles acknowledges that people learn in different ways. Understanding one's style is simply understanding the method by which the learner learns. People are all different and they use different thought processes. Dunn, Beaudry & Klaus (1989) in the article "Survey of Research on Learning Styles," defines learning style as a "biologically and developmentally imposed set of personal characteristics that make the same teaching method effective for some and ineffective for others" (p. 50).

Everyone has their own learning style and it is as distinctive as their hand print. Therefore, the methods (or lack of) to train and develop a child in the early formative years may be the method the child grows to rely on for lifelong learning. According to Dunn et al. (1989), "Everyone

has a learning style - all have at least some preference the result of many influences. Certain learning style characteristics are biological, whereas others are developed through experience” (p. 56).

Learning styles are also attributed to physiological factors. These factors include habits which may have been developed or the training one may or may not have had, both which are in response to personal models and/or the value preference of the culture. These factors are yet another confirmation that learning styles are developed early in life and are the result of experiences, modeling, habits, biological differences. -All of these factors have grave influence on a child prior to school beginning. Learning styles represent both inherited and environmental influences.

As previously stated, environment, cognitive development, and learning styles are all areas that inter-relate. It is my position that experience is the fabric that is woven into each of these concepts. The environment is enriched when experiences are multiple. The cognitive development is enhanced when experiences correspond with the behaviors. Learning styles are emergent because experiences have caused them to manifest and regulate the learner's classification and capacity.

As the leader's knowledge base progresses, we must look at the position from a different perspective. Now that the child is entering school, the narrow lense focus widens. Many other aspects become pertinent One in particular is how the educational leader as an administrator, a public relations specialist an instructional leader connects the child to learning. The concern and the responsibility of learning is no longer on just the child and his/her outside environment It

is now on an entire staff to whom the leader must facilitate and evaluate.. Now we have to look at a building manager, a bookkeeper, a maintenance person, and the beat goes on and on.

The aforementioned concepts become intensified as environment involves school and community relations, parental involvement, and communication skills. Cognitive development and learning styles become issues of staff development, curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. Management characteristics surface as maintaining the facility, budgeting and scheduling come into play. In addition to all this interplay, the overall building climate must remain positive while goals are established and obtained, dreams are interpreted, understood and fulfilled, and visions protected and preserved. In the cognitive developmental process foundations are laid that will effect learning for a lifetime.

Administrative Responsibilities

As the person in charge of a site based public relations program, the educational leader has many phases to cover. One of the first objectives however, is to define clear goals and a very distinctive mission for the school that is shared by its staff, and can be likewise shared by its community.

School and Community Relations

Educational leaders are people who are respected by their community. They are viewed as public servants and community leaders. They have an image to project and one to protect. "The image the principal projects forms the dominant perception of the school by students, staff, parents and the community" (NAESP, 1991, p. 7). The educational leader who is effective should be considered trustworthy,

considerate and fair. Their staff and community should be able to look on them with dignity and respect. Confidence is two-fold. The effective leader has confidence in him/herself, which also breeds confidence from the community he/she serves.

I believe the schools and the community share a joint effort in the success of each student. A major factor in schools functioning in a greater capacity is its link to the community. Holliday (1988) defines school public/community relations as “a systematic function on all levels of a school system, established as a program to improve and maintain optimal levels of student achievement and to build public support”. Holliday (1988) further contends that there are “two main purposes” for school relations. One is the student’s achievement and the other is to build citizen knowledge and understanding (p. 12).

I see the effective administrator as a catalyst for the establishment and maintenance of this relationship. “It is the principal who will have the most direct contact with parent and much contact with other local groups and individuals who have a vested interest in the operation of school” (Hughes & Ubben 1994, p. 65). The administrator has to build an alliance between the school and the community to establish a supportive relationship.

Not only should the administrator be looked upon with respect, but he/she should also have a clear insight into the community. Webster (1987) defines community as “a group of people living in the same area and under the same government; a class or group having common interest and likes”. An effective leader knows who is for or against him/her. They know who can make things happen and who can be stumbling blocks. They know history and statistics that may effect them. They are in tune with the economic status of the community. They should know and be a part of community organizations that will impact schools while understanding their functions and goals. Moreso, I believe a smart leader will agree with Finders (1992) when he states “no one is ever completely from one community. We are all active members in many

communities that come already equipped with tacit rituals and rules: ways of talking, acting, valuing, being in the world” (p. 61).

Good communication is a must in the field of administration. According to NAESP (1991), “School administrators constantly interact with diverse people in a variety of settings” (p. 7). This particular resource calls for clear, non-threatening articulation to, from and with the school community using basic facts and data. It calls for writing which is concise and the use of technology and all branches of the media. Understanding group processes is also important as the leader will often bring key players to the table.

Last but certainly not least, I feel the administrator should believe in the importance and necessity of community and parental involvement. The community has a responsibility to schools and schools have a responsibility to the community. “School has a definite responsibility to furnish taxpayers and parents with complete and accurate information regarding its needs and activities and to develop educational policies and programs that reflect popular interests and desires.” (Kindred, Bagin, Gallagher 1990, pg. 13) Community members expect schools to produce upstanding law abiding citizens. While they tend to hold educators accountable for student success, they sometimes fail to recognize their part in that process.

Saundra Murray Nettles (1991) did a study of community based programs which were designed to increase academic achievement. Nettles’ definition of community involvement is as follows; “The actions that organizations and individuals (e.g. parents, businesses, universities, social service agencies, and media) take to promote student development” (p 380). This definition caught my eye because I believe the community should be actively involved in the educational process. The involvement is broad and could range from providing outside support services and experiences to making classrooms visits and presentations. They could range from participating in PTO’s and school related organizations to supporting bond issues, school governance issues,

lobbying and/or petitioning local, state and even federal governments for the improvement of the education systems.

In an article in support of Outcomes Based Education, Albert Mamary (1994) proposes that “parents, teachers, administrators and the school board determine the desired outcomes for students” (p. 19). This quotation provides the foundation of my summation statement.

Communities have expected outcomes for students. Schools expect communities to have input and participation in meeting those outcomes. Collaboration between schools and communities seem not only feasible but also very purposeful and beneficial to both the school and the community.

Parental Involvement

I believe that parental involvement and student success are two synonymous terms. Many studies prove that when parents are involved, students succeed at a much higher rate. I believe that every school should develop a comprehensive parental involvement program tailor-made to fit the needs of the building.

In my research I discovered a variety of concepts and models of parental involvement. In his “Accelerated Project” model, David Seeley (1993) contends that families are not actively involved because they choose to delegate the responsibility to someone else. Like firemen have been delegated to put out fires and policemen have been delegated to combat crime, so has education been delegated to the educators. The schools in this project built a partnership with their parents. Together they developed goals and plans to achieve them. They too realized the necessity of a comprehensive model specific to their building needs.

In another model staff members are trained to work with families who have limited English speaking skills. Parents were trained to assist students with home lessons, and together the staff and parents work to build objectives which are more culturally specific into their curriculum. According to the research, “Students made significant gains in English

comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation” (Simich-Dungeon, 1993, p. 189).

An often-cited model is one created by Joyce Epstein in 1986. An article, “The Illinois Experience” by Warren Chapman (1991), cites Epstein and summarizes five basic elements upon which one could build a solid parental involvement foundation . They are:

- Supporting children’s learning at home,
- Maintaining communications with school,
- Assisting in school activities,
- Becoming involved in governance and advocacy, and
- Assuming the role as tutor at home.(p. 356)

Chapman also contends that is is important to consider multiple outcomes, not just scores on achievement test He suggests the concentration also should be on “other measures of school success, such as attendance, discipline, report card grades, level of parent involvement and so on” (p. 358).

My own experiences teach me that schools need to work out the plan that works best for them. Schools need to consider their population and the culture(s) of their school community, as well as the community they serve. They need to take bits and pieces of the models developed and use them as they can, but most of all they need to assess their own need and put a model into action that will best serve them. For example, schools with a high minority population need to develop programs that are sensitive to those cultures. They can then focus on those aspects which are important to their community of parents and will have the greatest impact on their involvement.

It has become apparent to me within the last few years how many more learners I can impact by being an administrator rather than a teacher. My initial feelings were that I didn’t want to lose direct positive contact with the children. I don’t want to be the person they only see for disciplinary reasons. I like watching the light bulb light up when I’ve been successful at teaching a concept. I love watching them learn, and wanting to learn and eager to have me present the next lesson. Did I really want to give that up? Then I realized that I could

reach so many more learners if I were in a position to assist in the development of the teachers. As I reflect back to my original intent and purpose, that is exactly what I had intended to do. I believe that, among other things, education gives one credibility. I probably could have shown my church teachers, supervisors and trainers a better and more effective way to reach the children, but what credibility did I have?

Staff Development

I believe staff development is a crucial area for the educational leader in that a competent staff is an asset to the learning community. I believe that an effective administrator takes every occasion to provide his/her staff with opportunities to strengthen, improve, and upgrade their ability. This action not only provides for a greater competency of staff, but “Research studies in Richmond County, Georgia and West Orange, New Jersey, have documented increases in student achievement as a result of staff development programs” (Joyce, et al 1989; Sousa 1990). This deduction is a logical one. If the understanding, attitudes and practices of the staff improve, how could there be no improvement in student achievement?

Culture, as defined by Garmston (1991), is a conscious pattern of values, actions and artifacts subject to assessment and change” (p. 40). The proficient leader understand the culture of the building. which is constantly transmitted, acknowledged and shared by not only the community, but also other communities involved with the building. “Cultures guide thinking and feeling and influence behavior by helping people get a ‘feel for’ the situation in which they find themselves”. (Mitchell & Tucker 1992, p.45).. I feel the culture and climate of the community are major determinants of the types and methods of the staff development process.

Curriculum and instruction are other determinants of the types and methods of staff development. Sparks and Hirsch (1990) “have organized staff development strategies into five models: individually guided staff development, observation/ assessment, improvement in a

development/improvement process, training and inquiry” (p.40). Further these writers contend that we must broaden our current scope of what we believe staff development to be. Just as students have different learning styles, levels of intelligence and motivations to learn, so do staff members. A leader who is really in touch with the building will realize that there is a large variety of practices that will enhance the development of the staff. The bottom line comes through this quote: “The success of the effort must be measured in the achievement of the goals, not the identification of a single strategy for achieving them” p. 40). My own philosophy is to use “whatever works” to accomplish your goal. If a strategy is resulting in student achievement and academic success then it should be used.

It is a known fact that the school district must be a major supporter of the development of its employees with expertise and financial assistance. It allows employees time and professional assistance needed for their development. Most of all it conveys a message to the staff that encourages them to reach for higher heights and to grow to their greatest potential. The district can not only talk the talk, it must walk the walk in providing professional development opportunities for all of its employees.

Supervision and Evaluation

The word supervision indicates to me that one is responsible for the work responsibility of other people. According to NAESP (1991), four elements are identified as proficiencies for effective instruction. Those four elements are curriculum, instruction, performance and evaluation. Supervision with regard to evaluation is the process of “assessing students learning and teachers teaching”(p.13.)

In a conversation with my building administrator, I asked her if she felt evaluation had a substantial impact on teacher improvement. She thought that it did, but only to a certain degree. She said that the teachers real desire to improve his/her abilities and skills had to come from within the person themselves. She felt the evaluation system is set

up to make teachers aware of strengths and weaknesses, and unless their skills are so poor that a plan of assistance must be developed, teachers can improve if they choose to. She identified this as a flaw in the system but quickly added that proper supervision would at least keep that teacher accountable to the administrator for academic achievement.

My purpose for inquiries about the process is for both personal and professional reasons. Personally, I think of evaluation as a mechanism or tool with which to improve myself. I welcome constructive criticism as an opportunity to improve myself. I am trying to determine in my conversations with other administrators if this was an overall perception of the evaluative process or if I am being unrealistic.

For evaluation to be most effective there are some requirements that are necessary. These requirements are in the area of the personal/professional characteristics and credentials of both the evaluator and the staff member.

The staff member must first trust the evaluator. He/she must feel that the evaluator has their best interest at heart and that their main concern is for them to be successful. "Feelings of trust will emerge if the teacher views the supervisor as a helper and if the supervisor maintains a nonjudgemental stance" (Chirnside 1984, p.42). They must also feel that the evaluator is a person of integrity and will not only be honest, but will also be fair throughout the evaluative process.

I believe there must be a mutual respect of the professionalism of both the evaluator and staff member. However, the staff member must believe in the credibility and qualifications of the evaluator. The evaluator is trained as an evaluator. They have knowledge of modes and models to determine which will give the most meaningful results. The evaluator has a personal/professional goal to keep abreast of current issues, trends and resources that would benefit the staff. This goal is conveyed to the staff through the evaluator's attitude,

interactions with staff and the provision of information and materials for their betterment.

The evaluator's consistently conveys the message that the purpose of the evaluation is to improve instruction (Chirnside 1984). When this message is properly conveyed, there is little room for misunderstanding or intimidation. Improvement from any sector benefits all who are involved as well as the individual. An honest staff member knows that there are always areas in which they can improve. Therefore, they should look at this process as an opportunity to grow.

A smart evaluator understands the importance of involving the staff member in the total evaluation process. Collaboration between the staff member and the evaluator an establish a partnership that can be beneficial to both of them. This partnership would make the process flow smooth and be much more effective.

An effective evaluation process includes a preobservational conference. At this time the supervisor discusses the evaluation instrument and process with the staff member. The dialogue is open during this conference so that the staff member feels comfortable enough to express areas of desired growth. Areas of specific interest may be identified as one of the focal points for the observational process.

A series of observations follow this conference. I believe some observations should be planned and some should be spontaneous. Most should be in the classroom setting, but some should also be in the hall, on the playground or somewhere outside the classroom setting. During the observational process the evaluator focuses on elements such as the presentation of the lesson, student involvement, the classroom climate and classroom management. Scripting and precise documentation will be a valuable asset to the evaluator. Also the evaluator should provide the staff member with immediate feedback following each visit.

A post conference is the next and final stage of this process. During this conference the evaluator shares information with the staff member regarding the observations. The evaluator will also share their analysis and strategies as a result of what they have observed. Together the evaluator and the staff member can establish areas for growth and set goals that can be achieved through measurable progress. They may also establish time lines and/or follow-up meetings

Completion of this process has opened many doors for the growth and development of both the staff member and the evaluator. The doors of communication have been opened using dialogue and documentation. The doors of staff development have been open reviewing areas of weaknesses and finding methods and strategies to build them. Collaboration has opened the doors for the staff and the administration to join together in a partnership. The evaluator has the opportunity to grow from yet another experience using the process. The staff member has gained the opportunity to improve his/her performance and set personal and professional goals. I am convinced that evaluation, when used appropriately, can be a developmental process to benefit all who are involved.

CONCLUSION

“Vision is the result of dreams in action” Barker (1991). Barker further contends that visions must be positive and inspiring, they need to be developed (in detail) by their leaders, and they must be shared with the team. Visions move us from the present to the future. Every leader should have a vision, and every vision should have a process.

Every leader’s vision of what their school should look like be may be different. Every school is different, and the vision for it should be tailored to the overall make-up of the school. Nonetheless, it is through visions that outlooks are changed and horizons are broadened. It is through visions that instruction becomes thorough and schools are improved. The first step in moving forward is the vision, for it is most difficult to get somewhere when you don’t know where you are

going. The next step is the plan. Knowing where you want to go and having no method or strategy as to how you will get there may prove to be just as difficult.

My beliefs and values are discussed throughout the course of this paper. I've discussed what I believe to be important regarding the student, the educator, the administrator and the community. I've mentioned of theories and models that I believe to be important to the educational process. There are most certainly overall aspects of these perceptions that are deemed important to any vision regardless of the make-up of the school. My personal vision definitely includes those aspects.

My vision also includes equality for all students. Neither the economic status, the gender, the racial and/or cultural background, nor the religious preference are determining factors to how well a student can learn; how well the student will be taught or what materials and equipment will be made available to them. It is my desire, however, that school staff and personnel would themselves with an abundance of knowledge in each of these areas for the best possible learning techniques, strategies and relationships with students and their families. Each student will be taught according to his/her ability and individual needs.

It is my vision that schools will be concerned about the whole student. Not just how well he/she can perform academically, not only what benefit he/she will be to society, but how we can adequately equip these students to take what society offers them and make the best of it. I believe the education process that is the most practical is the one that benefits students the most. The process that they can apply to their everyday lives to help them make sound decisions and build survival skills is the process they will carry with them for a lifetime.

I visualize for our school an embodiment of the community within a community concept which has the following characteristics.

- a community of learners who convey the message that learning

goes on for a lifetime and we are all learners.

- a community of caring people who share with each other, support each other maintaining dignity and respect for each other.
- a community that works with its outer community to promote educational excellence to its highest degree.

Does this sound like a pipe dream? Well dreams proceed visions, and visions proceed growth. Growth proceeds improvement and that is exactly what schools must continue to do. The improvement of schools, however, must begin with the individual who can and will make a difference. Making a difference includes setting high goals and high standards for yourself and those whom you influence. The ability to reach those goals and meet those standards will have a positive effect on everyone involved. Making a difference includes stamina, willpower, and determination. Making a difference means being a risk taker, believing in yourself and your ability.

I believe in myself. I believe I have the power no person can give. I can do anything I want to do and be anything I want to be and I am willing to pay the cost to achieve my goals. I don't want to be just another principal; for being good is not enough. I want to be exceptional. I want to be phenomenal. I want to make a difference. I believe these are attributes of effectiveness. These are attributes of a true leader.

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