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Evolving perceptions of effective administration in secondary education

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Evolving perceptions of effective administration in secondary education

Abstract

Educational leaders are faced with a variety of challenges. Effective administrators must be knowledgeable of the wide array of demands and have an innovative ability to manage them. The Master of Arts in Education courses along with personal experiences has helped me develop the beliefs, attitude, knowledge, and skills which I anticipate using in performance as an administrator. The curriculum has helped me formulate a personal vision of how my leadership style can make a positive difference in the lives of students. This reflective essay analyzes a variety of issues facing future administrators and communicates my vision of effective performance in an administrative role.

**EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION
IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Jeffrey L. Schneekloth

This Research Paper by: Jeffrey L. Schneekloth

Entitled: EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION
IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Master of Arts in Education.

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Educational leaders are faced with a variety of challenges. Effective administrators must be knowledgeable of the wide array of demands and have an innovative ability to manage them. The Master of Arts in Education courses along with personal experiences has helped me develop the beliefs, attitude, knowledge, and skills which I anticipate using in performance as an administrator. The curriculum has helped me formulate a personal vision of how my leadership style can make a positive difference in the lives of students. This reflective essay analyzes a variety of issues facing future administrators and communicates my vision of effective performance in an administrative role.

Legal Issues in Education

Initially, I gave little, if any, thought to how government's role in education affects decisions made by the secondary school administrator. I now understand that effective administrators must be aware of these roles and their implications on educating people to function successfully in society. The role that government has in the educational process will directly affect decisions which I will be making as a future administrator. In the United States, the education of its children resides in three levels of government; federal, state, and local.

The constitution addresses the general welfare of the people, which allows the federal government to have an interest in the educational process. Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan (1985) identify legislation passed at the federal level that had a direct effect on education. Public Law 94-142 passed in 1975 assured handicapped children public education and related services designed to meet their unique needs. Therefore, I must be certain that my building is handicapped accessible. If a wheelchair student attends my school, as the

principal, I may need to consider providing building modifications to accommodate this student. For example, an elevator or ramp may be necessary to transport handicapped student's up and down floors safely. Title IX approved in 1971-1972 required equal educational opportunities regardless of sex. When planning an activities program for my school, I must insure that all student interests and needs are adequately met by the program. This means that I must provide a cross section of opportunities available to all students. An example is, extra curricular activities need to include sporting events, drama club, debate team, etc. I must also insure that appropriate funds are distributed to each of these activities in my school. In addition, each activity must be guaranteed a fair practice schedule and an appropriate number of competitive dates.

The state is the second level of government that has the responsibility for education. I need to recognize state legislation prior to finalizing decisions regarding areas such as curriculum or standards for grade advancement to insure that my school is in compliance with state requirements. My administrative responsibilities such as school staffing, student scheduling, and the organization of future school years are dependant on the efficiency of state funding.

The local level is the third level of government. This level has the obligation to educate American students. Some appropriately feel that this obligation is most important. When examining the external and internal functions of school boards, their mandatory and discretionary powers, it becomes evident that I will need to be aware of what decisions the board has a right to initiate. DeBruyn (1989) suggests that local Boards of Education possess an assortment of functions which influence the educational responsibilities of an administrator. For

example, as an administrator I can recommend to the board of education that a teacher be renewed or dismissed. However, it is the solely the board of education who has the power to renew or dismiss a teacher (mandatory power). I must also be aware of the boards right to establish policies regarding areas such as staff assignments (discretionary power). When new staff members are assigned to my building, it becomes my responsibility to appropriately place the staff member so that the school's needs are adequately met. This may require re-assignment of current staff members in order to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in all content areas.

Evaluation of Instruction

Faculty evaluation is another responsibility of secondary administrators. My initial perception of how administrators and teachers view the process of supervision and evaluation of instruction has proven to be accurate. Unfortunately, too many principals see this process as a time consuming formality and as a result, teachers feel threatened by the process. They see it as a chance for administrators to catch them doing something wrong. This negative attitude that persists among principals and teachers defeats the entire aim of the supervision and evaluation of teachers; to improve the instructional performance of the teacher. Fortunately, I now have an understanding of how to change this perception. I feel that this perception may be changed when one examines the role of the administrator and obstacles that often get in the way of effectively assessing teacher instruction.

As an administrator, I will assume the responsibility of implementing the stages of clinical supervision. Acheson and Gall (1992) suggest that effective

implementation of planning conferences, classroom observation, and feedback conferences are essential to promoting the professional development of teachers. In the planning conference, I will provide the teacher with the kinds of instructional data that will be collected during the classroom observation. I will also arrange a mutually convenient and appropriate time for the classroom observation. For example, if the teacher's concern is the students responses to discussion questions, there will be no point in me observing a lesson in which students are engaged in independent learning projects.

During the feedback conference I will review the observational data with the teacher and encourage the teacher to make his/her own inferences about teaching effectiveness. Together, we will identify areas of strength and targets for growth. I will begin the summative process of evaluation by working with the teacher to provide a self improvement program. Perhaps a follow-up observation will be necessary using a narrowed lens approach. I will focus on one or two of the teaching behaviors that the teacher has agreed to work on. I think this demonstrates to the teacher that I care about his/her own professional development and that the evaluation process is not simply a formality. Unless I take the time to do follow-up work, it will be nothing more than paperwork to the teacher.

Unfortunately many obstacles may get in the way of effective implementation of the stages of clinical supervision. One obstacle is time constraints. Fallon (1979) says that some principals are quick to point out that other tasks, including unforeseen demands, consume the time that they would rather use for effective faculty evaluation. While it is certain that I will have many

demands on my time, I feel the time constraint obstacle can be minimized. If I do have a legitimate time constraint problem, I can utilize administrators from other buildings, department heads, or university consultants to act as evaluators. A second possibility may be the use of peer evaluations which do have legal implications. Although these may be considered unlikely alternatives, they may be necessary ones in rare situations. A more likely alternative is to avoid using time constraints as an excuse to conduct perhaps my most difficult/important role; to improve teacher instruction.

Another obstacle of effective faculty evaluation is the administrator who does not understand clinical supervision or receives no training to maintain acceptable competency levels. Buttram and Wilson (1987) suggest that training programs should include a review of the system's focus, content, and procedures as well as some supervised practice with a videotape or live classroom observations. As a practicing administrator I will attend programs such as ones suggested by Buttram and Wilson. If I utilize peer evaluations, I will also require these people to attend such programs.

Teacher perceptions of faculty evaluations may often be obstacles when attempting to improve the instructional performance of my teachers. Teachers tend to feel threatened by this process and see it as a chance for administrators to catch them doing something wrong. According to Acheson and Gall (1992) this "sting" of evaluation can be minimized by a skillful evaluator. I believe teachers are most threatened when they do not understand the criteria by which they will be judged and when they do not trust the evaluator's ability to be fair. As a principal, there are strategies which I will utilize in an effort to minimize teacher anxiety

when being evaluated. I will involve the teacher in the evaluative process and share the evaluative criteria beforehand. I will base the observation on the objective observational data that was shared with the teacher. I believe this idea of sharing will ultimately result in the teacher and I working together rather than against each other. In addition, I know from a personal experience that an intimidating style of evaluation will only diminish a teacher's productivity and increase the "sting" of evaluation. As an administrator I believe it is necessary to exercise tactfulness when providing growth areas and enthusiasm when identifying strengths.

Finally, an obstacle that could get in the way of effectively evaluating teacher performance is if I do not remain knowledgeable of what effective teaching is. It would be irrational to expect any administrator to be an expert in all content areas. However, I should be able to recognize effective teaching or lack of it in all content areas. I do not need to be an expert in French to effectively evaluate a French teacher's instructional performance. In an effort to minimize this obstacle I will periodically attend methods classes in order to increase my knowledge of effective teaching models. I could also minimize this obstacle by observing teachers who are considered to be effective.

There are also obstacles that get in the way of the summative process. One obstacle is due process. Due process can get in the way of nonrenewal and/or dismissal of a teacher. Gorton and Schneider (1991) state that the main purpose of due process is to insure that an individual has received a fair and just decision. In staff evaluation this means that I must ensure that the criteria is legitimate, the individual is informed of shortcomings, is given sufficient opportunity to correct

them, and is provided with adequate supervision and assistance to do so. Finally, I believe that it is important for both administrators and teachers to remember that people sometimes learn more from their failures than from their successes. A negative evaluation of a teacher's performance may be painful for both myself and the teacher, especially if it results in the teacher's leaving the profession. As an evaluator, I can only hope that the teacher views this departure as a positive process that allows for him or her to be successful in another profession.

Technological Applications

Technological applications in secondary education will be increasingly important in years to come. I have acquired a real sense of enthusiasm for integrating technology into the classroom. Initially, I perceived this process to be another new idea that would pass in time. However, after learning the capabilities of technology and its implications in the classroom, the idea of integration became not only exciting, but a useful and necessary tool for learning. As an administrator, I have the opportunity to encourage and support the integration of technology into our classrooms. This section will outline implications technology will have in the classroom and how faculty members may be guided toward my vision of integration.

Kozma and Johnston (1991) discuss the capabilities of technology and suggest that these capabilities will have direct implications in the classroom for both the teacher and the student. The teacher becomes more of a coach or mentor, helping students solve problems presented by the software. I believe this role is much more challenging for the teacher than lecturing or guiding a well-structured discussion. Instead of being the expert, posing the problems and knowing all the

answers ahead of time, the teacher helps students as they engage in problems of their own choosing or problems with varying solutions depending on the parameters set by the student. This requires more subject matter expertise and more skill in guiding students to derive appropriate conclusions from an activity.

I believe that integration of technology into the classroom will encourage students to become more actively engaged in the learning process. According to Kozma and Johnston (1991) students learn for understanding and application rather than memorization. Students connect their new knowledge to that previously learned, to the ideas of other students and to the real world outside the classroom.

As an administrator, I have the opportunity to encourage and support the integration process. The classroom teacher with personal drive and conviction may find ways to make integration work regardless of administrative support and encouragement. However, most teachers will need direction and guidance from me as their principal. This requires administrative vision and sensitivity. I believe teachers are commonly reluctant to step out of their comfort zone. Too many teachers are comfortable with their teaching style and see no need or possess little ambition to implement technology into their curriculum. I will need to be sensitive to teacher reluctance in order to effectively articulate my vision of what technology can do for students in our school. I believe in the three strategies that Kozma and Johnston (1991) provide to help administrators in their effort to guide the faculty toward their vision of integration.

First, principals must move from isolated experiments to organizational commitment. While individual efforts are an important source of energy and

innovation, they may at the same time limit its ultimate success. Therefore, I must provide the released time, technical assistance and other resources that may be needed to support such innovations. For example, I would consider an in-house consultant to meet weekly with teachers on an individual basis to provide the resources and tools necessary for them to gain confidence in implementing the change. Teachers will be more likely to resist change if they do not receive adequate time and training to implement computer based lessons.

Second, principals must provide models for implementing technology into the classroom. Kozma and Johnson (1991) agree that computers will have their ultimate impact only when faculty members are presented with vivid images of how computer use changes the classroom and changes how students study. I need to show faculty members how other teachers have changed their curriculum, their assignments, classroom arrangement, and the way students interact when teachers introduce technology into their curriculum. As an administrator I will encourage this integration, generate these models, and share them with others.

Finally, principals must move from innovation to the systematic assessment of the impact computers have on teaching and learning. This will require me to involve my faculty in development and implementation and also provide training in assessment methodology. Systematic assessment will provide staff members and myself with the evidence for which innovations can make a difference in learning and teaching. It will also provide the information needed to understand the connection between educational computing, learning, and teaching, and thus assure that these new developments will be built on a strong foundation.

Practical strategies will also need to be applied when planning for new instructional devices. Dede (1989) presents thirteen rules of thumb for administrators to recognize when planning for integration of advanced instructional technologies. I strongly agree with a few of his recommendations.

First, administrators should not buy any technological equipment until it has been determined why the equipment is needed. Students, teachers, school boards, business leaders, and other important people may be impressed by seeing room after room of costly equipment. Unfortunately, many of those devices will not be useful unless I carefully evaluate, in advance, how educational technology can meet the instructional needs of the students.

Second, initial costs are just the tip of the iceberg. Expensive hardware may sit idle if courseware, training, expendables, maintenance, and upgrades are neglected. I must anticipate expendables (e.g., paper, ribbons, tape, disks), upgrades, and maintenance as continuing expenditures which will impact yearly budget cycles. Dede (1989) says that training is the area most frequently neglected. New technology will require new instructional methods to be effective. I must provide teachers with training opportunities to learn these new teaching methods. Without guidance, instructors may use the technology to teach the old way, and its potential effectiveness will be drastically reduced.

Finally, never taking risks guarantees failure. Administrators may naturally feel more comfortable letting others pave the way for emerging instructional technologies. Minimizing risks is always attractive, however, I believe that change is the lifeblood of any profession. The desire to improve and grow is what makes or breaks a profession. Dede (1989) says that in swiftly changing times, only the

flexible and innovative make a difference. Tradition bound institutions are likely to damage their student's progress. Taking no risks with emerging instructional technologies may be the most dangerous path of all. As a future administrator, I have the exciting challenge to encourage and motivate teachers to seek new technological teaching methods.

Practical Applications

For my practicum experience, I was involved in the organization and administration of the magazine sale, which is the major fund raiser for the middle schools in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. The magnitude of this event is intensified because this is the primary fund raising avenue allowed by the Cedar Rapids Community School District for the middle level student. Roosevelt Middle School raised \$48,398.06 by selling magazine subscriptions to family, friends, and members of the community.

Much of my time, during the actual sale, involved organizing and distributing prizes to students. This permitted a positive interaction with the kids, however, it was during this experience that I learned what it was like to have the administrative shoe on my foot. As teachers, we sometimes become frustrated when constantly asked to supervise or assist in an extra curricular event. We wonder why it is always the same individuals who are asked to participate. Organizing prize distribution required help from other staff members. As I attempted to get assistance from staff to help distribute prizes, I quickly learned why it is the same people who are asked to participate. As a future administrator, one of my goals will be to create incentives for faculty participation in extra

curricular events. Perhaps certificates of recognition or genuine notes of appreciation will encourage faculty participation in such events.

At the conclusion of the Magazine Sale, all Middle Schools were required to activate a "Magnet" (Magazine Networking) program in their school. I was hesitant to implement this program because I anticipated a negative reaction on the part of our faculty. As I organized this program and distributed the information, a few staff members verbalized legitimate concerns and reservations to me regarding the Magnet program. We subsequently contacted the magazine company and our school was allowed to cancel the program. As a future administrator, I will have to make a variety of decisions and some may be rather unpopular. However, this experience reminded me to utilize shared decision making whenever possible with a faculty.

I actively participated in a variety of other activities for my practicum experience. It was during this involvement that I was able to connect aspects of current and past course work to real concerns/issues happening in our school/district. For example, in School Law, Alexander and Alexander (1992) discuss the Equal Access Act which allows all groups, regardless of their religious, political, or philosophical beliefs to form and hold meetings in the public high school. I was able to attend a middle school administrative meeting directed by the Executive Director of Middle Schools and High Schools. An administrator raised a concern that students in her building wanted to meet at 7:30 a.m. for religious purposes. The Executive Director discussed the Equal Access Act and approved the meeting. This reinforced the importance of becoming familiar with laws and regulations which will directly affect decisions I will make as an administrator.

Discussions during School Law also emphasized the value and legal implications of appropriately placing students into special education programs. Participating in RSDS (Renewed Service Delivery Systems), strengthened my understanding of the different stages and time required to staff a student into an appropriate special education position. The time and effort required from special education teachers to satisfy their legal obligations regarding existing students in and potential candidates for their program is quite extensive. As a future administrator, I will demonstrate my priority to special education by attending and participating in staffings and getting to know the special education students in my building.

During Administration of the Secondary School we had many practical discussions. For example, we discussed the significance of establishing a climate of trust and creating a building climate for the betterment of education. We discussed the importance of administrative support for reasonable actions of teachers regarding student discipline. During my practicum, I shadowed our associate principal for a full day and then was the acting associate principal for a half day. My day and a half field experience in the main office provided me with a real opportunity to establish a sound principal/faculty relationship and problem solve to aid in the betterment of the Roosevelt Middle School student. The majority of the problems that I dealt with were discipline referrals relating to inappropriate student behavior. I appreciated the time and opportunity to become extensively involved with student and teacher concerns. However, the amount of time required to deal with one referral or problem was shocking to me. Through this experience, I gained a better appreciation for the daily problems, concerns, and

issues which I will be dealing with on a regular basis as a principal. Administration of the Secondary School discussed the value of being visible in and around the building. However, this particular day I experienced many obstacles and/or unforeseen demands that prevented my visibility.

Change and Leadership

Spillane (1989) says that schools will always be reactive to society's changing needs and values. However, as educators we must be proactive about educational change. He goes on to say that educators must advocate the kind of change that moves schools forward in intelligent response to progress. Justiz (1985) believes that change is often difficult and the school principal is the catalyst that allows change to occur. Throughout many stages of the Master of Arts in Education program the notion of change and leadership was discussed. I believe that change can not be effectively implemented without effective leadership. In Administration of the Secondary School we discussed three stages of change: Unfreezing the situation (alerting people to other alternatives), moving to new levels (introducing other alternatives), and refreezing (implementation). If a principal is to be effective in implementing these stages of change, an atmosphere receptive to change must be developed. I believe that successful leadership characteristics will help promote a productive environment for change. Gorton and Schneider (1991) present a variety of leadership characteristics that teachers hold for their administrator. I will discuss four of these characteristics and my vision of accommodating them.

First, the school administrator should support teachers on issues and problems of student discipline. In fact, Bridges (1964) indicates that

administrative support of teachers in regard to discipline was more valued by teachers than anything else principals could do. I would communicate to the faculty my expectations regarding discipline. The staff needs to know what problems they are expected to handle and what problems should be referred to me. The staff also needs to understand what disciplinary measures taken by the teacher I will or will not support. Meeting this latter expectation can be difficult, however, it should not be a surprise to the teacher when I fail to support him/her for swearing at a student. Articulating my expectations will mean nothing unless I stand behind what I say. For example, I have informed the staff of my belief that they have the right to refer any student who is interfering with the learning of another student. When a teacher refers a student for classroom disruption, the teacher must be assured that the punishment will be consistent with the behavior. If I fail to establish this trust or confidence, then the teachers will not feel supported.

Second, teachers expect an opportunity to participate in school decision making. All of the studies on teacher expectations reflect the desire of teachers to play a significant role in school decision making. For example, Sharma (1955) discovered in his study that teachers wanted shared responsibility in all areas of the school program except instructional activities, wherein they wanted total responsibility. Working with others for input and/or decision making is important and effective. I would certainly allow my teachers to have a say in various decisions, but only those which directly affect them. Teachers will see little value participating in decisions which are out of their zone of importance. Also, teachers must be informed of the difference between shared decision making and input. For

example, I may seek input from teachers, but the decision is ultimately mine. As long as teachers are informed of this difference, there is little problem. However, if I seek input and then don't use it, teachers will not feel apart of the process and may not support my decision. Therefore, if an administrative decision contradicts input given by the teacher(s), then I must explain the decision and why it went against the views of the teacher(s). Finally, as the principal I would need to have a grasp on which decisions warrant input and/or shared decision making and which decisions are solely up to me.

Third, teachers expect their principal to demonstrate loyalty to the ideas and ideals of others. There is more than one way to teach effectively. A principal who recognizes this will allow different instructional techniques which may be quite effective. As an administrator, I may not necessarily agree with the instructional techniques of a particular teacher. However, because the instructional performance of the teacher is appropriate and effective, I need to trust and respect his/her teaching style. Dr. Decker often says that there is more than one road from Cedar Rapids to Chicago. As an administrator, demonstrating loyalty to the unique behaviors of others will encourage individuality, promote trust, and enhance a realistic learning environment for the students. Rothberg (1955) states that a climate of trust will lead to greater productivity. This type of trust may encourage support from faculty members when I attempt to change current policy. For example, wearing hats to school does not fit into my vision of effective education. Therefore, I want to implement a "no hat" policy. Teachers may disagree with this policy, but support it for the same reasons I supported their unique teaching style. This type of trust may also encourage support from faculty

with regards to scheduling. Perhaps I discover a high failure rate in a certain content area. After researching the situation, it is determined that kids are scheduled into the wrong classes. As a result, I alter existing policies and practices with respect to scheduling. In order for this change to have a positive impact on the students, it will require teacher support.

Fourth, school administrators should treat teachers as professionals with different but equal roles, rather than as subordinates in a bureaucratic relationship. Lam's (1983) study supports the notion that teachers no longer recognize the traditional superior-subordinate relationship that existed in the past between the administrator and teachers. Teachers now expect to be recognized as professionals and to be treated accordingly. I believe that staff recognition can be an appropriate and effective way to treat teachers as professionals. To me, staff recognition goes beyond the gold watch every 15 years. The personal touches, such as an encouraging note, a pat on the back, or a simple "thanks for your hard work," can provide teachers with a sense of professionalism that they deserve. Building a school structure that permits autonomy can be another method of treating teachers as professionals. For example, there may be times when I need to allow a teacher to take care of a personal matter during school time. Not only will the teacher appreciate this, but the students will not benefit from a teacher who is pre-occupied with a personal concern.

Spillane (1989) says that teaching can not be professionalized without the leadership of strong principals. I believe that change is the lifeblood of any profession. The desire to improve and grow is what makes or breaks a profession. Indeed, there are a variety of other successful leadership characteristics such as

two-way communication, sensitivity, enthusiasm, and organization which can help create an atmosphere receptive to change. I believe that these four characteristics of successful leadership: Support, shared decision making, loyalty, and treating teachers as professionals are essential when creating an environment responsive to change.

Closing

This essay analyzed a variety of issues facing future administrators and communicated my vision of effective performance in an administrative role. It is unquestionably necessary for effective administrators to be knowledgeable of the wide array of demands and have an innovative ability to manage them. Many instructors throughout the Master of Arts in Education program also stressed the necessity for leaders in education to possess a genuine concern for people. If this vital characteristic was present in all levels of education, it could only have a positive impact on the lives of students. I believe that a leadership style without genuine concern for people will not reach its maximum effectiveness. I close with a thought that has been with me throughout my teaching career and will stay with me as an administrator: Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

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