

1994

Ideas of ideal administration: A reflective essay

Gerald L. Shafrath
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1994 Gerald L. Shafrath

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



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shafrath, Gerald L., "Ideas of ideal administration: A reflective essay" (1994). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3299.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3299>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Ideas of ideal administration: A reflective essay

Abstract

I chose Educational Administration graduate work with the ultimate goal of becoming an athletic director. I also thought if I knew more about the administrative perspective I would be a more effective teacher. I believed if I knew more about school law, school and public relations, organizational skills, supervision and evaluation techniques in the educational setting, I could enhance my teaching and coaching abilities. After four years of techniques, law, and research on education administration, I now believe the best administrators are not those who write the best papers or get the best test scores, but instead those who can lead, motivate, communicate and obtain the best from every student, staff member and parent.

**IDEAS OF IDEAL ADMINISTRATION:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education**

**by
Gerald L. Shafrath
May, 1994**

This Research Paper by: Gerald L. Shafrath

Entitled: IDEAS OF IDEAL ADMINISTRATION:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

Robert H. Decker

March 29, 1994

Date Approved

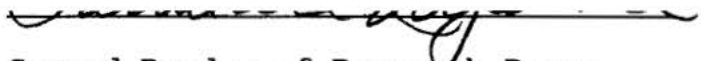


Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Patricia R. Krysinski

March 31, 1994

Date Approved



Second Reader of Research Paper

Robert H. Decker

4-13-94

Date Approved



Head, Department of Educational Administration and Counseling

I chose Educational Administration graduate work with the ultimate goal of becoming an athletic director. I also thought if I knew more about the administrative perspective I would be a more effective teacher. I believed if I knew more about school law, school and public relations, organizational skills, supervision and evaluation techniques in the educational setting, I could enhance my teaching and coaching abilities. After four years of techniques, law, and research on education administration, I now believe the best administrators are not those who write the best papers or get the best test scores, but instead those who can lead, motivate, communicate and obtain the best from every student, staff member and parent.

Over the past four years of my study in Educational Administration a variety of sources have impacted my professional beliefs and values. My practicum experience entailed the direction of the Keith Young Wrestling Invitational Tournament. This has given me invaluable experience dealing with people on an administrative level. Red Ribbon Week, which is a drug abuse awareness week for the school and

community, also gave me experience in administration. I have gained confidence from interaction with other peers during small group, class discussion, simulations and informal discussion throughout my course work. I have established a network of support and information with my colleagues.

In this paper I will outline my ideas of an ideal administration. A principal must have a vision, professional skills, a philosophy and a good school.

VISION

Vision--The ability to foresee or perceive something not actually visible, as through mental acuteness (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1971). The basic elements of all attempts to formulate vision are information, values, plan and insight. Vision is, in a very real sense, a dream of what you want things to look like. Vision is a special kind of hope built upon information, knowledge and inspiration.

Sergiovanni (1984) believes Warren Bennis' idea that a vision is "the capacity to create and communicate a view of desired state of affairs that includes commitment among those in the organization."

Nanus (1989) cites vision as composed of one part foresight, one part insight, plenty of imagination and judgement. It occurs to a well-informed open mind, a mind prepared by a lifetime of learning and experience, one sharply attuned to emerging trends and developments in the world outside of the organization. The values of a leader guide the selection of a vision in a variety of ways. Values are the principles that help people decide what is worthwhile or desirable. "The art of developing an effective vision starts with asking the right questions" (Nanus, 1989). Values influence the questions you ask and the choice of information you seek. Values determine which possible vision you consider, what criteria you use to select among them, and what measure of success you use to judge whether your organization is moving toward its vision (Nanus, 1989).

The family in America has changed. The responsibility of the school in America is changing. It has been identified that 50,000 to 200,000 children do not have a place to call home (Hodgkinson, 1991).

In many children's lives, the school is now the only stable environment. A tremendous burden is placed

on the school to deliver the same quality education achieved in the past in addition to providing many of the stabilities once delivered by the family. To achieve this standard, schools must change basic formats such as the school year, the length of a school day, curriculum design and teaching methods. Parents need to become more involved and schools must focus on the importance of home and child. Schools will need to educate parents as well as communities. A vision will have to encompass all of these aspects.

My vision for education is to enable each student to achieve their highest potential and to be happy with their achievement.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PRINCIPAL

There are five professional skills essential to successful principalship: (a) communication skills, (b) interpersonal skills, (c) judgement, (d) organization ability, and (e) face-to-face leadership (Dr. Decker class notes: Administration of Secondary Schools, 27:228).

Communication Skills

All strands of being an effective principal hinge on the ability to communicate a vision to others,

whether it be to faculty members or community members. Principals can build a team concept by attending to their modes of communications, sending "we messages" rather than imposing their own wants (Herlihy & Herlihy, 1985).

Educational leaders express pride in the accomplishments of their school. They make a point of telling the rest of the community about what the school has achieved. Leaders find ways to celebrate accomplishments.

The leader is the one who articulates the vision and gives it legitimacy, who expresses the vision in captivating rhetoric that fires the imagination and emotions of followers, who - through the vision - empower others to make the decisions that get things done. If the school is going to be successful, the image must grow out of the needs of the entire school community and must be "claimed" or "owned" by all the important actors (Kouzes & Posner, 1990).

Interpersonal Skills:

Routine tasks are most likely to take on meaning when the principal shows sincere personal concern for core values and purposes while performing them.

Examples are morning walks around the building; stopping in classrooms for informal observation; eating lunch with faculty and/or students; being present on schools grounds before and after school hours.

The greatest informal method is merely showing an interest in what goes on in the classroom. "Effective principals...often spend about half their time in the school's halls and classrooms...they are high visibility leaders" (Gorton, 1991).

The above examples may sound simple but in actuality make a big difference when earning respect and trust from those in the school community. The principal gives meaning to the vision by outwardly recognizing people's contributions with a thank-you note, a smile, an award, and public praise, and lets others know how much they mean to the school.

Effective leaders have agendas; they are results oriented. They adopt challenging new visions. They persuade others to become so committed to these new directions that they are eager to lend their resources and energies to make them happen. They are people who venture into unexplored territory. They guide us to new and often unfamiliar destinations. The unique

reason for having leaders--their differentiating function--is to move us forward, leaders get us going some place (Kouzes & Posner, 1990).

Judgement:

Judgement involves decision making skills and empowerment of others. A necessary condition for empowering employees is a willingness of the part of supervisors to delegate authority and redefine their role from the giver of orders to the developer of human potential (Dufour & Eaker, 1987).

To be a good "change agent," you must be able to anticipate developments in the outside world, assess their implications for your organization, create the sense of urgency and priority for changes that your vision requires in light of these developments. You must promote experimentation, and empower people to make the necessary changes. You must be able to build flexibility into your organization and operations and encourage prudent risk taking.

A principal must encourage innovation and insist on compliance. Kanter (1983) states, "Freedom is not the absence of structure -- letting employees go off and do whatever they want -- but rather a clear

structure which enables people to work within established boundaries in a creative and autonomous way."

Organizational skills:

Organizational skills are extremely important for an administrator to possess. Knowing what needs to be done is the most important role of an administrator. Organization essentially is using time efficiently and effectively to accomplish goals. To become organized, you must determine objectives and priorities and monitor time expenditure in order to maintain maximum productivity.

MacKenzie (1973) suggests six steps to aid in the control of your time destiny. He calls them the "imperatives of time management."

1. Set objectives.
2. Determine the priorities for those objectives.
3. Continue to inventory your time.
4. Minimize time wasters.
5. Maximize time savers.
6. Manage for the primary goal--results.

Winston Churchill said, (Kanarek, 1993).

Time is one thing that can never be retrieved.

One may lose and regain a friend, one may lose and

regain money; opportunity once spurned may come again, but the hours that are lost in idleness can never be brought back to be used in gainful pursuits.

Face-to-face leadership:

Face to face leadership involves being with people. What the leader stands for and believes in about schooling, the place of education in society, how schools should be organized and operated and how people should be treated are the guiding principles that give integrity and meaning to leadership. Leaders stand for certain ideals and principles that become cornerstones of their very being.

Kouzes & Posner (1990) stated, when opposition or criticism is expected, face to face communications will improve the likelihood of developing commonality and understanding between competing perspectives. Surprise at another's arguments or concerns also decreases when you consult on a one to one basis. As the complexity of the issues increases, greater face to face communications are required to integrate differences.

Strategic requirements of leadership according to Sergiovanni (1982), sum up the five components to being a good principal that were discussed in Dr. Decker's Administration class, 27:228.

1. A holistic view is important.
2. Develop an enduring philosophy of supervision, management, and organization to ensure consistency and to give proper purpose and meaning to events.
3. Emphasize leadership quality that reflects and nurtures this philosophy.
4. Develop an overall plan or image that provides a frame for implementing purposes.
5. Decision should be governed by purpose and philosophy.
6. The meaning of events to people is important. Be concerned with processes and substance.
7. Sensitivity to and involvement of people are key to success.
8. Quality control is a state of mind that comes from loyal and committed people who believe in what they are doing.
9. Evaluation should be long-term to more adequately determine the quality of life in the school and to assess effectiveness more holistically.

PHILOSOPHY FOR GOVERNING

The teaching philosophy I have used throughout my teaching career is one I call the "four L's." The "four L's" are listen, learn, laugh and most of all, love. I am certain that an administrative role would easily accommodate the "four L's" and be vital to management and vision for a great school.

It is important as a leader that you develop the skill of listening. It is important to know how people feel about their profession. Listening will help you understand the attitude of your school's culture. Listening creates an opportunity to gain respect and to interact with the people you will be working with.

We cannot confuse listening and hearing. Hearing is a passive process. Listening is an interactive process. Although we hear sounds and words, we may choose not to process the information. Listening involves receiving sounds and processing them so we understand the message. Listening requires that we react to the speaker.

Active listening is a source of considerable inspiration. It allows you the opportunity to find out about other individual's new and creative ideas

that you had not originally imagined yourself (Gorton, 1991).

Another advantage of seeking many inputs is making certain that people feel involved with decisions that effect them. Being consulted is no guarantee the decision will be accepted, but not being consulted is almost certain to result in high levels of resistance. Seeking many inputs, leaders also help get individual's issues out on the table where it is possible to provide an open forum for competing viewpoints to be addressed and discussed.

Learning is a way of life. It does not stop after you graduate from high school or college. I believe that all individuals can learn and can continue to learn from each other.

Carroll (1987) defines the learning task as "going from ignorance of some specified fact or concept to knowledge or understanding of it, or of proceeding from incapability of performing some specified act to capability of performing it, is a learning task."

McCarthy (1990) explores the 4MAT system of learning which has two major premises: (1) people have major learning styles and hemispheric (right-mode/left-

mode) processing preferences; and (2) designing and using multiple instructional strategies in a systematic framework to teach to these preferences can improve teaching and learning. There are four major learning styles:

1. Imaginative learners: perceive information concretely and process it reflectively. They integrate experience with the self.
2. Analytic learners: perceive information abstractly and process it reflectively. They devise theories by integrating their observations into what they know.
3. Common sense learners: perceive information abstractly and process it actively. They integrate theory and practice, learning by testing theories and applying common sense.
4. Dynamic learners: perceive information concretely and process it actively. They integrate experience and application learning by trial and error.

Laughter is the third "L" in my philosophy. It seems laughter is missing in the world today. A principal needs to create an atmosphere of learning

that is fun and where laughter can occur. All school personnel need to feel the security and happiness of the school community. We must be able to laugh at ourselves and know that it is healthy.

Barth (1990) cites that humor is strongly associated with learning and the development of intelligence, not to mention its importance to the quality of life. Humor can be the glue that binds an assorted group of individuals into a community. People learn and grow and survive through humor. We should make an effort to elicit and cultivate laughter rather than to ignore, thwart, or merely tolerate it.

The medical profession also has something to say about humor. Laughter causes the lungs to pump out carbon dioxide, the eyes to cleanse themselves with tears, the muscles to relax, the flow of adrenaline to increase, and the cardiovascular system to be exercised. Perhaps most important for those in schools, endorphins, the chemical produced by the brain to relieve pain, are released into the bloodstream when a person laughs. Clearly laughter is good for schools and for those who inhabit them (Barth, 1990).

The fourth "L" is love, the reason I chose the profession. I love to be around children and interact with various age groups. Love has many definitions. For me, to love is to show I care and respect each person for who they are. For many children, however, love has taken on a material sense. Many of today's problems in schools and elsewhere stem from this lack of love. With the current family and adolescent struggle with identity and self-esteem found in today's society, it is imperative that we provide our students with the love and nurturing they are not getting from the family unit.

The secret to success is to stay in love. Staying in love gives you fire to really ignite other people, to see inside other people, to have a greater desire, to get things done. A person who is not in love does not really feel the kind of excitement that helps them to get ahead, lead others and to achieve. I do not know any other fire, any other thing in life that is more exhilarating and is more positive a feeling than love (Kouzes & Posner, 1990).

With love there also needs to be encouragement. The word encouragement has its root in the Latin word

cor, meaning "heart." When leaders encourage others, thorough recognition and celebration, they inspire them with courage - with heart. When we encourage others, we give them heart. And when we give heart to others, we give love (Kouzes & Posner, 1990).

Vince Lombardi, in his speech before the American Management Association made these remarks: (Kouzes & Posner, 1990).

Mental Toughness is humility, simplicity, spartanism, and one other, love. I don't necessarily have to like my associates, but as a person I must love them. Love is loyalty. Love is teamwork. Love respects the dignity of the individual. Heart power is the strength of your cooperation. If all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting. It is hard to imagine leaders getting up day after day, putting in the long hours and hard work it takes to get extraordinary thing done, without their hearts being in it. Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the head.

I feel it is important to develop the 'four L's' in the school community. Teachers, support staff,

students and parents need to understand and implement them in their daily lifestyles. Teachers should become practitioners of the philosophies within our mission statement. In order for this to happen you must first model it yourself.

WHAT IS A GOOD SCHOOL

Principals can and do help create an environment of respect, affection and achievement every day by understanding the purpose of schooling and the importance of modeling, through one's own actions, the values, belief and normative behaviors on which cultures are formed.

Spady (1984) shares five elements of successful schools:

1. Strong values that support a safe and secure environment, one that is conducive to learning and is free of disciplinary problems or vandalism.
2. High expectations of every student and of faculty, too, believing that every one can achieve.
3. Belief in basic skills instruction as a key and critical goal for all students.

4. The belief that there should be clear performance goals and that every one should have clear and helpful performance feedback to help in guiding the learning and improvement process.
5. Strong leadership and a belief in its importance.

A good school is a place in which every one is teaching and every one is learning simultaneously. Students are teaching and learning; principals are teaching and learning; teachers are teaching and learning. Everything that goes on in a good school contributes to this end. In a school that is a community of learners, the principal occupies an important position of leadership as the head learner, engaging in, displaying the behaviors we want teachers and students to adopt.

A good school is one in which teachers and principals talk with one another about practice, observe one another engaged in daily activities, share their knowledge of their craft with one another, and actively help one another become more skillful. In a collegial school, adults and students are constantly

learning because everyone is a staff developer for everyone else (Barth, 1990).

If we want students to be less docile and more adventuresome in their thinking, then adults must model risk taking as well as learning. If we want to improve schools, we must risk doing things differently. New and unusual ideas must be viewed not as nuisances or embarrassments but as signs of life and growth. Considerable research suggests that risk taking is strongly associated with learning (Barth, 1990).

A good school is one that respects differences. Teachers, parents, students, and principals feel better and learn better in such an environment. A school can fulfill no higher purpose than to teach all its members that they can make what they believe in happen; and to encourage them to contribute to and benefit from the leadership of others.

Expanding the vision within the schoolhouse is an enterprise that will create schools with room enough for all of us to work and have our children learn. When we create schools that we value, for our children and for ourselves, we will have created schools of value to others as well.

CONCLUSION

Administrators of the future will be as widely varied as the problems and challenges they will face. I believe vision, professional skills, philosophy and creating a good school are essential in administration. There are some guidelines I will adhere to that will help me be a great administrator.

1. Know who you are and like yourself.
2. Nurture your self-esteem, believe you can make a difference.
3. Know what you want to accomplish.
4. Prioritize your goals and develop strategies for attaining them.
5. Never lose sight of your values and beliefs. Make them a part of your daily life. Think about them, articulate them, demonstrate them to your friends, family, colleagues, and to everyone else you come in contact with.
6. Never stop teaching.
7. Never stop listening, learning, laughing or loving.

References

- Barth, S. R. (1990). A personal vision of a good school. Phi Delta Kappan. (3) 512-516.
- Bennis, W. (1984). Transformational power and leadership. T.J. Sergiovanni and J.E. Corbally (Eds.) Leadership and Organized Culture (p. 66). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Carroll, J. B. (1987) Model of school learning. Teachers College Record. 62 723-733.
- Decker, R. H. (1992). Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction. University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.
- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1987). The principal as leader: Two major responsibilities. Fulfilling the Promise of Excellence: A Practitioner's Guide to School Improvement. Westbury, N.Y.: J.L. Wilkerson.
- Gorton, R. A., Schneider, G. T. (1991). School-based leadership: Challenges and opportunities. Dubuque, IA: Brown.
- Guralnik, D. B. Dictionary Editor in Chief, (1971) Webster's New World Dictionary, p. 830.

- Hodgkinson, H. (1991). Reform vs. reality. Phi Delta Kappan. (9) 9-16.
- Herlihy, B., & Herlihy, D. (1985). Improving principal-teacher relationship by understanding the concept of power. NASSP Bulletin, 69 (485), 95-102.
- Kanarek, L. (1993). Organizing Your Home Office For Success. New York: Plume.
- Kanter, R. M. (1983). The Change Masters: Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the American Corporation. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1990). The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mackenzie, R. A. (1973). How to make the most of your time. US News and World Report. 75 (12), 45.
- McCarthy, B. (1990). Using the 4MAT system to bring learning styles to schools. Educational Leadership. (10) 31-36.
- Nanus, B. Visionary Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1982). Ten principals of quality leadership. Educational Leadership. 39 (2) 330-336.

Spady, W. & Marx, G. (1984). Excellence in our schools: Making it happen. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators and Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.