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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 remains a prerequisite to functioning as a responsible citizen in our democracy. It is the purpose of our public school system to educate its citizenry, making it responsible for productive contributions to our society. An elementary school principal is a leader, community role model, and manager to the school community in which he or she practices. He/she must possess sound character and develop personal qualities representative of acceptable societal norms. The variety of roles that are demanded of a principal requires that he/she master a diverse portfolio of knowledge and skills. His/her beliefs must be well defined and all necessary tasks carried out efficiently and effectively. Such a leadership role presumes the unavoidable interdependence of person and profession.

**A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
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**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education**

**by
Lisa J. Trefz
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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Education remains a prerequisite to functioning as a responsible citizen in our democracy. It is the purpose of our public school system to educate its citizenry, making it responsible for productive contributions to our society. An elementary school principal is a leader, community role model, and manager to the school community in which he or she practices. He/she must possess sound character and develop personal qualities representative of acceptable societal norms. The variety of roles that are demanded of a principal requires that he/she master a diverse portfolio of knowledge and skills. His/her beliefs must be well defined and all necessary tasks carried out efficiently and effectively. Such a leadership role presumes the unavoidable interdependence of person and profession.

The purpose of this paper is to apply personal values and beliefs to professional knowledge and skills and reflect on direct experiences in the field, in pursuit of developing my own vision as an educational administrator. In reflecting on my experiences, preparation for this career requires integration of an in depth examination of my personal self with the important requirements of a sound principalship role model. In this paper I will discuss personal qualities that will impact my performance as a principal. This self assessment will reflect strengths and weaknesses. I will examine those roles I believe to be most important. These are: the role of principal as an instructional

leader, the role of principal as a community liaison, and the role of principal as a manager. Inherent in performing all of these roles is the skill of communication. As a prerequisite, I will discuss my philosophy as it relates to a vision and discuss the pursuit of effective leadership.

Philosophy and Background

I believe that learning is an innate need within a human being and growth toward personal actualization provides the basis from which individuals can determine their own destinies in life. "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes," (Proust, 1954, p. 61) is a favorite quote of mine. It comes closest to expressing my sustaining enthusiasm after 23 years in education. My interpretation is that real human growth comes from within. Learning is continually seeking to discover knowledge put together with our own gifts, in order to create our unique selves, which we can then share with humankind. I believe that by living a life of learning, one creates the possibility for making worthwhile contributions and thus experiencing a meaningful life. I choose to live my life with this belief. I feel I can express this through my profession and it stands for my purpose in pursuing administration. I strongly believe professing this would be a major accomplishment in my lifetime.

My clearest memories are of school days. I remember moments of each grade and teacher. School was a comfortable place where I enjoyed

success. My school was located half a block away from home and served not only as a play place at recess time, but a playground for my siblings and neighborhood playmates. My mother was always involved in parent functions, and later she was the first paraprofessional to be employed by our district. My school experience was ubiquitous then and guided me into my present teaching career where I still enjoy the excitement of discovery.

As an above average student, I depended on my consistently good performance for affirmation. Coming from a blue collar home, my college education was unlikely. I did not have a well-planned future mapped out with parental advice guiding me, but I did attend a large university where I received my teaching degree. I have now taught in my native school district since 1973. It was not until I taught that I developed my self confidence and professional beliefs. Encouragement from administrators and colleagues has helped me to actualize my leadership abilities. I believe my love of learning, my desire to make a worthwhile contribution to humankind, and my confidence in knowing my strengths has lead me to pursue a career in administration.

Vision

Teaching is an opportunity to influence the future by helping young people develop into productive members of society. In a leadership role, these opportunities become even more far reaching. As a visionary, a

leader is able to help create the future, a responsibility that must be taken seriously. I believe when an effective leader projects his/her vision, he/she turns possibilities into realities. Basic to this vision is a clear set of specific beliefs in education. I believe:

- teachers are instructional leaders who model continuous improvement and offer experiences for growth through personal discovery and create diverse opportunities for students.
- that the school community must work together, recognize the strength of all families, and through a collaborative effort, celebrate creative, positive differences and resolve problems using available resources in the school community.
- an administrator continually strives to improve the school climate by refining organizational skills, cultivating a strong decision making capability, using all resources efficiently yet effectively, and creating a positive, safe, supportive environment for all school community members.
- that in order to lead with a vision, an administrator must be aware of the importance of clear, consistent, and effective communication that supports the school mission, recognizes the need to do so in a variety of ways, and uses it when working together with a diversity of peoples and ideas.

- as administrator, I would project to the school community all of these core beliefs in hopes that they could be embedded into the school culture.

As a school administrator, the challenge would be to incorporate these beliefs into the existing school community. These would be clearly communicated and modeled in hopes that they become incorporated with teachers' perceptions and the existing school culture. We would then strive to create a mission that would honor the tradition of the school, reflect the vision of the school professionals, and also reflect the district mission.

Effective Leadership

I believe the highest honor we can give anyone is recognition and respect for their uniqueness. Argyis (as cited in Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1992) defines three critical responsibilities of administrators in terms of organizational-core activities. These are: "attainment of organizational goals, maintaining integration of the organizational system, and adapting to forces in the organization's external environment"(p. 62). And a fourth was added by Parsons (as cited in Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1992) "maintaining cultural patterns" (p. 62).

A successful administrator identifies core values, understands leadership principles, and develops technical skills, such as

organization and communication. Experience in education refines a principal's performance. I have had 23 years of classroom experience in a range of school settings and also worked on district and building committees. From these experiences I have developed personal qualities such as assertiveness and productiveness. Other qualities of honesty, openness, and friendliness would contribute to my personal administrative style. These are reinforced in my love of learning, understanding of other perspectives, ability to articulate, self-confidence, high motivation, industrious predisposition, and professional competence. Strong qualities help a principal to be a positive model in the different roles that he or she plays.

I believe children are our most precious resource and our greatest hope for a better future. As the school principal performs his/her different jobs, it is important that the purpose of their work remain clear. When deciding issues or prioritizing responsibilities, whether it be in the day-to-day operation or long-range planning, the qualifier shall always be the welfare of the students. In difficult decisions, this belief will help clarify what is important in order to lead effectively. In carrying this thinking forward, it is important to examine crucial roles of instructional leader, community representative, and manager.

The Role of Instructional Leader

I believe that an education creates the possibility for individuals to make their own contributions to humankind by using their acquired knowledge and unique gifts. Prior to the effective schools reform movement, the role of principal as instructional leader was ineffectual. With the surge of effective schools research came a distinct role of principal as instructional leader. Today, the school principal is responsible for half of his/her time to be spent in the role of instructional leader (Kaiser, 1995). In order to carry out this responsibility, a school principal must be knowledgeable of effective schools research findings. Varied lists of characteristics have been published. One example of such a list was generated by Brookover and Lazotte (as cited in Kaiser, 1995) which included: (a) commitment to mastery of basic reading and math objectives, (b) staff belief that all students can learn, (c) higher student standards, (d) indirect reading instruction, (e) assertive discipline, (f) greater accountability, (g) parent involvement, and (h) dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Since the conception of effective schools research, principals as leaders have envisioned reforms specific to the needs of their school. So transformation efforts have taken many forms. It is important that, prior to any transformational decisions, an effective principal examine the school culture: (a) the existing student population, (b) their overall

performance, (c) social and economic elements of the population, (d) the community at large, (e) the staff and resources available, and (f) the physical facilities.

I believe that knowledge of school climate is a significant element to the success of a quality school. Even though a strong, effective administrator has a clear vision, if perceptions from the school community are not congruent, then administrative desires for change become more difficult. It is imperative to the success of a principal that he/she provide opportunities for open dialog to occur between teachers, parents, and administrator in order to reach consensus on school goals. All perceptions must be embraced in order to successfully work towards common school goals that foster a positive school climate (Decker, personal communication, July, 1995).

Principals that ignore this basic rule fail painfully in attempts to initiate change. The transformation process is unique to each school culture and this process is determined by identifying existing strengths and establishing strong support and leadership among staff and community. I would be cautious to endorse a comprehensive program that is commercially packaged and marketed. The key to success in implementing change comes from within the school.

I believe that working together can only enhance a school's efforts to plan and implement programs based on need. A school improvement

plan must be developed to specifically meet the desired learner outcomes. With an individualized needs assessment and input from present staff, the effective principal can continually model to slowly incorporate those aspects of his/her vision that are relevant to a specific school community. At this point, a mission statement is written as the school community is internalizing stated beliefs. This planning process can lead to a principal's core values that are becoming more actualized. I believe that teachers must be an integral part of this decision-making process. They must participate in collaborative efforts to identify beliefs, determine needs, create desired outcomes, and implement an improvement plan (National Study of School Evaluation, 1994). If a district endorses a site-based management model, a shared decision making model at the site creates ownership for school members and promotes use of valuable human resources (Swap, 1993).

Curriculum and Instruction

I believe that teachers are professionals who are experts in instruction and curriculum and need constant support in order to plan and prepare an excellent program of instruction specific to the varying needs of the student in his/her class. As a classroom teacher, I have good knowledge from such experience and can readily understand elementary curriculum and the methods and techniques used in instruction. This experience would bring insight in decision making

concerning the integration of student needs, staff resources, and goals for effective outcomes of learning. In curriculum discussions related to remediation, enrichment, or problems, I could make relevant connections and contributions to the subject of discussion and in the process would establish professional credibility with staff. This would also allow me to relate directly to students and their experiences with a personal understanding. When called upon to spontaneously instruct, former classroom experience would be advantageous.

In a school's set of beliefs, it is essential that basic concepts about children as competent and life long learners be articulated. These concepts directly effect children and their learning. Integration of content and the processes of learning are elemental to good teaching. Besides these, students need to be actively engaged in work that is appropriate. Piaget (as cited in Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992) confirms: "Children at play are constantly at work, adding new observations to the existing relationships they have established. When faced with ideas that do not fit into what they already know, children must adjust the existing framework to accommodate the new information " (p. 206).

Along with active learning, a positive approach that affirms self and encourages exploration are highly effective. Classroom teachers need to have a clear understanding of how children think and develop in order

to diagnose needs, facilitate with effective guidance, and question students to further learning. Duckworth (1987) defines the role of teaching:

[T]here are two aspects to teaching. The first is to put students in contact with phenomena related to the area to be studied--the real thing, not books or lectures about it--and to help them notice what is interesting;...The second is to have the students try and explain the sense they are making. (p. 123)

These are ways to effective teaching. Understanding effective methodology credits the principal in the role of instructional leader.

Supervision and Evaluation

I believe that continuous improvement both personally and professionally can insure that the school will effectively meet the challenges of excellent quality in education. The instructional leader can directly impact change in the school by using supervision and evaluation as a tool toward transformation. School principals often feel the loss of their direct effect on student learning. By giving priority to implementing a clinical evaluation model, the principal practices the instructional leadership role of teaching teachers how to teach (Pajak, 1993). Although it is indirect, the principal impacts teaching practices, which improves instruction, and consequently student learning. In this approach, I believe besides being an effective evaluator, the principal

should adopt an evaluation model that fits the shared values of the school. Evaluation is perceived as an influential aspect of the teaching profession. If principals make an impact on student learning by helping teachers improve and effectively reinforce beliefs he/she has through evaluation model choices, then I believe the strength of his/her leadership has been two-fold.

Educational reform is nationwide and growing. This is the challenge for all principals. It requires comprehensive assessment of school needs. A major factor is helping teachers understand the need for reform and then supporting them in the endeavor. The major changes in our society and school compels all educators to change. This takes time, the rarest commodity in the education industry. Successful transformation is dependent on teachers having a growing knowledge base. Darling-Hammond (1996) believes that essential to this is staff development. Investing time in teacher learning can be facilitated through supervisory models that help new or weak teachers. The principal must take the role of mentor in this situation.

The principal's performance as supervisor and evaluator is important to everyone. To personnel it means performing well and establishing personal pride and commitment in the teaching profession. To central office it means hiring quality staff which is essential to building an effective school district. To parents and

community it means relying on professionals to help educate our citizens and trusting quality teachers with the lives of children.

With classroom experience, supervising and evaluating teachers would be more equitable because experience would help me in the summative process of evaluation while observing and scripting; this job is important and difficult because the job done here will influence the teacher's performance, both the good and bad. Observing classroom instruction must be done efficiently due to the nature of formative evaluation. It requires concise, spontaneous note taking of what is relevant and important within a limited time frame. Being succinct in scripting can be done well with the built-in insight an evaluator can have from personal classroom experience. Classroom experience would also help in guiding new teachers, or weak teachers through a growth plan such as the Professional Improvement Commitment (Decker, personal communication, 1995). It would be helpful in conferences to assist teachers in their growth because of understanding the nature of classroom teaching and management. There is no doubt that extensive classroom experience would strengthen all roles of the principalship but in curriculum and instruction and supervision and evaluation, it would be directly applicable.

The role of instructional leader has become increasingly important. I believe I clearly understand the expectations and importance of this

role. With a strong classroom work experience, I feel competent to fill this role. Learning technical duties, such as the skills necessary for effective evaluation, would refine an area that is already a strength. It would be necessary to continually improve awareness of the most recent curriculum philosophies and methods. A major demand on time would be keeping updated in this area. This intent reflects both modeling of continual improvement, love for learning, heavy personal interest in curriculum, and a strong belief in the role of instructional leader of instructors.

Role of the Community Liaison

The predominant philosophy driving a school to interface with its community is the educator's role in reaching out and embracing the entire family in the education of children. Historian Stephanie Coontz(1992) repeatedly states that the changes in our American society are not the cause of family breakdown but rather it is "change in our community ties, not in our family ones" (p. 15). She strongly believes that "building institutional and social supportive networks allows for the constructive reform needed" (p. 22). Attempts to reconnect the school and community are visible efforts toward this same goal in school districts today. John Goodland (as cited in Crowson, 1992) calls these social changes the "withering of community" (p.15). He suggests a strong need "to reestablish a productive balance

between home and school..." (p. 16). Decentralization allows schools to manage issues closer to home. Site-based management is reform that appeals to many larger districts and supports the school-community movement. This restructuring offers opportunities for administrators to redefine school and community relations to be more than the public relations function it has in the past. It requires a stronger responsibility in the principal's role as community liaison.

I believe a positive perspective sustains the hope needed in order to resolve inevitable conflicts that exist in a world of differences. When there is autonomy in decision making and planning, schools are empowered to best determine their own community identity and the plans resulting from this. This can happen when site-based management includes a shared decision making model. This model employs a wide range of school members who work together creating a team, based on trust and mutual agreements. Required training is facilitated by an expert who helps the ruling body to evolve into a cohesive group. These members may include school staff, parents, other stakeholders in a school community, and possibly students. Transformation is seen when school-community relations facilitate "a change from a closed to open relationship" (Crowson, 1992, p. 221) which bridges gaps between home and school. A major challenge in a collaborative model is acknowledging differences in perspectives while

looking for similarities in striving for consensus. The result is a shared set of beliefs which serve as the focus in collaborative decisions and planning. For the principal, this requires self-confidence and confidence in others. He/she must allow others to also become empowered. This will promote trust and ownership, factors necessary for effective implementation of plans and eventual realization of goals.

I believe an organization must have a clear, agreed upon set of beliefs which is publicly expressed to provide the rationale for what is being learned. The principal is key to effective schooling which is articulated in a set of shared beliefs, the heart of school culture (personal communication Doud, July 21, 1994). For this reason, school climate becomes very important. It gives the student a positive identity and sense of belonging. It provides conditions for a successful work attitude. It fosters confidence and pride in student and teacher performances and accomplishments. A learning climate allows for exploration by providing a rich environment of materials and offering a place for testing and questioning. School climate advertises the results of students' work by exhibiting products to celebrate accomplishments with the school community. This relays messages to parents and supporters and helps shape the school image. Such visual impressions may in turn foster more support when needed. Fowler and Corley (1996) believe that increasing family involvement in school will

improve student performance. This support offers strength for both the family and school. They show how a school can link families to help build community. The school principal helps promote the relationships of family to school, family to service providers, and finally families with community at large. For students, it promotes expression of themselves, shared among their peers. "Heroes and heroines, rituals and ceremonies, and networking are all dimensions of culture" (Blendinger & Jones, 1989, p. 23).

The principal plays an integral part in connecting the home and community by helping parents understand educational perspectives and by helping teachers become open to more input from the school community. Thus one of the main characteristics in the role of community liaison, stated in Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, and Thurston (1992), is to know the "flow of images that counts the most-- images closest to home" (p. 39). One of the key principles of interaction management is never to ignore confrontation; if there is a reason for confrontation then there is a point of view to be heard (personal communication, Doud, July 20, 1994). Self-confidence and a belief in collaboration will foster a willingness to utilize power sources in the school community to the benefit of the school.

I believe that the family structure, in all of its forms, is the primary source of nurturing and educational support of the total child. A strong

school-community partnership can change the perception of the school. With the historic neighborhood schools concept, many schools are potential public sites for other events, activities, and unrelated meetings. When activity occurs in the building beyond the school schedule, a neighborhood begins to identify with the school as a center of activity. This fosters support. With increasing family pressures, it is important to recognize the potential support that schools could offer because of their direct involvement with children of families, their commitment to children and families in general, and the potential to provide a facility near to home. In this way, the school has the capability to be a place for help beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic.

This drastically changes the role of the principal as community liaison. In the past, principals perceived this role as a public relations responsibility. With renewed emphasis on family involvement in school life, the principal is required to develop more communication and facilitating skills, cultivate a political sense, and seek out new understandings of governance on the local level. In addition to these, helpful personal qualifications would be: diplomacy, flexibility, spontaneous decision making, and public speaking. Some knowledge of local issues, social concerns, and a sense of community sentiment

would also help. Personal appearances of self and the physical facility would become more important than ever.

It is important in choosing a home-school partnership model that school needs be assessed before planning. Home-school relationships can range from a simple goal of maintaining two way communication to forming local school councils where parents have equal representation with professionals. Swap (1993) offers a variety of models in Developing Home-School Partnerships . Four basic elements that define a true partnership include: (a) two-way communication, (b) enhancing learning at home and school, (c) providing mutual support, and (d) making joint decisions at whatever level that may be.

Political involvement is essential to the principalship. The political school structure is directed by federal, state, and local laws, regulations, policies, and even funding. Sergiovanni, et. al. (1992) cite that, historically, the national agenda of the sixties and early seventies reflects the nature of school politics as:

...the federal government played a major role in prodding local educational agencies to change by providing financial incentives and legal mandates. [In 1985, contrasting policymaking influenced schools with] state governments assuming direct and highly regulatory responsibility for change. [These directives] are persistent over time [and] many issues emerged that

shape the present and future governance and administration of America's school. (p. 24)

It is also important to be familiar with the neighborhood community as well. Along with the governance of federal and state entities, Sergiovanni, et. al. (1992) maintain that "throughout the process school administrators must maintain an adequate degree of public confidence at the local level in order for schools to function reasonably well" (p. 37). These boundaries cannot be ignored, for they will impact school planning and decisions. Financial conditions also will dictate. A principal facilitates the defining of school culture and its needs. A solid school improvement plan will strive to achieve the desired outcomes recognizing the support and the constraints from both within and in the school community. With this approach, effective transformation is possible.

As a community liaison, the principal must have accurate knowledge of political factions, of attitudes and beliefs of the school community, and a strong confidence that he/she may lead with sound judgment. I am able to meet people and effectively acquaint myself with social situations. The skills required for this specific role also assume good communication. In group discussions that involve a variety of beliefs or opinions, I am able to understand other viewpoints and question ideas respectfully in order to inform myself and facilitate constructive

discourse. An area of needed growth here would be to refine listening skills. In conflict situations, I can control emotions and remain patient in order to be articulate in discussions about challenging issues. I am confident with local social politics, but in high level politics I am inexperienced. I realize the necessity of political involvement in education; this would be an area of growth that I have targeted in my professional growth plan.

The politics of this role are more challenging. But being a community representative for the school is an area in which I feel capable because of my belief in it and my ability to work with people. This comes from personality characteristics and lots of experience interacting with all kinds of parents, students, and teachers. The exposure to many different kinds of people and ideas is exciting to me as I see it as experiences of discovery. The array of possibilities available to anyone from everyone is potential learning in and of itself. The strength of these resources is vast.

I believe our cultural diversity should be recognized as a rich resource for growth, which we embrace and celebrate. Connecting the home and school strengthens the educational goals we have adopted. It provides support for the schools, and a community network for families. To effectively utilize all strengths, we must collaborate together and

work jointly. We must build consensus to develop a set of shared beliefs. We must recognize all families who offer help and need help.

The Role of Manager

I believe an essential responsibility of the school is to provide competent teachers, appropriate materials, and a safe, orderly learning environment for the purpose of achieving a basic, quality education for each student. In the past, the predominant role of the principal was that of manager. Managing a school requires attention to the daily operation of the school and to the duties that assist in guaranteeing an effective learning environment. In this capacity, duties are more structural in nature. Resource considerations such as personnel, facilities, scheduling, and materials are some of the essential elements of managing. These are necessities that are unavoidable and, in many cases, immediate. They are the demands that can consume time and energy.

I believe school image is essential to developing a strong school culture. Management duties are extremely important because if all priorities are placed on less tangible duties, poor management is visibly evident to the community. Parents and other stakeholders perceive the school image by what they see in the physical plant and behavior of staff and students. Areas such as curriculum or inservice training are vital to effective success in schools, but if discipline and

facilities are in disarray, it is these concrete examples that override less apparent goals and project a misrepresentation of real efforts to citizens outside the school walls.

I believe in structuring information and organizing people for the purpose of allowing efficient use of time and resources. A school administration that utilizes its teachers, capitalizes on student strengths, invites the community into the school, and coordinates resources is going to be a positive place. This requires management of time and resources. I view empowered teachers as valuable assistants. In decision making I would use their expertise. In planning and implementing, I would use their ideas and energy. In celebrating our learning, I would recognize their contributions. Fullan (1992) sums up the management role: "In short, the principal should strive to be not an instructional leader, but rather a leader of instructional leaders" (p. 20). When supervising and evaluating teachers with this belief, I would strive to develop trusting relationships yet expect excellent performance in staff.

It is also important for the principal to be viewed as part of the collaborative community. A principal makes himself/herself visible in the presence of students and staff. When consistently done, this communicates what is important to the principal. It also allows he/she to make daily, informal evaluations of school happenings as

“principals [must] stay informed” (Reitzug & Burrello, 1995, p. 49).

School administration, no matter what the role, is a business of people. More direct interaction, found in daily contact, gives the school leader valuable, up to date input that helps in immediate planning and decision making.

Even though the roles of school principals are changing and becoming more diverse, the fact remains that essential functions of good management can not be forgotten. Seven functions of good management include: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. These are commonly used descriptions for important areas of management (Doud, personal communication, July 27, 1994).

Management of the inorganic elements is no longer going to be enough. Schools are organic; the people and problems are the reality that need immediate attention. This requires more than managing, it requires leadership. This leadership is time-consuming, yet essential to the success of today’s principal. Therefore time for managing must be compromised.

Management of schools now requires planning that is reflective and systematic apart from daily activities, organizing, coordinating, and controlling. Management reality today includes: (a) taking some risks; (b) being visible and interacting with the working people;

(c) experiencing action oriented activities that are brief, varied, and discontinuous; (d) identifying specific regular duties; and (e) embracing systems that are personal, not scientific.

This type of situational leadership is challenging (Doud, personal communication, July 28, 1994). During my administrative internship, I observed much of this kind of leadership. The supervising principal was asked the question: What is most difficult about the principalship? Her response was having the ability to hire personnel. I observed her spending most of her time “on the floor” and office time was after school hours. She viewed her organization as a pool of human resources and her job was to listen to problems, then coordinate the many variables and resources in order to find solutions. Her focus was on the people and problems of the organization and how to manage them in the present situation. This goes beyond the simple, mundane managerial duties of the past.

Fiscal management is another vital part of school administration. I see this as closely tied with politics. The Constitution delegates governance of schools to the states. In Iowa, the State Board of Education, which is appointed by the governor, is responsible for public education policy-making. The Iowa Department of Education administers the policies. The ultimate authority is the Iowa state legislature which appropriates education funds (personal

communication, Doud, July 18, 1994). With the budgetary demands on schools and the new fiscal responsibilities that come with site-based management, principals need to be proficient in accounting practices and conscientious in monitoring cost-effective practices. Relative to this responsibility is a new fiscal duty, grant writing. The availability of grants has steadily increased and is quickly becoming a strong resource for additional funding for transformation in schools. I have observed that many transformational efforts are funded by grants. Administrators have mostly learned how to write grants by trial and error. Past grant applications are helpful in preparing new ones. This experience comes mostly from on-the-job training although some workshop classes are available in assisting successful grant writing. Fiscal management will be a personal growth area for me as it ranked "second in need" in my personal professional growth plan. To improve in this area, I have targeted establishment of a mentorship with an administrator for assistance and becoming involved in school finance opportunities through my own school or through offerings at the area agency. Presently, the most effective way to learn more is to be aware of opportunities through practical application in the school setting.

The heart of the school funding issue goes beyond state allocations. There has been a great deal of angry criticism about public schools fiscal responsibilities in general. The depth of this issue goes back to

the Constitution. Molnar (1996) observes an abandonment of the constitutional value of education and insists that a serious debate about American commitment to education is needed. This commitment is reflected in the amount of money the citizenry is willing to allocate to education. "Sadly, what we have instead of a real debate is a celebration of conservative economic conventional wisdom constructed out of contradictory research findings and self-serving political ideology" (p. 59). The funding struggles school districts face represent communitywide unwillingness to believe in the necessity of education in order to maintain our democracy. This fact does not resolve the problem but it creates awareness in principals of the need to be responsible for educating the public about educational needs. An open door policy in school climate is the first, small step in making inroads into this enormous funding issue.

A principal who moves to site-based management can be successful at overcoming many of the frustrations that budget restrictions create. Choosing to change is one thing, being able to accomplish it is another. The enthusiasm of embarking on new philosophy and structure is often dampened by budgetary restrictions or district-controlled policies that can tie a school's hands. In Edmonton, Alberta the public schools are managed using a site-based management model. One rationale for implementing this was the superintendent believed the old system did

not have any functional responsibility for student learning. "Until you give schools control over how they use their financial resources, it doesn't matter how much you talk to them about focusing on instruction" (Only, 1996, p. 67). Site-based management has many strengths in creating solutions when teachers, who are closest to delivery of program, are involved. A principal can gain valuable insights in budget planning when he/she uses the rich resource of teacher knowledge about curriculum and student learning. Using their expertise will aid in achieving maximum use of available funds towards the greatest learning.

I believe principals are readily seen as managers. Good management will impact the total school image. No one rejects the idea of a well run school. I see the challenge in school management as the ability to achieve school goals against the tough demands and constraints that are present. These demands and constraints require good management in order to overcome them. The result is that obstacles are removed to allow for the school's shared values to be realized.

To effectively carry out all three of the roles discussed, it is essential to understand the necessity for strong communication skills. Inherent in the areas previously identified is communication, which can determine the success or failure of an action.

Communication in the Principalship

I believe clear and honest communication is essential to connecting with the diversity of people we live and work with and utilizing those people as a powerful resource. When the work is people, the tool is talk. The most important information comes from face-to-face communication. Talking is considered 80% of a principal's job (Doud, personal communication, July 28, 1994). All aspects of a principalship require excellent communication skills. This is uncompromising. It is a proactive stance, as well-informed parties prevent misinformation that can divert energies and time from the goal. It only makes sense that a people business will be successful only if beliefs, ideas, plans, goals, opinions, perceptions, and evaluations are heard, recognized, and accounted for.

Good management will recognize the most efficient ways to communicate. As a time consuming venture, consistently evaluating and deciding on who and how to communicate can expedite more information correctly; i. e., consistently choosing the communication mode that best uses time and method of delivery will greatly influence the outcome intended. Poor communication methods can quell a good idea or plan. It is essential a principal knows his/her job is talk and acknowledges the necessity for good communication. A principal must be an effective communicator.

Principals must utilize the new technology of today. These tools only enhance avenues of communication and help a principal to coordinate and facilitate resources even better. The essential component is to certify the need for good communication via integration of technology tools to achieve the goal of improving the communication network in a school.

I feel very strongly about my ability to communicate to others. I have practiced extensively in the school setting; I would also target personal continued improvement by listening better to others in order to clearly ascertain the speaker's meaning. I have proven my ability to remain constructive in confrontational situations. I am willing to seek sources of input as a positive means toward problem solving. Good communication is an undeniable given in fostering a successful administrative performance.

Conclusion

After 23 years of learning with children, conferencing with parents, planning with teachers, and working with educational professionals, I have developed a set of core values. The principalship is a worthy position that touches the lives of many people. It requires a sound person who commits to a life of service. I believe an integration of person and profession comes from a belief system that projects integrity, ability, strength, and goodness. A set of core values gives a

principal a framework for acting upon the immediate, the unexpected, the unknown.

Core Values

I began to formulate my core values as I gained classroom teaching experience. I have built this set of values knowing that they also express the deep beliefs previously stated. These have been examined, revised, and articulated throughout my administrative program. I value these holistically and they are embedded in the roles I have identified in this paper. I value:

- children, as our future, as a worthy investment of our time, who must come first.
- active learning experiences that build ideas, one on the other, and are lasting.
- the open school that recognizes that people are connected to it.
- a positive, collaborative climate which encourages expression and promotes good citizenship.
- effective managers that include others in decisions.
- a school that visibly expresses shared beliefs.
- continuous improvement.
- schools that are in the business of people and realize that talk is essential.
- consistent and clear communication.

In discussions, judgments, decisions, and actions, I will strive to be loyal to these. I will use them to lead, represent, and manage. I will evaluate my work with these as a guide. I will commit to walk my talk.

Professional Role for the Future

I predict that school leaders have a major charge for the future. Technology integration in the schools is a necessity. Schools reflect the changes in society and are responsible for providing the needs of that society. Technology is our students' future. Gilder (1993) states:

Information technology is an American technology, an American triumph. And schools, as the center of information propagation in this society, must learn how to use this technology. That will require change and adaption; it will require restructuring for cost-effectiveness. (p. 35)

It requires new skills, funds, and evaluation of present programs. Incorporating technology in learning will enhance the techniques and methods now used for mastery learning. Computers are the tools that we use to learn. They will undoubtedly offer greater discoveries and exploration. It is our responsibility to understand the impact technology has and will have on our lives, because, in the role of leader, the future is our business.

Leaders envision; it is their job to fix an eye on the future. Effective principals are proactive. A leader builds a shared vision using his/her

own vision as a guide. A leader communicates this expectation first by modeling and then encouraging behaviors and ideas that are congruent to the vision. With the demands of time, a principal must decide on priorities, and vision must consistently influence those decisions. With the vast possibilities available to an organization, a principal must sometimes choose rather than react. This gives leadership to today's schools in the face of reform. Expressed in my core values and the work I do will be: loyalty, dignity, integrity, honesty, respect, hard work, compassion, and truth.

Every thriving human being seeks meaning for their life. To satisfy this desire is to learn. I believe this is a true gift given to all humans. Learning is the essence in my life. Being in education gives endless opportunity to make my life one of meaningful learning, making new discoveries through "having new eyes" (Proust, 1954, p.61). My deepest value lies here. Being a principal, I would like to share this belief with others. Some may join me in this belief, and the joy of sharing in those discoveries would allow me to leave this lifetime knowing I have spent myself as I saw fit to do.

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