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

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

### Abstract

Minnie Pearl, a traditional performer with the Grand Old Opry, summed up the purpose of this paper many years ago with part of her act. In it, she was cavorting with the audience about the special attributes her boss had in regards to leadership. It was quite amusing in that many of the things she joked about hit home in so many ways. The one thought she finished [sic] with, however, seemed to sum up the entire routine and perhaps those problems associated with decision making and leadership itself, "His aim was high, but he had no ammunition."

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING MIDDLE  
SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration  
and Counseling

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Cody J. Vincent

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SCHOOL: A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper  
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Minnie Pearl, a traditional performer with the Grand Old Opry, summed up the purpose of this paper many years ago with part of her act. In it, she was cavorting with the audience about the special attributes her boss had in regards to leadership. It was quite amusing in that many of the things she joked about hit home in so many ways. The one thought she finished with, however, seemed to sum up the entire routine and perhaps those problems associated with decision making and leadership itself, "His aim was high, but he had no ammunition."

As a middle school English teacher, I would use the above phrase as a dual edged sword in slaying the dragon of classroom teaching. I would develop it initially for use in regards to building opinion paragraphs and speeches. However, I would also use it as a tool to demonstrate the decision making skills required for becoming a leader within the parameters of life itself. With the Bible parable of the man who built his home on the rock versus the man who built his home on the sand (Matthew 7:26,27) in mind, I would explain the concept of foundation building thusly: To withstand any argument, you need at least three reasons for any belief that you have. A single one won't suffice, as you will find your foundation under constant attack. I believe

this to be true for any of us as we are constantly under the gun of whim to change.

Minnie Pearl's comment is indicative of many new principals as well. They begin administrative careers with lots of aim but carry very little ammunition to go with it. This aim includes a vision of where they long to be without thought to the how or the why to get there (Gregory, 1993). Too many focus on the easy task of aiming without those needed foundations of administrative or educational practice. They allow themselves to be tossed about in the storm of change without an anchor. Somehow, they miss the mark for which they strive without the slightest clue as to why, even in retrospect. This inability to either derive a clear image of practice or to reflect upon what that practice is centrally about is immoral (Green, 1987).

Setting the aim or vision and finding the ammunition to hit the target is the key. Successful, quality practice must be based upon sound principles of vision, action, and planning. Without this foundation there are lots of questions, both from the practitioner and those around him, when challenging times arise. There are even more remonstrations from the periphery of people surrounding the fray itself. It is within this chaos that many administrators must realign to survive: pull up reflective action, develop an ammunition base,

and salvage the wreck. This takes valuable time, it takes a toll in regards to trust (Nanus, 1989), and requires much work which should have already been done. Others, never understanding the need to develop the base, sink even deeper into the muck. They sometimes never regain that solid ground of moral practice. On the other hand, a few, having fixated upon the focus of developing a quality base to go from, weather the storm without wavering to the winds of whim. Indeed, these are the ones who have built their knowledge base of practice upon the solid ground of principles. That solid ground is the foundation or the ammunition needed to stave off the chaos that surrounds the profession; the basis from which we make sound decisions.

The purpose, then, of this paper is to forestall that beast of uncertainty by developing a foundation or purpose for my beliefs. It is to be the summation of my learning, knowledge, and reflection. In essence, a sounding board for my focus, the reasons for that focus, and the foundation from which it emanates. It is my plan of action and the definition of who it is I want to be in regards to the leadership process. It is an important work in that it spells out beforehand how I will meet the challenges I need to face and help to delineate the basis for action. It is a development of ammunition to help me to achieve the focus of my goals

and build my practice on the solid ground of administrative principle.

Green (1987) presented to me the real basis for leadership foundation. He stated that:

No leader can lead without a vision of how things might be in the light of how things are and have been...Leaders without vision, without rootedness, and without imagination are dangerous or at best inept. (p. 114-115)

Both of these sentences can be summed up succinctly for me as: a leader knows where he's been, where he wants to go, and how he's going to get there. It seems that by building a foundation upon that vantage point, my true point to the profession will be developed. One of the key ways to accomplish that task is to first focus upon the basic aspect of moral leadership: rootedness.

#### Rootedness

Rootedness is our foundation base and remembrance of where we've been in regards to our profession. It is from such roots that our precepts which help us to set our goals and focus are considered and developed. It is the basis for our ammunition building to reach our aims or getting to the focus. This part of the leader is the most important aspect in that the very essence of his personal training is the key. This rootedness is one aspect as to what is exemplified by quality practice, a



cornerstone to the process of understanding  
(Sergiovanni, Burglingame, Coombs & Thurston, 1992).

My rootedness is an important part of my preparation for administration. Years of experience in learning, teaching, and life itself have given me a base from which to begin this preparation. This rootedness consists of all the aspects in regards to circumstances, people, and events which have shaped my outlook and vision. These aspects have been honed, re-examined, reshaped, and evaluated many times. There have been several factors which have helped me to gain insight into this process. The most important is the preparation within the educational institution itself.

The University of Northern Iowa has been, in a large part, the change-agent in regards to my personal outlook in regards to an ability to lead. That is not to say that stints at other institutions have not played a part, nor is it to say that being thrust into the leadership role in other aspects of life hasn't impressed upon me the skills required. What is important, however, is that this particular institution has helped me to gain insight into the process of leadership and pull all the fine threads together to form a tapestry of effectiveness which may have been somewhat hazy before. This has come in the form of

classwork and dialogue, and most importantly, the reflection upon both in regards to past practice.

I am in firm belief that one way that a leader can develop the basis for decision making is through the process of reflection combined with personal vision (Sergiovanni, 1991). Theory and research are vital parts of the learning process, but school administrators are more interested and in need of result based experience. This type of learning has been a major component of my foundation during my administrative training experience at the University of Northern Iowa. It is through this experience that I have found, as has Hart, Sorenson, and Naylor (1990):

Reflection as it is used here is much more than quiet thinking over past events. It aims toward a goal such as a set of solutions to dilemmas of problems of the redefining and understanding of the problem. In order to frame solutions to problems, a knowledge base becomes critical to the process. By combining the knowledge with the potential solutions new ideas emerge and lead to unexpected but productive conclusions. (p. 3)

Bennis (1989) adds to this and probably best exemplifies what the practice of reflectivity is about when he stated, "Reflecting on experience is a means of having a Socratic dialogue with yourself, asking the right

questions at the right time, in order to discover the truth of yourself and your life" (p. 61). It is within this realm that the real expression of reflection begins to take root. This becomes your foundation as the discovery of truth within your life is a cornerstone to effectiveness.

The reflective process calls for personal and professional transformation (Wellington, 1991). It is within this transformation process that we can create an active spiral of empowerment. This empowerment comes in both the form for ourselves as in, "...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), and in empowerment of those around us.

Smyth (1989) has set aside four aspects of the reflective process that have been introduced in my training process. They have served me as a guideline to develop my reflectivity upon course work and dialogue. In each phase, there are questions which cause one to develop that internal Socratic dialogue. The first question is to ask, "What do I do?" in which a simple observation is considered of the situation. The second is to ask, "What does this mean?" whereby my coursework containing theory and principal is pulled together in the extrapolation of the problem. Next, I ask "How did I come to be this way?" It is at this context that I have come to develop and join past experience with

current thought into the aspects of the problem. Last, I ask "How might I do things differently?" This has been the most important aspect of the reflective process as it generates a joining of the other parts in development of a plan of action.

Use of these questions is not arbitrary, but when used in sequence they have provided me with an opportunity to focus upon both past and present situations to make empowering sense out of them. It also has allowed me to take new thoughts and ideas, and put them into workable notions of application for the future. With the development of this ability to improve my vision, it can help me to foster the elements of the teachers' personal visions in the form of school improvement (Barth, 1990) and growth.

This reflectivity, combined with a valuable training process, is and has been, a powerful tool in the development of my rootedness this past year. With this level, however, comes the need to energize the rootedness and formulate the next level of moral practice: vision.

#### Vision

Knowing where you have been, or having rootedness, is the birthing point for the next level of leadership growth. As our rootedness develops through reflectivity and experience, we filter it and begin to

build paradigms of values and beliefs in regards to a perceived standard of quality practice for use at the next level, that of knowing where we are going. There, we take those paradigms and form them into definitive values and beliefs on which to base our focus. It is here, at this new level of leadership growth, that filtered values and beliefs are translated into a vision of what a school could or should be. Our belief system is then defined to reflect that dream (Covey, 1989). We become, in essence, our value driven vision.

This process of belief shaping is similiar to the way in which my vision paradigm has been honed in such a way. All incoming information, in regards to education, is and has been sorted to establish and update this personal vision paradigm. This information is in turn categorized to make up values which guide me as to what I feel should be a part of quality educational practice. My foundation base, or my rootedness, has served as the filtering device, and the culmination of such filtering is the development of my values. These values are defined by one core value and five ideal behaviors related to that value to make up my focus.

#### A Core Value

In the last Presidential election, one candidate's campaign manager kept a placard on his desk to remind everyone of the real issue of the campaign. It simply

said, "It's the economy, stupid!" Like the candidate, my core value, "It's people, stupid!" points me to the real issue of the profession, and all incoming information is guided by it. It is against this core value that all information that runs through my paradigm system is measured and evaluated. From that key measurement, specific ideals have been developed and are the basis of my actions to reach my aim.

My areas of vision as an administrator include: curriculum, instruction, the evaluation process of both students and teachers, and discipline. These bullets are the ammunition for my shot at the target. They are important for me because I see them not only as values translated into vision, but also because I see them as important aspects of making school a better place to be for teachers, parents, and students.

#### School Curriculum

The curriculum as a whole is what we do to kids to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives based upon time honored assumptions. These assumptions have been handed down from administration to administration and from school to school (Hass, 1980). Time, more than money, usually seems to dictate the school priorities in regards to curriculum. If that's not the case, then it is reduced to the assumption of terminal continuity being the cause. Like a beast, the

school curriculum is pretty docile as long as someone doesn't bother it. The nature of this beast, in my estimation, is that when left alone it does the worst damage. Curriculum shouldn't be left dormant, unchanging, and unresponsive (Squires, Huitt & Segars, 1983).

Curriculum shouldn't be time representative as generally is the case. Life itself isn't like that. We don't do 40 minutes of math in the morning and 35 minutes of social studies in the afternoon. Life isn't cut into neat 43 minute parcels. In real life, we blend all aspects of our learning together to work out problems, deal with situations, and plan for living. Only in school is all aspects of this learning based upon short segments which in most cases are not connected or made relevant to anything. An example of this occurs when you ask your students to find the percentage of their grade in social studies. Even if they are currently engaged in finding percentages in math, blank stares and confusion reigns supreme. Teaching concepts in isolation is inefficient, irrelevant, and without authenticity.

I believe that curriculum integration is a needed part of the learning process both at the elementary and middle school level. Integration (Jacobs, 1989) or the use of an interdisciplinary approach does not stress

delineations of core courses, but instead stresses linkages of them. Such linkage makes the curriculum more efficient, relevant in regards to real life needs, and authentic from the standpoint of use.

Curricular linkage is needed now more than ever because of the huge amount of information which is being espoused as required learning without any more increases of school time. Raebeck (1992) supported such linkage, stating:

There are ever expanding requirements being placed upon the curriculum to provide for all aspects of society. Principals must stand at the door and keep curriculum crammers out: civic groups, national organizations, local councils, single-interest parents, the state department's mandate of the month, supervisors with some hot new thing they picked up at a conference somewhere, travelling salesmen selling textbooks, agents trying to book juggling acts, and on and on. (p. 80)

As there is this burgeoning amount of information, there is also a great amount of fragmentation in the effort to teach all aspects of it. In that chaos, the relevancy is lost as teachers strive to teach concepts in isolation of each other.

Curriculum integration is an important aspect of my value base. I see it as reducing stress in both



teachers and students as it sifts information into usable, relevant pieces of information. It causes learning to become useful outside the realm of the classroom, authentically linking life to learning processes to expand and increase the relevancy of school itself (Atwell, 1987). In light of this relevancy, however, the curriculum must also be delivered with an effective and relevant instructional methodology.

### Instruction

The instructional portion of administration is multi-faceted from the standpoint that it entails not only how schools are organized, but also the actual method or philosophy of how kids are taught. Instruction, like the curriculum it supports, should be fluid and able to change to meet the needs of kids. It shouldn't be stagnant, but instead offer flexibility in regards to student and staff need (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).

As one of my values, I feel that teachers should be held accountable for their actions in the school. Research develops that idea in that teachers are the most direct link to students, and their behavior is the key to improved student achievement (Squires et al., 1984). In order to do this, I feel that there are three areas that I can impact as an administrator: planning, managing, and methodology of instruction.

Planning. Planning for instruction includes all aspects that relate to the teaching of an objective. Teachers must know where they are going before they start kids on the journey. They must develop a goal, utilize the resources to get to that goal, and visualize it. In order to do this, especially when curriculum is integrated, there must be a common planning time with other teachers (Arhar, 1992), and there must be good lesson organization. In planning, several items must be considered: prior learning, skills to be taught, and the scope and sequence. In order to insure that teachers are invested in what they plan, they must be given the opportunity to determine what is important. If they are truly to be held accountable for it, then it is imperative that they are held responsible for what they prioritize.

Managing. Management of classrooms is considered to be the most important aspect of teaching and usually is considered to lead to the greatest amount of problems for both teacher and student in regards to achievement (McDaniel, 1981; Porter & Brophy, 1988). I don't agree with that universal assumption. Research shows that, indeed, classroom management is an integral part of an effective school (Kounin, 1977), but the effective teacher is one who plans in advance for problems. Madeline Hunter says it best when she says teachers who

know before problems arise have a "with-it-ness" that others don't. It's this with-it-ness that separates good teachers from quality teachers. A with-it teacher is one who knows the level of tasks and can predict what will confuse or distract. They will present clear rules, expectations, and assignments in a concise and detailed manner. They will establish classroom routines and establish an accountability for behavior and academic work. They will consistently monitor all aspects of the classroom, and they will pace and change activities often. In essence, quality teachers will, by using effective management techniques, build group cohesiveness and consensus, establish a reason for being in school, and develop positive relationships by setting standards (Duckett, Parke, Clark, McCarthy, Lotto, Gregory, Herling & Burlson, 1980).

Methodology. My last portion of instruction which I believe I can impact as an administrator is the behavior of instruction itself. I feel that a quality teacher is one who utilizes not one, but several, methods of instruction. Like arrows, "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:5). There are many powerful models of teaching designed to bring about particular kinds of learning and to help students become more effective learners (Joyce & Weil, 1986). Cooperative learning, inductive reasoning,

concept attainment, inquiry, and synectics are just examples of a few. Teachers must get away from one stand-and-deliver method of instruction and learn to develop new methods to reach a broad base of students who have a broad range of learning styles. "To provide an optimal growth in complexity, the student needs to be exposed to an environment which is matched to the characteristics of his world" (Joyce, 1980, p. 425).

Instruction as my value of concern for kids may be the most important aspect of my focus. Much work needs to be done, especially that of developing strategies to see that kids find success. It is time for teachers to get to the kids' level of instruction rather than expecting the kids to rise to their level. "Children," according to Vincent (1991), "aren't vases being filled but fires being lit" (p. 329). Teachers must accept the responsibility of teaching and work to light the fires of success rather than providing the dead-end of failure. They must believe and invest themselves in the notion that all kids can learn and their responsibility to that end is uncompromising. It is my task to develop that goal.

As teachers are the most important aspect of a child's success patterns, the responsibility of that position is immense. This immensity requires professional procedures to both develop and insure

quality practices of teaching. To that end, evaluative procedures must also be addressed.

### Teacher Evaluation

The evaluation process of teachers needs a change of philosophy from that of a "gotcha" to that of collaboration and improvement. The announcement that, "I'm here to help you." from the principal needs to take on a real sense of support. As it is now, that help is often thought of as if the IRS had said it. That type of anxiety is not conducive to fixing problems, diagnosing trouble, or lending support. In order to begin, this process must start with using evaluations as tools of improvement and as a basis for sharing values of teaching (Rosenholtz, 1989). This can be achieved by using collaborative methods, peer appraisal, and observation.

Collaboration. Collaboration among teachers is an effective way to improve teaching. Bacharach (1984) noted that effective schools have staff development which is not confined to formal training sessions, but instead is acted upon on a day by day exchange of information between and among the teachers themselves. Longitudinal research done by Rutter (1979) supported collaborative methods, finding the most effective schools were those characterized by sharing, collegial

planning, and cooperative work by teachers. Smith and Scott (1990) added:

Teachers felt they continued to learn about their profession throughout their careers where the following conditions existed: schools set clearly defined goals for teaching improvement, principals used teacher evaluations as tools to help teachers improve, principals and faculties shared values about teaching, and collaboration between principals and faculties and among faculty members was the norm. Conversely, where these conditions did not prevail, teachers tended to believe that they had learned all they need to know about teaching within the first few years after entering the profession. (p. 17)

The evaluation process now is made up of assumptions which must be re-evaluated if we are to get away from giving teachers the feeling we are out to get them. Some assume that all teachers are broken and need fixing, and some assume that because a few teachers are incompetent that all teachers must utilize the same remediation and evaluation procedure. All teachers are evaluated on the same instrument regardless of ability or need, and we assume that the nebulous checks on it will give them deep insight into their professional ability to teach. With this type of belief system in

place, the concept of trust and collegiality is difficult to improve. I feel that the use of peer coaching and peer evaluation are much better ways to instill trust and self improvement.

Peer appraisal. Teachers are professionals; why not utilize that professionalism and allow them to take responsibility for their improvement? As research has shown, only when there is ready access to other professionals can the aspect of collaboration--and hence an effective school--be promulgated. Teachers who work as a group not only get useful feedback, but they begin to work together, share their expertise, and break down isolation patterns which hinder the effectiveness of teaching (Brophy 1979).

As a principal, I must work to remove the barriers to professional growth (Duke, 1993) and allow my teachers to develop the ability to make mistakes without fear. It is only through this knowledge of error and knowing that there are no negative actions that new challenges will be tackled.

One method which I feel that will help to expedite both collaboration and trust is a higher profile of the administrator within the confines of the classroom. This not only develops an awareness of the behaviors within the school, but it increases the collegial feelings of support among the staff as well.

Observation is key aspect of these principles in that regard.

Observation. My last belief is that of intermittent observation. I have reflectively observed over the years that I found a great deal of inner satisfaction that my principal made unannounced calls into my room with the sole purpose just to watch. He always found time to come in for just a few minutes a couple of times a week. I was proud of my ability, and I felt that he believed that as well as I was truly able to demonstrate my competency. He always knew what was going on in the classrooms of the school. He knew what was going on in my class. He understood my style, and took great pains to leave notes stressing positives and some small things that I might attend to. I look at this as a very positive approach to evaluation, building trust and working to make my school more effective.

The area of teacher evaluation needs to be fair and informed. It needs to be based upon measurable outcomes and needs satisfying in regards to staff. Student evaluation needs to be overhauled and modeled similarly. It is time for a concerted look at the procedures which schools use to judge student's performance.



### Student Evaluation

The current trend of student evaluation has to be changed. One of my key beliefs in regards to student measurement stresses that all children can learn. This is also true in the fact that all should be able to find success. This success emanates directly from those who are in charge of doling it out--the teachers.

Experience has shown that there is a direct relationship between classrooms where students can achieve versus classrooms where students learn failure. The teacher who sees to it that kids have success finds ways to insure it (Raebeck, 1993). They are well liked by parents, kids, and their peers. They are also considered to be excellent teachers. On the other hand, those who have the highest failure rates usually are not held in high regard by anyone. They are also usually considered to have marginal teaching ability.

Student evaluation is based upon a letter grade value which can be, and often is, arbitrary in nature and unreliable (Vars, 1992). Why don't we change that as well? Why can't it be harder to get an F than it is to get an A? Why don't we get rid of the D and F and replace it with a U which designates both as unacceptable? Do we need to label children as failures with a letter grade? If it is truly a school with a value related to kids, the answer should be no.

More evaluations must utilize a system of grading that stresses authentic assessment or portfolios to encourage students who lack ability but give effort. Personal comments rather than computer generated comments must be stressed as well. Research demonstrates that hand generated comments are significantly related to schools with a lower retention rate (Epstein & MacIver 1990).

Teacher and student accountability is increased with report cards that are fully descriptive, paint a broad picture of the true abilities of the student, and are generated with hand written comments or narrative. Somehow with the computer, we have managed to take the person out of the evaluative process.

As the evaluative process contributes to an effective school, discipline at times can overshadow even the best components of an effective school.

### Discipline

If one was to ask a layman what problem seems to be the most pervasive problem in school today, the resounding answer is discipline. Glasser (1985) defines discipline as a failure to work hard and a failure to follow rules. He attributes this failure to the inability of schools to satisfy the needs of students in regards to learning. I agree with this in that rather than kids' needs being met, they are too often coerced

into learning by using techniques of punishment and reward. This type of stimulus-response learning works well to train animals, but people respond much differently. After awhile, unlike non-reasoning animals, punishment and reward has no effect as the payoff for the behavior is seen as useless.

It is time that kids experience a school program that convinces them that working hard and following rules will give them what they want and need. This type of program motivates by appealing to their internal drive through teaching in ways which meet pschycological needs. It is our job as administrators and teachers to find ways to satisfy students' internal needs, as the entire school discipline system is driven by them. Students actively engaged in tasks which are relevant, authentic, and varied are having needs met. Discipline begins with the philosophy of the school itself in regards to meeting the needs of kids.

Under the umbrella of a total school program of meeting needs, there are several other aspects which become a part of such a philosophy. One of those is that we motivate by investing in the morale within the building. This is need fulfilling, as kids need recognition. Recognition can come in the form of award assemblies throughout the year, letters of commendation, and other positive experiences. In other words, make

school an exciting place to be in regards to self-fulfillment and need satisfaction.

Schools really only need a couple of rules. Too many rules in a school sometimes over-complicates the simplest of life's requirements. Two rules can take the place of dozens: Respect people and respect property. This covers a plethora of ills and allows flexibility, a needed commodity when dealing with people. This is important as there are many mitigating circumstances that warrant many different decisions. Remember, kids are not like other animals. They all have their own problems which drive them to do or say things differently at various times. We must be flexible in our response to these times.

Listening to kids is as important as listening to adults. We must learn to listen and react to the problem, not the child. It must be remembered that we are there to change behavior, not to simply dole out stimulus-respose punishment in the hopes that this will take care of the problem itself.

As a principal, I have an obligation to make the school as user-friendly as possible for both teachers and students. If I expect good teachers to have the with-it-ness required to take care of problems before they erupt in their classrooms, I must also be expected to have it as well within the entire school. We must

work together to defuse discipline problems throughout the school before they begin.

I see discipline as a key ingredient to an orderly, safe, and conducive environment for learning. As a principal, I will be the key player in ensuring this environment is part of our school. It is important to me that staff consensus in this regard is developed as espoused by Squires et al., (1984):

Principals of effective schools have a focus in mind when running their schools. They ensure that school goals are set, guide the development of consensus around those goals, and systematically check to see that the school is operating accordingly. In schools where students and faculty perceive a consensus on discipline and academics, school outcomes are generally high. (p. 7)

Rootedness and the aspects of a value based vision must join to form the final aspect of moral administrative development. That aspect is based upon the ability to focus upon what a school can be.

#### Imagination

Imagination is the culmination of having both rootedness and vision. This aspect is the most important, as "No leader can lead without a vision of how things might be in the light of how things are and have been" (Green, p. 114). It is within this context

that both my rootedness and vision are energized to form the ammunition or my plan of action to hit the target of effectiveness. This energization, however, is dependent upon leadership.

### Leadership

The concept of leadership has taken on two definitive aspects for me over the span of time. The first is related to that of reflective practice. It is here that I have observed the mantle of leadership and developed personal paradigms concerning its characteristics. The second aspect is leadership in regards to the power it has to bring my dreams or personal focus to life. In both cases, its misuse and the eventual failure that can come from it can be summed up by Pogo, a traditional comic strip character, in this way: "We have met the enemy, and they is us." In order to insure that I don't become my own enemy, my ability to lead must be based on sound principles. Those principles are the stones of the foundation upon which my personal focus is brought to life.

I believe that teachers must be "zapped" (Byham, 1991) with empowerment. This is necessary, as without it dreams and focus points can't be energized. This zapping comes from the development of three areas of leadership principles, each with behaviors in and of themselves. These behaviors are the small fragments

which lend support to the larger leadership principles. The first principle of empowering leadership is that of maintaining the self esteem of others.

Maintain or enhance self-esteem. This principle is based upon making people feel worthwhile, part of a solution, and not detracting from their self image. One of the ways to do this, according to Covey (1989), is that we are to build the emotional bank accounts of people by making deposits. These deposits are in the forms of trust, integrity, commitment, and sincerity. By building this account, we can withdraw when the need arises without bankrupting the individual of his or her self-worth.

Building self-worth in our teachers is an important part of successful leadership. Skinner (1971) specified that, "...when people are deprived of credit or admiration or the chance to be commended or admired, they respond in appropriate ways. They escape from those who deprive them or attack in order to weaken their effectiveness" (p. 54). As an effective administrator, I have the responsibility to deposit and build self-esteem as this is a key factor of empowerment.

A second area of leadership concern is that of being able to listen and respond to others with empathy.

Listen and respond with empathy. The ability to share is the main ingredient of this concern. Senge (1990) stated, "... whereby a shared vision becomes a commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities. A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision" (p. 206). This shared vision comes about not as a result of active listening alone, but as a result of empathetic discourse. This discourse is imbedded in the idea of synergy--the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Covey, 1989). Cooperation in this regard is a creative experience in its own right.

Synergy in relation to empathetic discourse includes both the terms discussion and dialogue. There is a difference between the terms when measured against the ability to empathetically listen and respond. In that sense, both have diverse and divergent meanings.

Discussion is a word game which is usually considered a conversation of the deaf. All parties involved are actively formulating words to throw back at the speaking party without listening to what words are coming to them at the moment. In essence, they are planning the next volley of attack in the throes of the battle. No one is listening.



Dialogue, on the other hand, is not a win/lose conversation, but is considered to be a win/win one instead. As Covey (1989) pointed out, where emotional accounts have been built in the past, then withdrawals from those accounts can be made without a loss of self-esteem. Compromise and a true exploration of issues can be made as a high trust relationship of interdependence has been previously made. It is here that a deep shift in personal paradigm must take place--you must first strive to listen without bias in order to understand the other person's paradigm. High trust and openness is a requirement of true dialogue. Senge (1990) stated, "the purpose of dialogue is to reveal the incoherence of our thought" (p. 241). From this incoherence of individual thought comes a coherence by way of collective thought. This is how focus becomes a reality.

Another aspect of zapping teachers into empowerment and bringing a shared focus to life is that of asking for help to do just that.

Ask for help in solving the problem. If movement from a discussion to a dialogue is a natural progression of leadership, then movement from individual ownership to a collective focus is part of that progression as well. According to Rule 2 of monkey management (Blanchard, Oncken, & Burrows, 1989), "the dialogue between boss and staff member must not end until

ownership of each monkey is assigned to a person" (p. 67). In this case, this rule would be paraphrased to mean group ownership rather than individual responsibility. Ownership requires accountability and people take better care of things they own. The key is to develop others to do the work (Maxwell, 1993) and combine it with a collective ownership developed only through group dialogue.

This does not mean, however, that as a leader I abandon my staff. What it does mean, though, is that I share responsibility for the school as well. These aspects include: making decisions that they can't, setting directions or goals for the school as a whole, ensuring that people are on the right track, assessing performance levels, knowing what is going on, and clearing the way for decisions. The essence of this responsibility is the constant establishment, monitoring and upgrading of imagination based upon the reaching of goals.

Modeling. I am the model of action; the walk is the talk. I view leadership in regards to modeling as another important aspect of focus development. There are many intangibles of modeling which make up great leadership that add to the concept of being an educational leader without being educational. Maxwell (1993) referred to this modeling idea when he stated,

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (p.8). I want kids and staff to see me as a life-long learner who never knows enough, constantly striving to improve and learn more. I want to be known as flexible, looking beyond the rules to the reality of a situation. I want to be known as a risk taker in regards to curriculum, teachers and kids; one who encourages mistakes. I want to be a friend to those who are suffering or who make mistakes. I want to be the principal that can be counted on for a break; the one whom a teacher can ask for coverage for their room to see their own child in a play, or the one whom a student would feel free to ask permission to leave early to babysit while Mom works. I want to dress well, expect quality, and demonstrate class. I want to live the vision that I hold, never compromising and constantly revising for improvement. I want to be known as compassionate, looking beyond the person into the problem itself; respectful of hurt, divorce, loneliness, and shattered dreams. These things are important to me as they say "I care" to those around me. This is an embodiment of my core value of placing people, students as well as adults, first.

#### The Challenge

The challenge of educational leadership is based upon what I, as a perspective leader within that

realm, see in regards to my personal vision. Within this paper I have outlined what the point of educational practice is; striving to reach to that point is what being a professional is all about. It is that professionalism--rootedness, vision, and imagination--upon which I have based my assumptions about the principalship and my leadership behavior. The challenge for me as I see it, is to translate the words that I have written into ammunition in order to achieve my target or goal. I see this as not dependent upon my introduction to the right school with the right staff and the right clientele. Instead, it is dependent upon my having the right personal attitude, commitment, and focus upon the point of the profession.

I am driven to this commitment and focus because I have a love or passion both for what I do and what I would like to accomplish. Bach (1984) defines this personally for me when he said:

Whatever enchants, also guides and protects.  
Passionately obsessed by anything we love:  
sailboats, airplanes, ideas; an avalanche of magic  
flattens the way ahead, levels rules, reasons,  
dissents, bears us with it over chasms, fears,  
doubt. Without the power of that love we're boats  
becalmed on seas of boredom, and those are  
deadly.... (pp. 26-27)

This paper embodies and reflects my passion for education, my desire to effect change in its behalf, and my imagination of how to bring it about.

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