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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

Trust is the single most important factor in the legitimacy of an educational leader. Administrators can have a multitude of great characteristics from personality to organizational skills, but without trust they are not part of the daily, weekly, monthly, even yearly operations of the building. If the leader is not going to be immersed in the educational process of the building or district through positive relationships, quality communication and trustworthy actions, then do not be there.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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by

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Educational administration had been a goal of mine for some time, so I began the process to meet that goal. Expectations were high and excitement built. What will it be like; what will I learn; will I fit into the administrators mold; can I do this? These were just some of the thousands of questions haunting me as I entered into the role of student again. I had the support I needed from those around me as I plunged into this new ambition; the rest was up to me.

Why do this? I strongly believed I had what it would take to become an administrator in today's changing world of education and leadership. I had an understanding of children and I liked helping others take charge of their education. The students had always commented on how they knew I would understand and fellow teachers had often come to me asking questions about how to teach this or that, so why not move into a position where I could do that on a regular basis? Thus, I started on the long road to become an educational leader.

Educational leadership has much more to it than I first believed. I had to take a good look at my values, beliefs, and philosophy of education as a whole to help determine what sort of an administrator I would be. I knew that as a teacher I was in the public eye, so the values instilled in me as a teenager by my parents and teachers growing up, and then refined as a young adult would again be put to the test; as an administrator I would be watched and judged even more.

What do I value? Family, integrity, and honesty were at the top of the list. If a person has something to believe in there is always hope in the future. Helping others, especially children, believe in something and stick to it, was on the top of my list of goals in the classroom and as an administrator. All children can learn, granted not all at the same rate or level, but they can learn. Knowledge is something that people are able to have and claim as their own regardless of race or economic status.

I value family above all else. There are children at school without a true family. Family does not necessarily mean father, mother and children, but rather a support "network" for each individual in life. If the children do not have that "network" elsewhere, then we at the school need to become that support. We can not expect children to learn when they are not safe. Without the "network" they are not safe. As an administrator I need to make my school as safe as possible and create the "network" needed by all of my students and faculty.

According to Good (1999) there are five basic needs in everyone's life:

belonging: loving, friendship, involvement

power: a sense of competing, achieving, and gaining importance

freedom: the choice to move around and make choices in life

fun: the ability for learning and playing, laughter

survival: the need for basics like food, clothing and shelter

Without any one of these items we as humans are not able to do anything else, with comprehension, until that need is met. It explains why there are times when children are just unable to deal with a classroom setting. That setting is not what these students need at that time. By knowing our students and being aware of their needs we can help them deal with their deficiencies and enable learning to take place.

No other program promotes this more than the Assets Program, Healthy Communities: Healthy Youth (1997). This program promotes the forty characteristics people need to have healthy, caring responsible lifestyles.

The external factors of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectation, and constructive use of time promote activities that allow people, especially children, to experience a role within the community that so many of us take for granted. Not only do they need external assets but also internal. These areas include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. If they are not able to receive these assets from within the home setting, then it is the community's responsibility to help provide them.

What can I do as an administrator to promote these assets within my district and building? School and community relations are vital to the success of both the school and the community that these ideas should be implemented even without the assets program behind them. Ideas to think about (a)inviting volunteers into the school environment to participate with the students in various

activities, (b) going out into the community to promote the theory and practical application of our programs, (c) recognizing people of all ages within the community for their contributions to students in and out of the regular school day and environment, (d) partnering with other schools and businesses to actively share, plan and complete activities that promote healthy lifestyles.

Personal Philosophy

As an educational leader, I need to be able to provide or help find people who can provide these assets to my students and faculty as needed. Mentoring programs, breakfast with the kids and community clean-up days along with the activities listed above can help to develop these assets within our students. Just because the program from the Search Institute is designed for children does not mean that it can not be used for adults too. There may be a need for one or more of the faculty to benefit from these activities too. Many of the ideas should be kept in my "bag of tricks" for at-risk teachers.

My philosophy of education is:

> To demonstrate that education is for everyone,
>
> To instill the drive in others to do the best they can in all they try,
>
> To support their dreams and help them reach their full potential,
>
> To share my love of learning and show that it never stops no matter how
>
> old we get or what happens to us along the way -- learning is contagious.

I believe all people are able to succeed at something. Whether the learning is physical or mental in nature is not the point. The point is that they have the drive and conviction to succeed. As an educator it is my job to give students the tools to make success happen. This can be in the form of reading and math skills or just to get through the day without swearing at someone. Goals are goals no matter how big or small they are.

The only way to really reach a goal is to be honest with yourself and those around you. Honesty shows respect and responsibility at any age. As an administrator I need to be honest with everyone that I work with: students, teachers, parents, and community members. Trust created with honesty takes time to build and yet it can be destroyed in seconds with one dishonest action. A school can not be run without honesty. I need to be honest with students in order for them to be honest with me. If this is not a two way street then we can not have true communication. Without communication there is no educational learning.

Not only does there need to be trust between adult and student, but between adult and adult. With trust, the world is at our fingertips because there is nothing to get in the way of our goals and relationships. However, without trust the barriers to our goals get higher and higher the longer we allow the mistrust to remain.

What have I learned to help me be the administrator I want to be? There is more to the job than first meets the eye. Interpersonal skills are vital. Dealing with parents and community members are almost as time consuming as dealing with students on any level. Knowing the laws, state regulations, board policies, and current curriculum trends before undertaking any issue takes time. Reading journals, attending conferences and area meetings also require attention with time away from the building and students. Learning the balancing act of how to prioritize, developing organizational skills and being able to delegate authority seem to be the key.

Richard Gorton (1991) in his text School-Based Leadership, stated that there are six different roles that the administrator is to have (a) manager (b) instructional leader (c) evaluator (d) disciplinarian (e) human relations facilitator (f) conflict mediator.

<div align="center">Manager</div>

Definition: (Gordon, 1991) to procure, organize, and coordinate the physical and human resources to reach goals set by the district and generate a positive attitude toward contribution(s) to the building or district.

What sort of administrator will I be? The Theories of X, Y and Z (McGregor, 1960) give direction as to the various styles of administration. I

believe in Theory Z more than any other; the mixture of Theory X: administrator

as lord above all, directing from on high with an iron hand and Theory Y: that it is

a group process and all should be involved as equals. Someone, the administrator,

is ultimately responsible for the action. However the action was agreed upon by

the team. There are times when one is more appropriate that the other but the

willingness to use both is best.

After taking the Life Style Inventory by Lafferty (1989), I know that I am

in the medium to low range in all areas, very neutral in most cases. This was sort

of a shock to me, but it was not to those who know me best. It does correspond

to the Theory Z idea, so maybe there is some truth to it. I would not like to be

the domineering, overbearing dictator that some administrators strive to be. I do

agree with letting others have ownership and responsibility for their contributions.

The Myers-Briggs (1998) survey came out with an INFJ type. This

means that I am seen to succeed by perseverance, originality, and the desire to do

whatever is needed or wanted. To put forth my best efforts in my work. To be

quiet yet forceful, conscientious, and concerned for others. I am likely to be

honored and followed for my clear visions as to how best serve the common good.

This too fits with the theory Z concept of educational leadership.

Instructional Leader and Evaluator

Definition: (Gordon, 1991) to evaluate and supervise the

teaching staff, with the intention of developing a productive,

satisfying working environment for teachers and effective

learning conditions and outcomes for the students.

As the instructional leader of the building it is vital that I understand effective teaching. Effective teachers are organized, prepared, and kid centered. They have a sense of work ethic and are knowledgeable in their content area along with a desire of professional and personal growth. They also have the knowledge and understanding of what an effective teacher is, question it, reflect on it and improve within the classroom and building.

An effective teacher sets expectations and goals that promote healthy, positive reasons to go to work each day. These goals and visions relate to student achievement through the instructional, program and evaluation factors as seen in the course readings for Facilitation and Professional Growth (2000). By being aware of the factors involved within each of these systems teachers are able to positively relate and affect their classrooms, students, and buildings.

Effective teachers seek growth and understanding of students by asking why a student is this way or that way and then looking for the best method to reach them instructionally and internally. If the chosen method is not effective, these teachers will strive to fix, adapt, modify and/or replace that method always with the student at the center of the possible solution.

Effective teachers never quit or master learning and teaching! By being aware of this, I will be able to evaluate and remediate, if needed, teachers within my building.

By developing an evaluation program within the requirements of the master contract and promote individual professional goals, not only will I be able to evaluate the faculty more fully but also be involved in our development and growth professionally as a building and district. This could be done through professional improvement plans, portfolios and evaluation rubrics all designed and agreed upon by the staff they are going to affect as discussed in class and through course readings for Facilitation and Professional Growth (2000).

Discipline

Definition: (Gordon, 1991) to punish someone for a wrong deed within the context of the school environment.

The hardest role for me is going to be the disciplinarian. According to Fitzpatrick (1994) by asking four very simple questions most things can be handled or at least investigated at all levels .

1. What do you want? What's the rule?

2. What are you doing? saying?

3. Is it working? Is it against the rules?

4. Can you figure out a better way?

Asking these questions of people in need of direction puts the

responsibility of the action on their shoulders. Then they, through discussion

with the administrator or teacher, can work out a plan for correcting the

misdirection in behavior. This is also a good plan for human relations and the

building of relationships and communication.

Communication

Human Relations and Conflict Management

Definition: (Gordon, 1991) Human relations meet the personal

needs of the employees within the building, develop cooperative

and harmonious relationships among them, and meet the

productivity goals of the district.

Definition: (Gordon, 1991) Conflict Management secures all

the facts in a situation, as will as the perceptions of each party

within the dispute, then help each party come to a compromise

to resolve the current situation positively.

Communication is vital in all aspects of the position. By keeping the

channels of communication open with all stakeholders an administrator builds

trust, relationships and value within the community. The system will not survive

if the communication is not there to support each and every aspect of each mini-

system within the whole. As an administrator it is my job and conviction to uphold the system to the best of my ability in the best interest of the students.

Donald Phillips in The Founding Fathers on Leadership (1997) stated in that Washington would make a decision by, gathering information and understanding the facts, consider various solutions and their consequences, make sure that the decision is consistent with the objectives, and effectively communicate his decision before implementation. Washington stated that his decisions were not complete without the advise and information presented by his council of war meetings. He did not take action without first listening to the ideas of his generals and peers. Then once the decision was made it was communicated to all in detail.

If you want someone to do something with the idea there has to be detailed communication of the decision or it will not go as directed. If the communication fails the idea fails. By involving others in the process there is ownership and trust in the decision that is made; ownership and involvement build into trust and respect which will in turn lead back to better communication and the cycle continues.

Jim Hamilton presented us with an informational packet during our administration class (1998) of things to do before school starts in the fall. Many of his ideas dealt with communication and relationship building. One of the major points was the building of relationships with the staff. Getting together

for introductions in small groups or individually before the students arrived to meet each other and discuss the vision or direction of the building and any possible concerns for the year. This is a positive step in the development of trust within the building.

The development of trust is a moral and ethical promise between individuals, according to Hoyle (1998). Formal promise keeping requires contracts and conditions, it is necessary to support any system of school governance and provides the basis for organizational trust within the district. Beyond contracts there are people who also need promises kept for support within the school system.

Trust is the signal most important factor in the legitimacy of an educational leader. Administrators can have a multitude of great characterics from personality to organizational skills, but without trust they are not part of the daily, weekly, monthly, even yearly operations of the building. If the leader is not going to be immersed in the educational process of the building or district through positive relationships, quality communication and trustworthy actions then, do not be there.

Conclusion

My personal professional vision for the future is to be a qualified, trustworthy, caring administrator. My responsibility is to the children of the school and their educational program, to the teachers and staff, and to the

community. I will not be the sole leader of this process. All who touch the lives

of the children are part of this picture. It is my job to guide, nurture, support, and

direct the culture, curriculum, and communication of the learning environment so

that all students are safe and able to achieve all that is possible. I will do this

knowing the laws of the state regarding education, curriculum theories, financial

regulations, and common administrative practices and theories.

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