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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

I believe that every child born into the world deserves, as their unalienable right, an equal opportunity to a quality education as promised by the United States Congress in 1981. This promise can only be accomplished by maintaining the belief that every child can and will learn if given the opportunity. I believe that within the mind of a child is a natural curiosity about this great world that can through proper nurturing continue throughout their lives.

The atmosphere in the school community should be one of caring and acceptance. Plants and animals cannot grow without proper care and nourishment and neither can children or adults. My passion for children and my desire to affect their lives on a larger scale has helped me create my vision of becoming an urban principal who can impact student learning for those children entrusted in my care.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,
and Postsecondary Education
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Education

By

Lucy M. Evans

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I believe that every child born into the world deserves, as their unalienable right, an equal opportunity to a quality education as promised by the United States Congress in 1981. This promise can only be accomplished by maintaining the belief that every child can and will learn if given the opportunity. I believe that within the mind of a child is a natural curiosity about this great world that can through proper nurturing continue throughout their lives. This great responsibility for nurturing creativity has been given to those in the school community. Education is to be provided by those who have a heart for children and have a daily realization of the dynamic role they have in the lives of our future leaders of the world. Because I have a passion for children, my calling to be in a position of an urban school teacher and now an urban principal was already predestined.

The first time I saw my older brother and sister go off to school, I remember crying because I wanted to go, too. I would ask my brother and sister question after question about school, and I was not satisfied until I had exhausted their patience. When I entered school, I felt like I was in a totally different world than I had ever known. It did not matter that 95% of the students were black and all of our teachers were white. That was not my concern. The only thing that was important to me was that I was in school.

I still have the same love for the smell of new crayons, the look of new pencils, and the desks sitting in expectation of the new students. The loose-leaf paper seems to be an invitation for me to write poetry; the chalk and chalkboard challenge me to solve mathematical equations. I love to hear the sound of the bell as it signals its power to

establish the beginning and the end of a new day. Every time I walk into my own classroom that I share with 25-26 other bodies, there is a sense of comfort and a sense of belonging that I felt nowhere else. As I sit in my chair and close my eyes, I can hear the sounds of children laughing and playing on the playground. I can envision students eager and excited as they discover that snakes used to have legs and that spiders are not insects. I can hear the bell ring and the sound of student excitement as the children get ready to go out for their favorite part of the day, recess. I open my eyes and realize that I still have many things to do before the first day of school arrives.

Reflecting on my past, I think about my family. My family was the greatest influence in my life. I was the third oldest child in a family of sixteen children, and five of my siblings would die as time passed. There is a myth that low-income families do not value education. Education was so important to my parents that they did not tell us, until much later in life, that my father had a sixth grade education and my mother only finished the ninth grade. To know them, one would think that they had advanced much beyond their academic achievement. They learned to take care of a family without the immediate benefit of welfare unless it was absolutely necessary.

My father never allowed us to use the word “can’t.” To hear us say the word “can’t” was the same as a curse word, and he dealt with it as such. I remember watching him as he transformed a block of wood or a bar of soap into an animal, tree, or whatever was on his mind. An old paper bag was another opportunity for him to construct a work of art that would amaze all that beheld its beauty. There were many times I wondered what would have happened if he would have been allowed to finish his education. You

see my parents were sharecroppers. Therefore, cotton being picked was more important than an education for Blacks. The overseer would say, "Too much learning ain't good for ém."

My mother suffered worse than my dad. It was important to her that we receive an education so she worked jobs that took its toll on her physically. My mother made sure my oldest sister had everything she needed to go to college and faithfully sent her money for all the years she was in school. She even took care of my sister's child so she could finish her education. My brother was placed in special education because he had a stuttering problem, even though academically he was fine. This placement hurt his chances of going to college, so he went to work in a factory. By the time I was fourteen, my parents separated. My sisters and brothers were devastated. We could not understand what happened. We felt it was because of us. We knew that they could not get better jobs, and we were growing up so fast. Whatever the reason, I continued to go to school, sometimes, without eating, without proper clothing, and without parental support.

Yet, in the midst of all the family turmoil and the racist attitude of some of my teachers, I wanted to be at school. I wanted to learn; it was my daily nourishment. In the summer, I would learn the name of every flower, every butterfly, every tree, and every rock. I felt my little brothers and sisters should learn them, too. To make life fun, I would provide them hands on activities. We would conduct experiments with water, mud, and grass. We mixed all the ingredients together, poured the mixture on a cookie sheet, and allowed it to bake in the sun until it was well done. I realized even my youngest brother understood the concepts if the directions were modified. We were not allowed to sit in

front of the television, so nature provided us with all the entertainment we needed. We watched ants going about their daily duties oblivious of the strangers who were amazed at their ability to carry heavy loads.

As I grew older and entered junior high, I found myself gravitating toward the students who were ostracized for one reason or another. I became one of those children who was rejected and was the blunt of many jokes and cruel words. I knew what it was to be in an atmosphere that started to kill my self-worth. I had learned to love and respect my teachers and I turned to them for help. To my hurt and dismay, my teachers refused to stop the onslaught of cruelty and agreed some of the things that the students were saying. These incidents were brought back to my memory as I read the book by Aronson, *Nobody Left to Hate* (2001). In this book, Aronson described the atmosphere that was prevalent in the school I attended. I began to fall into the trap that many young people fall into today, self-destruction. I had a child without the benefit of being married. In the 1960's you could not go to school if you were pregnant and remain part of the general school population. An alternative high school was not available for pregnant teens.

Nevertheless, I still had a vision that kept me going. In this vision, children of different races and physical abilities surrounded me. They were all learning, they were excited, and they were laughing at their own mistakes and not giving up, the children were finding other solutions to their problems. I looked around, and the building seemed to be alive with the hope and promises of a better day. I would wake thinking that this dream was just a reflection of my childhood days, yet within myself, I knew that it went deeper than reflection. My dreams became the beginning of my vision of the school of tomorrow.

I returned to Iowa after many years in Chicago. I enrolled in Hawkeye Institute of Technology to obtain my General Equivalency Diploma (GED). I finished the required course of study, and there I met an instructor that encouraged me to enroll at University of Northern Iowa (UNI). My GED scores were high enough to get me into the college of my choice. Nevertheless, I remained at Hawkeye and entered the General Office program. I graduated and received a certificate. I applied for many office jobs and was employed by Rath Packing Company. I learned all I could about the company and within four years I became the first African American female inspector.

My life began to change as I started to attend a church that had approximately seven members, all of them were older than me. Yet, I knew that was where I needed to be. They nurtured my four children and me. They helped me develop my perception of the true meaning of life by sharing the great truth with me and demonstrating the love they had received. When I began to love myself again, someone came into my life who loved my children and me, so we were married. Together we studied the teachings of Jesus and how he taught or disciplined others. I studied how Jesus taught Biblical principles to those who were seen as ignorant and unlearned. He used the audiences' background knowledge so they could relate to what he was teaching. He modeled many concepts by using concrete examples. He used small group instruction when he had the twelve disciples around him. He used large group instruction when there were multitudes. He also taught one on one in order to teach the necessary comprehension skills to understand his parables. He never upbraided those that did not understand. He used higher order thinking strategies by allowing those who questioned him to answer their own questions

through probing, prompting, and coaching. He did read-aloud, shared readings, predictions, and continually referred back to what had already been written. He gave the objective for the lesson, the main idea, the plot, the setting, and the characters involved. The more I studied the way he taught, the more I understood how people learn. I found someone else in my life that would not accept the “can’t” word. Over and over again I reminded myself that, “I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me” (King James Bible, Phillipians 4:13). This experience changed my sense of self-worth and positively affected my self-efficacy. Jesus helped me to realize that all things are possible to him that believes. I found that I believed that anything was truly possible and I constantly shared this message with others. Just as I needed help in believing that I could learn, children also need someone to believe in their ability to learn. This journey was the beginning of my understanding of what Instructional Leadership really is.

During this time of growth in my life, Rath Packing Company closed their doors forever. I was hired by UNI as a file clerk. I started attending classes at UNI. But because of family difficulties, I dropped out after one semester. I was hired at McKinstry Elementary School as an associate, so I left UNI after two years to work at a school I had attended in my ninth grade year. I met someone in the then, Chapter I program. Dorothy Wynters would come and watch me with the students and encourage me daily to go back to college.

During my years at McKinstry Elementary School, I watched students who had the ability to learn, but were not successful. I realized the students had needs, and they were more than academics could cure. I watched how the stereotypes of children created

through ignorance, not intentions, about children of color proved to be detrimental to the students. I felt powerless to do anything about it. There were times I would take the teacher to the side and talk with her. I tried to enlighten her on some strategies that I felt would help alleviate some of their learning difficulties. I quickly found out who the professional was. Since I had nothing to back up what I was saying, my experiences in life counted for nothing.

I took a two-year leave of absence from McKinstry with the promise to myself and to anyone that would listen that if I ever returned to the school, it would be as a classroom teacher. I volunteered for many years in a Christian Day School. It would be ten years later before I would return to McKinstry Elementary School as a classroom teacher.

I returned home as a domestic engineer and home-schooled my children for many years. I knew that I loved them deeply but I knew there was something more I was being called to do. I would talk to other children all the time, and I was surprised that many of them could not read or were having difficulties comprehending what they were reading. I knew two high school students that could not read at the 4th grade level. Even today when I go in a particular high school, I see the picture of one of these students and all of her track trophies in the display case. Yet, it fills me with sadness to know that she cannot receive her driver's license because she cannot read the manual. I became angry and bitter and criticized the public school system for failing the very students that needed them including my own children. Then a pastor came to me and said, "Don't curse the darkness, light a candle."

I entered Wartburg College in a new program that was created to educate minority

teachers for the benefit of the large number of African Americans that attended the Waterloo Community Schools. I hesitated at first, but I knew it was time for me to “light a candle.” In the research paper, *Educating Minority Youth*, the authors state the importance of increasing the percentage of minority teachers. (Bates 1990; Lomotey 1989; Murphy and Hallinger 1989; Oakes 1985, 1986a).

There is currently a great deal of concern for students of color in today’s schools. Although the percentage of minority group students is increasing, the percentage of minority teachers is decreasing. Over the next decade the percentage of minority teachers is expected to drop from 12 to 5 percent while the minority student population will increase 33 percent. Some efforts to attract minority group members to the teaching profession are already underway, and more should be undertaken since limited research indicates that higher percentages of black and Hispanic teachers in schools are beneficial to black and Hispanic students. (Pine & Hillard 1990 as stated in Bates et al.).

Therefore, my mission to help children brings me to the acknowledgement of the qualifications that are necessary to ensure that students in the urban setting receive an appropriate education. I feel that I have been in preparation for the responsibility of school leadership throughout my life. Yet, in order for me to be effective in this profession, I must have the educational leadership foundation represented by the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. ISSL Standard 1 clarifies the Visionary Leadership needed to provide the school community with a sense of purpose in order to motivate the shareholders to accomplish goals necessary for student achievement. Instructional

Leadership represented by the second standard is necessary to focus the school's priority on curriculum and instruction issues to increase student learning. Organizational Leadership, ISSL 3, assures that the daily operations of the school are handled efficiently and effectively; the facilities are maintained; the school atmosphere is a caring culture; and the personnel management, discipline, budget, and all those day-to-day tasks are handled fairly and equitably. Being able to collaborate with teachers, students, community leaders, and all other stakeholders that are in the school community is very important for an effective school. An ethical leader realizes that diversity is not just a possibility; it is a reality. By understanding the policies, procedures, and legal aspects that affect the school community, the rights of all students will be protected and an appropriate education will be assured. Therefore, before anything can begin to change in the lives of teachers, children, or the community, there must be a leader of leaders with a vision.

Visionary Leadership

Hopkins (2000) implies that if you don't know where you are going, it makes no difference what path you take. Without a clear vision, you have no way to prioritize what is most essential. A clear vision allows you to focus energy on the most important things to do for each child's education. I have attended many meetings where I was not clear about the direction in which the meeting was heading. I did not know what the vision was about or why I was there. Therefore, the attempts to get people motivated to support whatever it was about was futile.

The effective administrator must be able to articulate a vision for the school in such a way that all that will be involved in the vision must share and own the vision. Tony

Wagner (2001) states a vision with clear goals that focus on increasing student achievement. The leader's responsibility is to provide direction and guidance for the implementation of that vision, to constantly model it in his/her own words and actions, and help the school community remain faithful to the vision in its daily practice.

What's in a vision? Thomas Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that a vision is characterized as an "educational platform" that incorporates the school's beliefs about the preferred aims, methods, and climate, thereby creating a "community of mind" that establishes behavior norms. In speaking with Ms. Hall, she explained the vision for the Waterloo Community Schools is determined by the district. Larry Lashway (2000) states that in schools that are deeply committed to a shared vision, principals remain the key players both before and after the school adopts a new direction. An effective administrator facilitates the vision for learning while empowering others to construct their own learning. The leader has to have a visual image within their heart of the vision and the resilience to make it a reality.

An educational leader shares disaggregated data with the school community and then shudders as he/she realizes that African American students are six months to a year behind the dominant culture consistently throughout all grade levels. To cover this discrepancy, we as a school community, tend to shift the blame to poverty, parents, or the child's limited intellectual abilities. We diagnose the students, label them, medicate them, and place them in ability groups, special needs classrooms or resource rooms. Yet, there seems to be no change in these students' academic learning. This bleak picture can add up to insurmountable odds for any one interested in becoming an urban administrator.

Nevertheless, for the visionary leader, these circumstances are opportunities to rise to the challenge. The educational leader can look beyond these circumstances and not let them discourage him/her. The realization that the blaming has to stop and the healing of anger about a system that has failed a population of children must begin.

When focusing on the urban schools, the type of curriculum and the quality of the instruction that is happening every day in the classroom is the most important parts that affect every student in the school community. Therefore, to be an effective administrator he/she must also be qualified in instructional leadership.

Instructional Leadership

An effective administrator realizes that he/she must be knowledgeable about the quality of instruction in the school community. The instructional needs of the students must be monitored and assessed continually. The administrator needs to work with staff and community to develop a viable curriculum that meets the needs of the student population. It is important that the curriculum reflects the values of the community in which the school resides.

For teacher education programs to adequately prepare future generations of teachers to meet this challenge, they must begin to place as much emphasis on cultural understanding and cultural relevance as they do on training in subject matter content, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The ability to encourage teachers to help them learn how to teach children using the best research-based strategies that is appropriate for the culture of that particular school is an important function of instructional leadership. Through data

collection, review, and monitoring of the implementations in the classroom, instruction can prove to be effective. (Jeffries, P.T. & Thomas, C. & Walker-Fitzhugh, P., 2000 p.28).

The ability to recognize and appreciate these changes will demand that the school leaders become culturally responsive. Alderman states in her book, *Motivation for Achievement*,

“Thirty percent of the school-age population is composed of students from a minority culture, with the proportion expected to increase in the future. The dilemma for minority students who are not members of the dominant culture is, “if I identify with and accept the academic goals of school, does this mean I lose my cultural identity?”” (1999, p. 178).

Therefore, the effective administrator in the urban school must be a strong instructional leader. Fullan (1991) in his research found that schools operated by principals who were perceived by their leaders to be strong instructional leaders exhibited significantly greater gain in scores in writing achievement and mathematics than did schools operated by weak instructional leaders (p. 156). Diversity in the school community is not only in race, but is also represented by culture, socio-economic status and differentiated styles of learning. Therefore, the administrator’s heart also must be with the diverse needs of children. The passion that the administrator feels for all children and their education must be the driving force in implementing whatever is necessary to create an effective learning environment.

Clearly, research-based teaching strategies should be applied to assure academic

achievement. The classroom teacher must uncover a student's particular learning style and adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate the student. Howard Gardner has given teachers and administrators a way to recognize the types of intelligence a student may possess. The different methods to assess these different intelligences based on Gardner's theory were developed by David Lazear. In his article, *The Multiple Intelligence Assessment Menu*, he shares what he calls the Multi-Perceptual Formal Testing (Lazear, 2000, p. 10). The intelligences and assessments are:

*Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence	Language Arts-Based Assessments
*Logical-Mathematical Intelligence	Cognitive Patterns Assessments
*Visual-Spatial Intelligence	Imaginal-Based Assessments
*Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence	Performance-Based Assessments
*Musical-Rhythmic Intelligence	Auditory-Based Assessments
*Interpersonal Intelligence	Relational-Based Assessments
*Intrapersonal Intelligence	Psychological-Based Assessments

The book entitled, *Instructional Leadership: How Principals Make a Difference*, by Richard Andrews and Wilma Smith (1989) suggests the following view on principals and instructional leadership.

The effective principal is actively involved in all aspects of the instructional program, sets expectations for continuous improvement and collegiality, models the kinds of behaviors desired, participates in in-service training with teachers, and consistently gives priority to instructional concerns. He concludes that principals must do more than just "know about" the instructional program, they must be

intimately involved in its development, implementation, evaluation, and refinement. Although a principal may not have specific knowledge of every curriculum area taught in school, his knowledge should at least embrace the general trends in each subject area. The effective principal must have sufficient knowledge to understand and evaluate curricular innovations and be familiar with effective teaching methods and the principles of learning and instruction, they can help teachers improve, regardless of subject matter (pp. 506-507).

The curriculum that is used in the urban setting must include the contributions of all people who made this country great. Too often we have included the contributions from people of color as an add-on curriculum, not as an inclusive piece of history. Thomas et al. (2000) pointed out that a culturally relevant pedagogy helps students maintain their cultural integrity as well as attain academic success. There are five variables that teachers must embrace to help diverse students learn:

- *Teacher's beliefs about students;
- *Designing appropriate curriculum and materials
- *Providing instructional materials and using appropriate instructional approaches in the classroom that portray diverse groups;
- *Providing educational settings conducive for learning; and
- *Teacher education preparation of which multicultural education is an integral part (p. 28).

If educators are to alter the educational outcomes of diverse learners, proponents of a culturally relevant curriculum believe we should attempt to gain an enhanced

understanding of the cultural behavior style. Clearly, every adult in the school community must be prepared to lead.

Nueman & Simmons in *Leadership for Student Learning* (2000) state if an administrator really wants to promote student achievement, the adults who work with students must also learn and grow. Preparing adults to take on new leadership roles requires highly targeted, research-based professional development with ongoing opportunities for practitioners to practice and develop new competencies over time. Access to mentoring and advisory programs with exemplary professionals in the school or district builds a climate in which adults take responsibility for their own development, their colleagues' growth, and their students' learning. One effective way to create a common culture that values continuous learning for everyone is to create professional learning communities of small groups of practitioners who work together to foster reflective practice, collegiality, and collaboration who develop and focus on a coherent set of standards-driven goals connected to teaching and learning.

These professional development opportunities will include methods of increasing teacher self-efficacy. As a school leader I will expect teachers to have a more positive perception of themselves and the students they are teaching. Effective teachers in the urban schools must see themselves as responsible for student learning. They must not perceive learning problems as products of a student's personal backgrounds, but rather as indications that adaptations need to be made in instructional approach so that learning can take place.

Teachers must believe in their ability to reach and teach virtually all of their students

successfully.

Even though, visionary leadership and instructional leadership are two standards of importance, without organizational leadership the school cannot function properly. An effective administrator must also possess organizational leadership skills.

Organizational Leadership

Wise and effective leadership is more important than ever, but it requires a complex array of lenses to distinguish traps, dead-ends from promising opportunities. Multi-frame thinking reduces administrators' stress and enhances their effectiveness. In the long term, the measure of success will be how well [leaders] can reframe the problems they face so as to discover and invent new solutions that significantly enhance the performance of their schools. (Cunningham & Cordiero, 2000 p. 31)

The atmosphere in the school community should be one of caring and acceptance. Plants and animals cannot grow without proper care and nourishment and neither can children or adults. Mark A. Royal & Robert Rossi (1997) state

In our view of school community, communication is open, participation is widespread teamwork is prevalent, and diversity is incorporated. Staff members and students share a vision for the future of the school, a common sense of purpose, and a common set of values. They care about, trust, and respect each other, and they recognize each other's efforts and accomplishments." The school community also affects staff members, research suggests that a strong sense of community can facilitate staff members' instructional efforts and enhance their well-being.

I realize as organizational leader, the principal cannot be effective by being hidden away in the office. Gary Hopkins (2000) found the best concept for organizational leadership is management by walking around. He states that getting out of the office and seeing what's going on in the school is very important to the welfare of everybody-the students, the parents, the staff.

As cited in G. Hopkins, 2000, Dee Anna Manitzas, principal at the Accelerated Middle School in San Antonio, stated

“By getting out of the office, a principal is able to take the “pulse” of what is actually happening inside and outside the classroom. By being visible to all, everybody feels a part of the quest for education and the principal communicates a message that students and teachers are expected to maintain high standards, not only with academics but also with behavior” (p. 2).

Wehlage (1989) in his article, *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support*, believes that a sense of school membership is the foundation on which educational engagement is built. Psychologically, *membership* described by Goodenow as cited in Wehlage is the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, supported by others in the school environment. A sense of school membership is based on the satisfaction of three basic human needs: autonomy, competence, and belonging or relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991 as cited in Wehlage). To the extent that students feel disconnected to the school, they are likely to reject school goals. For example, Steele in 1992 as cited in Wehlage proposed that one reason for the lower achievement of African Americans is that identification with school is missing. A low

sense of school belonging and low school motivation was found among urban adolescents.

Clearly, there are a lot of issues in the urban school. The climate of the school, safety issues, the maintenance of the building and grounds, the quality of the school lunches, and the resources available all present a challenge. Therefore, the need for collaboration is a powerful factor within the school community.

Collaborative Leadership

We live in a society where everybody wants to talk, and it seems as if no one wants to listen. Decisions are made, laws are passed, and everyone does what they are told. The effective administrator knows that this is not the way things are done. Wilma Smith (2000) relates that collaboration is essential to the success of the leader. Collaboration demands hard work from everyone, especially those who are designated leaders.

As a teacher, I find myself communicating with students, parents, colleagues, and many stakeholders. The difference between effective and ineffective communication is the results that are produced. As an effective administrator, I realize that my audience with whom I collaborate will expand. In order to promote the necessity and importance of student achievement, I must be able to stimulate, request, direct, and present the needed information. It must be done in such a way that the stakeholders are motivated to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Collaboration is a give and take relationship. An effective administrator must consider that all teachers have expertise and interest in areas beneficial to the school community. They must be encouraged to contribute to the success of the school vision. When I collaborate with my cohort members at the University of Northern Iowa, we fully

understood the differences in the culture of our buildings and how our coursework strengthened our understanding of urban schools. We also discovered commonalities that we would not have known existed if we had not been allowed the opportunity to work collaboratively. The ability to communicate across districts was very beneficial and the use of the ICN also stressed the advantage of implementing technology in learning. Ash & Persall (1999), suggest

“In order to create an organizational culture and infrastructure that supports leadership opportunities for everyone- a “leader-full” organization- requires principals to have an altogether different set of leadership skills than have previously been necessary. The formative leader must possess a high level of facilitation skills because team inquiry, learning, and collaborative problem-solving are essential ingredients” (p.15).

Carol Levine (1998) believes the purpose of collaboration is to get people to work in new ways toward a shared vision. In Waterloo, Iowa, two years after opening a high school and a middle school health clinic; the collaboration of Communities in Schools, the county health department, 23 collaborating agencies, school principals, the school board and superintendent, can point to a rise in school attendance and an increase in GPAs for students using the clinic. This example emphasizes how a vision works when participants are engaged and feel responsible for the achievement of the vision.

Planning is necessary because it sets the direction and determines shared goals. Yet, these plans need to be flexible and revised frequently to meet the changing needs and situations that occur in the school community. The effective administrator does not take it

for granted that everyone will jump on the bandwagon and ride. There will need to be a lot of motivation and encouragement for those involved to win over the negative mushrooms who exist in every organization. Yet, the administrator has to have boundaries in place and has to know that whatever is necessary for student achievement cannot be compromised. For this reason, the effective administrator must earn the trust of those involved. They not only have to talk but possess the character to walk the talk. Therefore, being moral, just, and having an ethical belief system is necessary.

Ethical Leadership

The belief system and the values of the effective administrator determine whether what he/she gets ethically. When I think of ethical leadership my mind automatically goes back to all the conversations we have had in our leadership course about our own ethics and values. It was mentioned that there will be times as a future administrator that my values will clash with those that live by a different set of values. However, an effective administrator knows not to compromise, but rather seek to understand the viewpoint of others.

Larry Lashway (1996), states that real leaders concentrate on doing the right thing, not on doing things right. Schools are moral institutions, designed to promote social norms, and principals are moral agents who must often make decisions that favor one moral value over another. Moreover, although schools are dedicated to the well-being of children, students have virtually no voice in what happens there. For all these reasons, the leader's conduct must be deliberately moral (p.1).

The effective administrator must not only behave in a responsible manner, but must

create this ethical institution. Authority cannot be used in a manner that is destructive to the school community. The teachers must have a belief that the administrator reflects the values they support. The students in the community quickly assess whether the administrator is fair and honest. Many times I have seen students point out an error in the judgment of an administrator because the administrator failed to listen to both sides of an issue.

In many classrooms, halls, and homes students are taught about the consequences of their choices. Life experiences, previous examples, and educational institutions teach the effective administrator the consequences of his/her choices. Dr. Decker and Dr. Jackson have spoken of the “fatal error” that can affect our career as administrators. That fatal error could be as simple as innocently accepting a gift from a parent and realizing later that the parent wanted a special favor for their child or an error as serious as moral infidelity with a student. Howard Gardner (1995) states that leaders embody the message they advocate; they teach, not just through words, but through actions.

There also has to be a consideration of the culture of the student and whether the student in question is truly being insubordinate or if there is a misrepresentation or misinterpretation by the teacher or others involved. With the high dropout rates of African American males, the inappropriate amount of referrals that are written for African American males, and the numerous suspensions given African Americans, the effective administrator must address discrepancy in the learning of these students. For the past two years, I have facilitated, formulated, and implemented staff development for those in the school community. I have stressed the importance of stakeholders to look deeply within

themselves and reflect on perceptions of different cultures, economic status, and gender. The workshops that I have facilitated were not always pleasant, yet talking about these issues is of importance for the benefit of the students involved. The effective administrator will not avoid issues that are controversial, but rather will confront them. If there are biases that are detrimental, it will affect the culture of the school, but most of all it will affect student achievement.

Also, the effective administrator cannot be a hypocrite. The personal and professional life of an administrator is open to scrutiny by the community and their colleagues. Therefore, they have to maintain an ethical lifestyle both in and out of the school setting. Ethical behavior is something that cannot be used just when the occasion calls for it; it must be an internal part of the administrator. Whatever example the administrator sets is the example that all of those around him/her will follow. The biggest threat to the administrator's ethical survival is their fiscal accountability. They need to avoid the least taint of suspicion when it comes to school monies. It is important that someone else knows about and/or co-authorize the distribution of school monies. If they fail in this area, then they cannot lead those in the school community or effect a change in the larger political context.

Political Leadership

Students of low socio-economic status (SES) often are clustered in schools that are grossly underfunded while other nearby schools attended by primarily higher SES students receive substantially more funding on a per-pupil basis. The public needs to be aware of these funding inequities. For this reason, the effective administrator has to be

aware of the political climate, assess their student and building needs and become actively involved in legislation concerning education.

Budget cuts affect the resources that are available for the schools and the effective administrator must be aware of the availability of grants, business partnerships, or community services that will provide funding to accomplish the vision for improved student achievement.

Nevertheless, budget cuts should not affect the quality of the instruction that goes on in the classroom. I realize it is an inconvenience to have overcrowded classrooms with faulty heating and lighting. I know by experience the oppressive heat of summer in the classroom. I know what it feels like to be in a classroom where asbestos is leaking into the classroom because of a broken radiator. Yet, in spite of all these obstacles students learn that their education is more important to the teacher than these circumstances. The effective administrator tries to relieve these issues as much as possible by petitioning the district for funding.

School board meetings are also of the utmost importance to building principals. These meetings give administrators a chance to allow their voices to be heard and to share what is happening in their school communities. I have attended school board meetings many times, but not until the course Educational Leadership, did I pay attention to the political aspects of this system.

As an aspiring administrator, I was involved with the McKinstry Parent and Teacher Organization this year. I attended a few meetings and discovered that parents have a lot of influence on this governing branch of the school community. They have the

ability to facilitate funding of technology equipment in a teacher's classroom, but also can challenge questionable books students are required to read or a school policy they do not agree with.

The community and school are more concerned than ever about the safety of the students. The various laws that shape the school community must be read and understood by the staff and students. Parents must receive booklets stating their rights and responsibilities concerning their child or children. Within each classroom must be classroom codes of conduct that have been developed by the students. Rules should be culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate. School rules must promote student safety, allow adults to model responsibility, respect, reflect democratic principles, and provide for positive reinforcement of good behavior as well as suitable and neutrally-applied sanctions for misbehavior. The message should be clear that students are responsible for their actions.

If academic success, student safety, school climate, student conduct, and all the issues and concerns happening in the school community are not being adequately addressed, the effective administrator must become a change agent. Change is constant and will forever be a necessity as we learn more about how students learn and what is involved in accomplishing the vision of excellence in the school community. The school community has garnered national attention with the demand for accountability of tax dollars and student achievement. The urban schools have been viewed as not supplying students with a quality education. Reformation and change are the words for urban schools.

My passion for children and my desire to affect their lives on a larger scale has helped me create my vision of becoming an urban principal who can impact student learning for those children entrusted in my care. As I continue to learn and understand what being an effective administrator is, I find that the Iowa Standards for School Leaders have proven to be the foundation for my educational leadership philosophy. Through practicum experiences, I have been able to apply the skills I have acquired in the learning community. These standards have better helped me to understand what a learning community should look like in order to insure that the students are receiving the education that “all children” deserve.

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