University of Northern Iowa

UNI ScholarWorks

2004

A vision of leadership for secondary school : a reflective essay

Bret A. Jones
University of Northern Iowa

Recommended Citation

A vision of leadership for secondary school : a reflective essay

Abstract

Leadership requires a vision. A clear picture of what you want to accomplish. It's teaching those around you how they can better themselves as well as the people they are working with. It's developing, organizing, and monitoring a plan so the vision can be carried out. It's knowing that you cannot reach the vision alone and drawing from the people around you. Using all the resources your school and community have to offer. Leadership is modeling desired behaviors and showing others you care. Leadership is making tough decisions , and leading change when needed. Leadership is not what you think, but it is what you do.

A VISION OF LEADERSHIP FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL:
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 Art in Education

———————

Bret A. Jones

June 2004

This Research Paper by: Bret A. Jones

Entitled: A VISION OF LEADERSHIP FOR A SECONDARY SCHOOL:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Art in Education

/2-0/-04
Date Approved

Victoria L. Robinson
Advisor/ Director of Research paper

12\1\04
Date Approved

Gregory A. Reed
Second Reader of Research Paper

12\2\04
Date Approved

John K. Smith
Head, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

My desire to be an educational administrator stems from my life experiences and the values my parents instilled in me as a child. My father has had the greatest influence on me and his guidance has had a tremendous impact on my life. I hope I have acquired some of his traits as he is the hardest working, most committed person I know. This is evident in his career as he has worked at the same place for over thirty years as a supervisor and leader. For the past three decades I have watched him go to work each day with the desire to be the best he could be and with the attitude that he was going to make a difference. My dad's philosophy on work is that you should leave work at the end of the day knowing you owe the employer nothing. You give your job all you have while you are there and leave at the end of the day with the satisfaction of knowing you gave it your all. When I was a young teenager I was hired for my first job. My dad came to me and said, "They are paying you to do a job. Do the job to the best of your ability whether you like the job or not. If you do that, at the end of the day you can come home knowing that you owe your employer nothing and have earned your pay." That philosophy is one I carry with me today.

My father is a natural leader. People have always looked up to him and held his opinion with high regard. He has demonstrated his leadership ability through various supervisory positions over the past twenty five years. As a supervisor, he has found himself not only dealing with work related issues but also personal issues his employees bring with them to work. He has managed to be these people's leader, counselor, problem solver, supervisor, and friend, all at the same time.

As I have grown up and developed into an adult, I am honored when people tell me I am just like my father. I could not think of a better person to be like. The values that have

driven his leadership ability for the past three decades are the values that will propel me the next thirty years as I make the transition to becoming a leader myself.

Like my father, my mother is a hard working, committed person. She has also held the same job for my entire life. She too has assumed the role of going to work each day and giving 100%. My mother is the most caring person I know. Her kind hearted demeanor is always looking for ways to help the people around her. If my mother has a fault it is that she focuses on others so much she doesn't take time for herself.

As a husband and parent I feel very fortunate to have had the parents I have had to guide me in a positive direction in life. My greatest attributes of being hard working, dedicated, committed, holding high regards for quality, being a caring individual, and the ability to persevere, are all characteristics I have acquired from my parents. Hopefully, I can pass these values onto my son and my students as well.

The core values I outlined previously have guided my life and led me to opportunities that I am grateful for. While I was in college I was fortunate to have the opportunity to compete for the University of Northern Iowa Wrestling team. The emphasis of working hard that my parents instilled in me paid off, as I was able to earn a scholarship to help offset the rising cost of a college education. At the conclusion of my senior year, I was awarded the Lyle E. Schwarzenbach Award for team contribution, hard work, dedication, academic performance, and self giving efforts to the Northern Iowa Wrestling program. This award is a great example of who I am and how I live my life.

As I visualize myself as a leader, I see these same values driving me in the day to day operations of a school. Leaders must fully understand their own values and beliefs and must reflect upon those as they make choices and build relationships with faculty and students

(Duignan & Macpherson 1992). At this point in my life I do not see myself leading through the position of a high school principal, but rather as an associate principal or student dean. I feel it is through one of these positions that I can be most effective and succeed as a leader.

One factor that inspires me to work each day is student contact. An associate principal position will allow me to have that daily contact with students and still be a leader in the school community. For me, it is important that I develop a strong, positive relationship with the students. The students I have taught have felt comfortable around me and felt as though I was a person they could talk to. My ability to relate to and connect with students will be a factor in my success as an administrator. I feel we live in a society of diminishing family values. My leadership style, combined with my modeling desired values, will have a positive impact on the students in my building.

Effective educational leaders possess a unique set of traits, characteristics, qualities, and habits that guide them in the decisions that they make. The assets of a quality leader are outlined in the ISSL standards. In exploring these standards I have more clearly defined my own thoughts and beliefs about the qualities an educational leader should possess. My positions are derived from past experiences and research conducted by leaders in the educational field. The following paragraphs touch on some of my beliefs within each of the six ISSL standards and how they relate to my experiences in an educational setting.

Visionary Leadership

When I think of a Visionary Leader I think of a person who is never satisfied with past accomplishments and is always looking for ways to improve who they are, what they do, and the people and places around them. By focusing on the future and reflecting on the past, this person will also have the ability to foresee needed changes and establish a plan of action to carry out a

vision. This vision would be clearly communicated to the students, staff, and community members.

Visionary leaders are on the "cutting edge" of education and will encourage the use of proven methods of instruction. They are also willing to take chances and implement new strategies. When doing this they will assess the needs and concerns of the students, as well as members of the district and surrounding community.

Visionary leaders use data to drive their decision making process. Data will locate areas of strengths and weaknesses and a visionary leader will use that data to develop short and long term goals for improving not only the areas of need, but the entire school community as well. A leader should realize that there is more to data than collecting and reporting it. They will use the data to motivate and empower their teachers. The data will drive their decisions that will help them achieve their vision. Arie van der Ploeg (2002) writes, "You can't put data away, let it accumulate, and then write a report. You must keep the data in front of the teachers and report frequently the results and effects of their efforts."

John C. Maxwell (2002) writes, "Vision is everything for a leader. It is utterly indispensable. Why? Because vision leads the leader. It paints the target. It sparks and fuels the fire within, and draws him forward. It is also the fire lighter for others who follow that leader. Show me a leader without a vision and I'll show you someone who isn't going anywhere. At best he is traveling in circles."

As I look at my leadership style and compare it to the indicators of a visionary leader, I can't help but identify my strengths and weaknesses. In my seven years of working in the educational setting I have discovered that one of my strengths is my ability to assess a situation and derive a workable solution based on my findings. I am a believer in the team concept and know that I cannot act alone in improving a school. It will take the collaborative efforts of students, staff, parents, and community members to successfully implement any changes in our school system. Lambert (1998), states that the habits and conditions that allow a staff to work well as a unit contribute to a "professional community." Such communities are places in which teachers participate in decision making, have a shared sense of purpose, engage in collaborative

work, and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work. I also realize that I have to be the leader and set the example. If I do this, others will follow and changes will be successfully implemented. Dr. Else frequently stated, "What you do on a daily basis is what your school will become over time."

I see visionary leadership as leading the vision for a school and district. A schools vision for success guides a school much like standards and benchmarks guide what happen in a classroom. The vision should be clearly defined and communicated to all stakeholders. If followed, the vision will become a roadmap to success. Every decision a school is faced with should be met with the vision in mind. Each step towards achieving the vision is like reaching another benchmark. Although you may continually make strides towards reaching the vision, it will, and should always remain in front of you. This task of establishing and defining the vision, along with guiding all stakeholders towards the goal is the primary task of a visionary leader.

Instructional Leadership

In looking at Instructional Leadership I see curriculum, teachers, and teaching strategies all working together to help students get the most out of their education. An instructional leader will be an effective observer and teacher of teaching strategies. This person will implement and lead effective staff development and support continuing education efforts by both certified and non-certified staff.

One of the most important beliefs that an effective instructional leader should have is the educability of all students. Sabrina Laine, PH.D. (2000), states that, "Access to a high quality education is an inalienable right for every child in the United States and the world." I believe that all students can and do want to learn. An effective instructional leader will maximize students' opportunities so they obtain the high quality education they deserve. One way this can be done is by encouraging all teachers to use a variety of teaching methods. Differentiating instruction will engage the students. Combine this with the implementation of a strong, exciting curriculum, and the results will show positive growth for all students. Anne Meyers and David H. Rose (2000) noted, "No two brains learn the same way. Whether curriculum consists of text,

sound, pictures, motions, or a medium not yet imagined, it must accommodate all learners." The possibilities for making curriculum meaningful are endless. "If the content is rigorous and relevant, debates, storytelling, art, music, drama, games, mnemonics, graphic organizers, and hands- and minds- on laboratories can dramatically enhance student understanding." This person will also see the importance of technology and how it relates to the evolving word the students are growing up in. In order for the students to experience success in their life after school and become contributing members in society, they must be immersed in technology while in school so they can successfully make the transition to a technological word. A successful instructional leader will not only encourage the teaching of technology in their school, they will also see that it is used successfully by all students in all classes. It is essential that this person stay on top of the most current technology so they can plan staff development sessions around technology in an effort to expose the staff to what's available so they may implement its use in the classroom.

Instructional leaders will also be able to effectively observe and critique teachers and the strategies they use. They will be able to communicate their thoughts of the observation to staff and offer suggestions on how to further develop the strategies they are using. Whitaker (2003) suggests that outstanding principals know that their primary role is to teach the teachers." This person will also evaluate the co-curricular and extra curricular activities as well. It is important that these areas are not overlooked as they provide learning opportunities to large numbers of students.

Personally, I am a firm believer in the power of goal setting and feel that is important for a leader to encourage and teach goal setting to his/her staff and students. Helping students identify goals and connect their learning to those goals fosters intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Keller (1982) has identified four major dimensions of effective classroom motivation: interest, relevance, expectancy of success, and satisfaction resulting from positive consequences of learning performance.

I feel it is also important for an instructional leader to believe that each student will achieve success. This person must have a good understanding of the growth and development of

the students they are working with and must find ways to motivate each student so they can reach their fullest potential.

The collective efforts of an instructional leader and a staff that is willing to explore the possibilities of change will have a positive impact on the students. In the end, the students are the ones that benefit by receiving a higher quality education.

I see the primary duty of an instructional leader as leading the staff in the development and implementation of instructional strategies that will meet the needs of the students in their district. This should be done with the districts vision in mind. In order to successfully lead an entire staff, this person must fully understand the organization and the importance of being organized. I will explore organization in the next section.

Organizational Leadership

I see Organizational Leadership to be very important because it is essential that the school be organized and managed in a manner that is conducive to student learning. Some of the key elements of organizational leadership are maximizing student opportunities, timely problem framing and problem solving techniques, and a clean, safe school environment. An organization leader will be able to efficiently manage the day to day tasks that need to be completed in order for a school to operate effectively.

When we look at all the things that our students need to know, we would be naive to think we could teach everything that is important. This alone is cause for us to try to maximize the learning opportunities for our students. Since we are somewhat limited in what we can teach in terms of quantity of material, it is essential that we teach is well organized and exposes the students to as much knowledge, diversity, and culture as possible. Students need to experience much of what we teach first hand. One way to organize a curriculum is through the process of curriculum mapping. Curriculum maps outline what is taught at each grade level throughout each month of the school year. This process will help you to identify gaps and overlaps in a curriculum. A well organized curriculum will ensure that the staff is building upon previous knowledge and not re-teaching the same information year after year.

An important aspect of managing any organization successfully that must be dealt with is problem solving. When you look at the depth of school structure and see all that a school entails, problems are going to arise and they are not avoidable. Often times some of the greatest problem occur when change is taking place. It is important that the administrator be able to soundly locate the source of the problem and work with staff, students, community members, and other stake holders to alleviate the problems in a timely and effective manner. Problems which are not addressed appropriately can quickly become poisonous mushrooms. Hall & Hord (2001) discuss several types of mushrooms that can occur within an organization in the book '*Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Pothole.*' It is my belief that the poisonous mushrooms are the ones that have the greatest impact on a school, although it may be negative. This provides the basis for my position on the importance of problem solving and is supported by the following quote:

"It is critical for change facilitators to become skilled in mushroom detection. They must continually be looking for positive themes arising out of individual actions and strive to support their further growth. On the other side, they must be constantly tuned to the potential for negative mushrooms, growing in the dark, at the edges of the change process. When a negative mushroom is detected, efforts deed to be directed towards destroying the its constructed theme, rather than responding to each individual action independently. The mushroom needs to be recognized and dealt with in its totality. Targeting individual actions in isolation will only lead to more rapid growth of poisonous mushrooms." (Hall & Hord, pp.185, 2001)

With each passing year it seems that school safety is becoming a more important issue. Laine (2003) suggests that too many children and teenage youth continue to be denied their opportunity to learn because we do not ensure that they are in a safe learning environment with high quality teachers. It is essential that we provide a safe, clean, aesthetically pleasing work environment for our students. Doing so will instill a sense of ownership and pride among students and staff. As a result, our schools will be safer and student achievement will be on the rise.

One of the most important tasks an organization leader must undertake is the management and development of human resources. An effective way to improve the climate and

culture of your school is not only by developing the staff you already have, but by hiring people that fit the vision of your district and building. An organizational leader must be able to effectively assess the candidates for an open position and chose the one who is the best fit for the school.

As I begin to break down each of the ISSL standards for administrators it is apparent that each of the standards is devoted to an area of leadership, yet all of them are integrated into each other making them very cohesive. The next standard I would like to explore pertains to Collaborative Leadership.

<center>Collaborative Leadership</center>

I see Collaborative Leadership as human and community relations, as well as connecting the schools and communities needs. An effect collaborative leader will be highly visible in the eyes of the public. They should also be approachable and willing to listen to suggestions and concerns. Being approachable will help keep the lines of communication open, which is important to all aspects of leadership. When the lines of communication are open, people are more likely to express themselves in both a positive and negative manner. This process will help foster the development of parents as partners in education. Antunez (2000) suggests that one of the defining features of effective parent and community involvement appears to be good communication from schools to parents and community and vice versa

A collaborative leader will also be sensitive to diversity. They will work hard to meet the needs of all students, while exposing the majority to diverse cultures. As students are exposed to culture they will become more sensitive to the needs of others, not to mention that they will become more well rounded individuals.

In today's world in which budgets are tight and there appears to be a lack of funding for public education, all districts are feeling the effects. It is more important than ever that schools work collaboratively with the community to best utilize the resources available. Community businesses have a lot to offer a school and its students. A collaborative leader will assess what the community can do for the school and what the school can do for the community. As

collaborative relationship is developed between the school and the community, the two will work together to meet the needs of each other.

It's no secret that the programs that have the most success, even those not connected with education, are the programs that have the most support. Support, both monetarily and emotionally, is what keeps programs going and allows development to take place. A collaborative leader will help drum up support for their school and its programs by being an advocate for their school. This may be done by publicly honoring the achievements of the students or by working with local business owners on a school project.

I see one of the major tasks of a collaborative leader as spreading of the schools vision throughout the community. Earlier I discussed, under visionary leadership, the importance of communicating the vision to all stakeholders. Like other programs, the vision cannot be met without the support of the community. The community can only support something they are aware of and fully understand. An effective leader will bridge the gap between the school and community so community members are comfortable supporting it's local school and its programs.

Throughout the previous sections I discussed several times the importance of communication. Communication, whether it be verbal and non-verbal, needs to be conducted in a manner which is effective, timely, and most importantly appropriate. This aspect of leadership falls under the standard set for ethical leadership. In the next section I will discuss ethical leadership and the effects it may have on a school.

Ethical Leadership

In my perspective, ethical leadership has a great impact on a school climate. One of the main objectives of this standard is the nurturing and development of quality citizens. I see all of the indicators for this standard as being vital in order to achieve the objective. I firmly believe that the actions of a school principal have a direct effect on the way the teachers and students act. If a principal has high regard for ethics, and demonstrates this in his or her own actions, it will have an effect on the way staff member present themselves each day. Crudele (1998) states,

"Management is what you do but leadership is who you are." With the principal and staff both modeling ethical behavior, the students will respond by having a higher value for ethics as well. This will also help to ensure that students and staff will have a mutual respect for each other. As a leader, I want to bring enthusiasm into the school setting. I my experiences as a teacher, I have seen the positive effects of an enthusiastic leader. When the building administration is excited about what is taking place within his/her school, everyone is affected. It shows not only in the classroom but also in the extra curricular activities. School spirit rises and students want to be apart of what is going on. I feel that getting the students involved is one of the most difficult and important challenges I will face as a leader in education.

An effective leader must not only speak of ethics but must demonstrate them as well. In order to build credibility with students and staff, a leader must practice what they preach. Bamburg, Andrews, & Cotton (1991) suggests what the staff clearly admires most is that their principal's 'walk their talk,' serving as valuable role models for the behaviors they seek to instill in others.

An ethical leader must maintain a positive attitude at all times. Since everyone is looking to them for guidance, leaders must remain positive even in the toughest of circumstances. I have always tried to be a positive person. Don Briggs, my former wrestling coach at the University of Northern Iowa, always said, "I refuse to be around people who aren't positive." By constantly displaying a positive attitude he changed the attitude of the people around him. As a leader I feel it is essential that I maintain a positive attitude as well.

It is my belief that ethical leadership is the most important of the six ISSL standards for leadership. An individual may not be great at each of the six standards but can be a very successful leader if they take an ethical approach when making tough decisions and when communicating with students, staff, and the community alike.

Political Leadership

As I examine some of the factors surrounding political leadership, I feel as though it is the most difficult standard to understand. I see political leadership as being the most complex of

the six standards for educational leaders. One of the knowledge indicators that I feel is very important is K6.3. This indicator focuses on law as it relates to education and schooling. In an interview I conducted of Dr. Keith Stamp, former principal of Monticello High School, Dr. Stamp expressed the importance of school law and how it has impacted education. One of his major concerns is the emerging trend of families being willing to place law suites against schools and it's staff. He emphasized the importance of knowing the laws that govern schools and the need for documentation. He stated that in order to protect your self, it is very important to document all situations, no matter how insignificant they may seem.

Political leadership focuses on the success of all students. This is directly related the 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) legislation that schools are faced with today. Although NCLB is assessed solely through test scores, and political leadership has no official assessment, the two go hand in hand. Both are aimed at making sure all students achieve success, and that school operations take place in an environment that have been influences on the behalf of the students and their families.

I see an effective political leader as a person who has a vast amount of knowledge of school structures and the variables that effect public education. Some of the variables are financial matters, economic influences, and demographics. This person must also have the ability to foresee the possible effects of the variables and the impact they will have in shaping our schools. Since the school is affected so much by influences from outside the school, it is important that this person communicate with members of the school community.

Conclusion

Educational leadership encompasses many facets of leadership. These facets are outlined in the six ISSL standards for educational leaders. Each of the standards is independently important but together they form a word picture of an effective educational leader.

I entered this program thinking educational leadership was management. How wrong I was. Management is merely organization that allows leadership to take place. Management is boring and requires little effort and no vision. I know see educational leadership in an entirely

different perspective. Leadership requires a vision. A clear picture of what you want to accomplish. It's teaching those around you how they can better themselves as well as the people they are working with. It's developing, organizing, and monitoring a plan so the vision can be carried out. It's knowing that you cannot reach the vision alone and drawing from the people around you. Using all the resources your school and community have to offer. Leadership is modeling desired behaviors and showing others you care. Leadership is making tough decisions and leading change when needed. Leadership is not what you think, but it is what you do. Leadership is ongoing.

References

Bamburg, J.E., Andrews, R.L., Cotton, Kathlene (1991). Principal Instructional

Leadership. *Journal of Research and Development in Education.*

Chester, E. , Crudele, J. (1997*). Lead Now or Step Aside*, Responsibility: The links to

personal freedom.

Danielson, C. (2002). *Enhancing Student Achievement: A Framework for School*

Improvement.. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lambert, L. (1998). *Building Leadership Capacities in Schools.* Association for Supervision

and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What Works In Schools.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development.

Maxwell, J. C. (2002). *Leadership 101: What every leader needs to know.* Maxwell

Motivation, Inc.

Meyers, A. & Rose, D. H. (2000, November). *Educational Leadership.* Universal Design for

Individual Differences.

Short, P. M. & Greer, J. T. (2002). *Leadership In Empowered Schools.* Pearson Education, Inc.

Westwater, A. & Wolfe, P. (2000, November). *Educational Leadership.* The Brain Compatible Curriculum.

Whitaker, T. (2003) *What Great Principals Do Differently.* Eye on education, Inc.