

University of Northern Iowa  
**UNI ScholarWorks**

---

Graduate Research Papers

Student Work

---

2001

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

Carol M. Knoll  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Copyright ©2001 Carol M. Knoll

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

---

### Recommended Citation

Knoll, Carol M., "A preferred vision for administering schools : a reflective essay" (2001). *Graduate Research Papers*. 1015.  
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1015>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

---

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

### Abstract

The most important assignment of the effective school leader is being responsible for establishing and maintaining a climate conducive to academic learning and achievement by the students. An effective school climate, which is promoted by the principal, includes: (a) setting academic achievement as the primary goal of the school; (b) ensuring that all members of the school community understand the importance of good teaching; (c) reducing the intrusions and disruptions in a school; (d) developing a good follow-up system for students who are tardy, absent, or disruptive; (e) being consistent in enforcing the rules, regulations and policies of the school; and (f) holding high expectations of self, teachers and students.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING 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  
Master of Arts in Education

---

by

Carol M. Knoll

May 2001

This Research Paper by: Carol M. Knoll

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Robert H. Decker

5/15/01  
Date Approved

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Edwin H. Griffith

5/29/01  
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Michael Waggoner

June 4, 2001  
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational  
Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary  
Education

As I continue my trek down life's road my experiences are a result of the turns I have made. The roads, which I have chosen, and the stops that I have made along the way have formed my values and beliefs. My experiences in life and in education have aided in the development of my strong belief in the importance of education and the role of an educational leader in this continuous process of learning.

I believe that all individuals can learn and experience success. Given that every person has value, through education and maturity the value of that person increases. By enhancing a person's self-worth, self-discipline, and the essential skills for life-long learning the result is a productive, caring citizen.

Maslow advocated in his hierarchy of needs that an individual must have their lower needs met before they will be motivated to grow and develop. Maslow asserted that until an individual's deficiency needs (physiology, safety, and belonging) were met it was difficult for individuals to respond to higher-order or growth needs (Daft, 1999).

A goal of educational leaders is the growth of individuals in their learning communities. If we keep Maslow's theory in mind then as school leaders it is our responsibility to see that schools provide a safe, caring, and learning environment for all individuals. A student's future and welfare must be a priority of ours as educational leaders. Education should empower everyone to achieve to his or her

greatest potential and be encouraged to reach for their dreams through their educational experiences.

### Building Blocks

An individual's life and their experiences allow that person to nurture their needs. Life experiences are the building blocks of an individual's beliefs and values. The foundation of beliefs and values is a result of what a family teaches and models. The environment from which an individual participates in life influences their beliefs, which in turn determine how they act. It is therefore vital that parents/guardians are involved in a student's education. If a student can see that education is important to family members, that image becomes embedded in their mind and influences the value he/she places on his/her educational experiences. Parent involvement makes school to home and home to school communication easier.

Student achievement and development then become a collaborative process. Peterson and Skiba (2000) contended that increasing parental involvement resulted in home environments that were more conducive to learning. Involvement by parents/guardians also improved communication and consistency between the home and school.

Peterson and Skiba (2000) further commented that parent involvement positively affected student success, higher attendance rates, and lower suspension

rates. The educational experience is positive for students, parents, and teachers.

Learning becomes a cooperative effort between all parties involved.

The community is a building block within education, not only the school as a community but also the public. Community leaders, resources, senior citizens, and volunteers can greatly enhance education. As educational leaders we need to provide opportunities for volunteering that promote community involvement, which can lead to additional resources that will strengthen programs within our schools. Not only can this block provide resources but also the true-life experiences. Students are not limited to reading and hearing about life's experiences but they become an integral part of the experiences.

If we can provide learners with opportunities to see and to be actively involved in a variety of careers, a learner's motivation accelerates as the importance of education becomes a reality. Students have a greater understanding and are better prepared to step out into the "real world".

The personality of a school indicates not only what the school believes but also the ideals of individuals within the community. Personal identification with the values of an organizational culture can provide powerful motivation. Owens (1998) implies that an educational leader needs to draw upon the interests, abilities, and energies of the community as a means of securing a commitment in achieving the goals of the school.

The U.S. Department of Education (1993) published material noting characteristics of an effective school. These included a positive school climate, strong instructional focus, a system for monitoring and measuring students, higher teacher expectations, and a strong instructional leadership (Johnson, Johnson, and Zimmerman, 1996).

### Purposes of Schools

School should be about maximizing expectations for all students. These high expectations must apply in academics, activities, and behaviors. Ideally, individuals coming into the educational setting would have mastered the three Rs. The three Rs being - knowing right from wrong; responsibility for oneself; and respect for others. Hopefully the family and religious organizations have assumed the primary role in the development of these moral and civic values. If however the Rs have not been learned, then they become a responsibility of the educational system.

Not only do schools have to reinforce social values; they then need to teach them as well. This is by no means a new concept. Early philosophers and educators, such as Dewey, proclaimed the same idea. Peterson and Skiba (2000) made the point that, consciously or unconsciously, schools and classrooms exude values.

As educators we have often described students in terms of “being responsible.” Students who participated in a study viewed the following



categories to be their responsibility: do the work, obey the rules, pay attention, learn or study, try or make an effort, and responsibility is something given or taken (Rice, 1999)

... there's a difference between being responsible and being held responsible. Students who are being responsible will do the work without constant reminders or prodding. Students who are being held responsible will do the work only when someone is somehow forcing them to do so. (Rice, 1999)

A community, whether that community be the school, workplace, or society, needs to have some similarities to function. Schools need to develop citizenship, along with teaching core subjects and electives. Values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and trust are some of the important qualities that need to be included. Teaching and involving learners in education should instill an understanding and mastery of those values that society has put a high priority on. That list would include the four previously mentioned along with but not limited to discipline, promptness, cooperation, and integrity. As educational leaders we need to encourage student involvement in curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as non-school affiliated groups which will allow students to observe and experience these values.

## Educational Leadership

### Culture

Leadership makes the school philosophy, mission, and vision come alive. Leadership also determines the school climate and work culture through

philosophy, mission, and vision (Krajewski, 1996). The school principal is key in creating a productive and satisfying work place in the eyes of many. According to Sergiovanni (1991), an effective principal's role includes that of a cultural leader for the school. The objectives of this role are to articulate the school mission and purpose; create an atmosphere where new members are accepted into the school culture; and bond teachers, students, parents, and the community into believers in the school.

An educational leader who wants to successfully achieve a change in culture must first be able to determine what the present culture is. The culture of the organization typifies not only what the organization stands for but also the aspirations of individual participants (Owens, 1998). A healthy learning environment is built when faculty members and students in collaboration with the principal identify the culture they want. An effective and efficient school is a result of gathering input on what the rules and expectations are. When a principal shares the expectations, the expectations become the shared culture. The members of the staff and student body have had an opportunity to determine what rules will be used to govern them.

The result is moral power. Moral power, as defined by Bulach (2001), motivates others to do what they are supposed to because it is right. Owens (1998) contended that personal identification with the values of the organizational culture provides powerful motivation for responsible performance even under

conditions of extreme stress and uncertainty. As a leader we are then expected to enforce the identified expectations. As suggested by Bennis (1985), true leaders are those people who affect the culture; they are the social architects of their organization; and they create and maintain the values of the organization. These are all attributes that I believe an effective school principal must possess.

### Climate

Leadership makes a school's vision come alive and vision determines the climate of a school. School climate is a reflection of the positive or negative feelings regarding the school environment, and it may directly or indirectly affect a variety of learning outcomes (Peterson and Skiba, 2000). Johnson, Johnson, and Zimmerman (1996) referred to school climate as the personality of a school. A positive school climate begins with the educational leader who is the catalyst behind the development and maintenance of a learning climate.

The most important assignment of the effective school leader is being responsible for establishing and maintaining a climate conducive to academic learning and achievement by the students, according to Troisi (1983). Troisi (1983) further described an effective school climate, which is promoted by the principal, to include: (a) setting academic achievement as the primary goal of the school; (b) ensuring that all members of the school community understand the importance of good teaching; (c) reducing the intrusions and disruptions in a school; (d) developing a good follow-up system for students who are tardy,

absent, or disruptive; (e) being consistent in enforcing the rules, regulations and policies of the school; and (f) holding high expectations of self, teachers and students.

An educational leader's behavior promotes a positive climate. A survey of teachers inquired as to whether a principal's behaviors affected climate. The behaviors fell into three categories: empowering, supporting, and communicating (Harris, 2000). Examples of behaviors that empower would be treating teachers as professionals and involving teachers in decision making. Secondly, supporting behaviors include providing emotional and moral support, being consistent with discipline, and being visible. Active listening, organization, encouragement, clear expectations, and an open-door policy are forms of behavior that display a leader's communication skills. This is a clear indication that principals must be able to walk the talk, thereby influencing a positive school climate that supports teaching and learning. In the words of Lao Tzu's: "A leader is best when the people barely know that he exists ... Of a good leader who talks little when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say – We did this ourselves" (Krajewski, 1996).

### Professional Growth

Just as we encourage teachers to present their lessons and curriculum in a variety of ways using numerous strategies to address the multiple intelligences of their students, a principal must make a variety of tools available so that staff

needs are met. These tools may include such items as resource people, transportation, strategies, materials, and perhaps most importantly, time.

Workshops, conferences, and school visits are also activities that teachers and other staff members should participate in and use for their personal and professional development. Instructional leaders need to encourage their staffs to grow professionally, assisting them in developing a passion for life-long learning. Supovitz (2000) asserted that as instructional leaders we are shepherds of reform, we orchestrate occasions for staff leadership, and we allow others to make some decisions.

Instructional leaders must seek every opportunity to reinforce teaching and learning. Principals must make an effort to visit classrooms, talk to students about their schoolwork and teachers about their needs and concerns. As leaders we must take an active interest in what is happening in the classrooms throughout our buildings. Sergiovanni (1991) describes a role of an effective principal as a symbolic leader. The effective principal is visible in the building, visits classrooms, finds and spends time with students, puts educational concerns ahead of management concerns, leads celebrations, and demonstrates the school vision through actions and words.

Educational leaders need to find the resources that will nurture staff growth which will ultimately impact student achievement. Substitute teachers, resources, and time need to be allotted so educators can attend workshops,

conferences, and observe other educators in action. Time must also be allotted so that professional discussions and reflections can occur, as these are vital aspects of professional growth.

Administrators need to be a model of the mission. They need to view all problems as opportunities and understand that each solution will bring challenging opportunities. Leaders need to be facilitators and remember there are no failures, just learning experiences. It is important that leaders continue the process of learning and communicate the vision. Principals must be active in the daily operations of the school. A leader who is visible and enthusiastic can convey a sense of caring for students and staff. Krajewski (1996) listed the following as traits of an effective principal: (a) are enthusiastic facilitators, (b) meet teacher and student needs, (c) prepare for effective interactions, (d) understand what motivates each school employee, and (d) enhance growth of all school personnel.

Leadership strengths of organization, good listening skills, and a willingness to help others are qualities that will be of great value in the position of school principal. An administrative position is definitely a people position and will require the skills of listening, clarifying, as well as cooperation.

Communication is key to effective and efficient leadership. Before making a choice or decision a leader needs to be informed on the issue so their decision can be one of quality. By listening to and taking an interest in

individuals in the school, a caring and trusting atmosphere is fostered. A safe environment where ideas can be shared without fear of ridicule results from a genuine commitment to achieving excellence.

Integrity is vital in a leadership role. An educational leader will earn respect by the commitment, sincerity, and persistence they demonstrate and by the fairness of their actions and decisions. Education is teamwork between teachers, administrators, community members, parents, and students. An effective leader will support their colleagues when appropriate, praising in public and criticizing in private. Team members using their wealth of resources and knowledge will strive through cooperative activities to achieve the goals that were developed collaboratively.

Administrators are role models for students, parents, staff, and people of the community. An educational leader will be involved in the community. They will be an active participant in community groups, visible at school activities, and participate in social functions. Leaders must be positive role models for all individuals in the learning community. This unique position allows administrators an opportunity to gain insight from a variety of perspectives.

With the help of school personnel and the community an educational leader will be able to strengthen and fortify areas of weakness. Also as the wealth of their experiences grow both positive and negative, the leader will mature personally and professionally.

Experiences in education are great assets to individuals who function in an administrative role. Background experiences in a variety of educational positions will help a leader to understand and appreciate the different roles people play in a student's growth, development, and their educational success. All school personnel impact each and every student they come in contact with. A bus driver who pleasantly greets them as they board the bus, the custodial staff they pass in the hallway, the cook who fills their tray, as well as their classroom teacher share in the shaping of a student. No school employee is insignificant in a student's life. By informing every employee of the value of their presence in the lives of students, an educational leader is able to motivate students and staff.

School principals must be passionate about schools for the students and staff that spend their time there (Paulus, 1997). Schools need to provide a safe, caring, and learning environment for all individuals. Their future and welfare have to be a priority of educational leaders. Through education everyone should be empowered to achieve to his or her greatest potential and be encouraged to reach for his or her dreams.



## References

- Bennis, W. (1985). The four competencies of leadership. School Library Media Quarterly. 15, 196-199.
- Bulach, C.R. (2001). A 4-step process for identifying and reshaping school culture. Principal Leadership. 1:8, 48-51.
- Daft, R.L. (1999). Leadership: Theory and practice. Orlando, Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Harris, S.L. (2000). Behave yourself. Principal Leadership. 1:3, 36-39.
- Johnson, W.L.; Johnson, A.M.; Zimmerman, K. (1996). Assessing school climate priorities: A Texas study. The Clearing House. 70:2, 64-66.
- Krajewski, B. (1996). Enculturating the school: The principal's principles. National Association of Secondary School Principals. 80:576, 3+.
- Owens, R.G. (1998). Organizational behavior in education. Needham Heights, MA, Allyn and Bacon.
- Paulas, G.E. (1997). Vision and school culture. National Association of Secondary School Principals. 81:587, 118-120.
- Peterson, R.L.; Skiba, R. (2000). Creating school climates that prevent school violence. Preventing School Failure. 44:3, 122-129.
- Rice, F.P. (1999). The adolescent: Development, relationships, and culture (9<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (1991). The principalship: A reflective practice perspective (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Supovitz, J.A. (2000). Manage less lead more. Principal Leadership. 1:3, 14-19.

Troisi, N.F. (1983). Effective teaching and student achievement. Reston, VA: NASSP. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 231067).