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2004

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

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### Recommended Citation

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

### Abstract

If a person wants to succeed on becoming a principal, a leader, that person has to understand what people want and need. A principal needs to learn how to listen and talk with people. He also needs to understand different cultures, because not everyone is the same. There is an important relationship between the law and protection of the students as well as the staff.

A principal needs to have a sense of humor. Laugh with the students and the staff. Others will understand him as a human. He needs to be strong. People like to mock policies or complain when something doesn't benefit their needs. A principal needs to keep pushing forward with ideas and creativity. The school is a setting for bringing about knowledge and success. In order to succeed, he must find the best resources available to achieve his school's needs, even if they are limited. The principal doesn't become a leader because of his title; he becomes a leader because he can convince the community, staff, and students to believe in him.

**A Preferred Vision for Administering High Schools:**

**A Reflective Essay**

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**A Research Paper**

**Presented to**

**The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education**

**University of Northern Iowa**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts in Education**

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**by**

**Jason Knittel**

**May 2004**

This Research Paper by: Jason A. Knittel

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING HIGH SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

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2-18-04

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What is leadership? Is the presence of leadership a situation in which one person makes all the decisions for the majority? Is leadership the perception of power and control over others? Is leadership a position granted to a person who can bring about changes with success? Are leaders determined by position?

The common definition of leadership is stated as guidance or a direction. A person who really wishes to become a leader must be an agent of change. Leaders must combine knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to stir motivation in others. They must take risks for the good of their school. They must use every attainable resource to encourage continuous improvement. A leader can be a superintendent, a principal, or a teacher.

As a future principal, I will build and maintain a vision, direction, and focus for student learning. With technology constantly changing in our society, administrators must change with the times as well. Schools need to improve the quality of education by giving students all available resources. Principals must seek continuous improvements in the school setting instead of recycling back to traditional thoughts on education. The old ways will not meet the needs of today's student.

Principals must foster an atmosphere that encourages teachers to take risks to meet the needs of students. Secondly, principals must constantly encourage and praise the success of teachers. Principals must demand a high level of professionalism. To achieve this, they must encourage their teachers to keep abreast of the latest technological advances and instructional techniques. By being the instructional leader and possessing

these skills themselves, principals can foster an atmosphere of respect. This atmosphere can lead a staff to become a unified team.

I will follow in the footsteps of other effective principals who have strong core belief systems. I will take the advice of Todd Whitaker, in that I will be “cool to care” in my school (Whitaker, 2003). By this, I mean that I will be interested and caring. I want to treat everyone with respect and dignity; always take a positive approach; model how teachers should treat students. I understand that what matters is people, not programs. I will hire great teachers and make every decision based on people (Whitaker, 2003).

I completely understand that it will be a difficult task to have everyone believe in my concepts, or believe in me. But if I treat everyone as professionals, and foster a community of respect and learning, I will build relationships that will create trust.

In order to create a community center of learning, principals need to keep in constant contact with the local public. This fosters an image of a school that takes pride in its students. The relationship between school and community is important, yet it will not be successful if parents are not involved. Communication with families should be constantly strengthened; it should be among our highest priorities. Schools need to utilize more members of society in the educational partnership.

In order to be an effective principal, one must have the qualities of a leader. He or she must demonstrate leadership qualities not only to staff or community, but also to students, as well. To focus more on effective leadership, the topic of the six ISSL Standards must be broached. If one can comprehend and build leadership qualities based on the ISSL Standards, one can improve on what it means to be a principal.

## **Visionary Leadership**

When I think about visionary leadership, I am reminded of our District's Educational Mission and goals that are posted in every classroom. Our mission is to provide the highest quality of education. Specifically, our goals include an emphasis on improved reading, higher graduation rates, and the strategic meeting of students' special needs including equity concerns. But in order to follow our performance-based mission goals, we must model what we state. If we are to improve our education, we must follow through with our visionary leadership. Vision as an "educational platform" exists when people in an organization share an explicit agreement on the values, beliefs, purposes, and goals that should guide their behavior (Lashway, 1997).

There are five characteristics to look for when developing a vision:

- attracts commitments and energizes people
- creates meaning in workers' lives
- establishes a standard of excellence
- bridges the present to the future
- transcends the status quo (SEDL, 1993)

These characteristics are not necessarily going to make a principal become a successful leader. These characteristics help to energize people to become the best they can be. Leaders have the capacity to translate vision into reality. How can leaders creatively communicate those ideas to others? They must impress their ideas and beliefs onto others so that the realization of a vision can take place.

"All leaders have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place and the ability to translate that vision into reality" (Bennis, 1990). The mission of the school provides purpose, meaning, and significance and enables the principal to motivate and empower the staff to contribute to the realization of any vision

to that mission (SEDL, 1993). The principal must create a climate and a culture of new ideas. With those new ideas, one must take them to a level of strategic planning. What the vision means in classroom terms is new curriculum, programs, or staffing (Lashway, 1997). At some point, budget, evaluations, policies, and procedures will feel the distinctive viewpoint on vision. Vision is a process that requires continuous reflection, action, and reevaluation. Visionary leadership is a continuous transformation of skills that may build the relationship between the school and its public. But before principals begin to implement new reforms, they must have communication with the staff, community, and district board.

A leader does not want to start a reform without any support. Once principals have implemented a new reform policy, they need to look at the strategic importance of the reform by gathering information and data, and analyzing that data. The best way to begin data analysis is by assessing student learning regularly in order to identify any barriers that are blocking success. School leaders must also get the community involved in understanding the mission and goals.

### **Instructional Leadership**

“If we could do only one thing to build school capacity, we would develop a cadre of leaders who understand the challenges of school improvement, relish academic achievement, and rally all stakeholders to higher standards of learning”, stated a blue-ribbon Consortium on Renewing Education (NSDC, 2000). Instructional leaders must be able to coach, teach, and develop the teachers in their schools as well as be steeped in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to supervise a continuous improvement process that measures progress in raising student performance (NSDC, 2000). Effective



principals who are good instructional leaders spend a large amount of their time observing classrooms and encouraging teachers in their performances. Instructional leaders track student learning and test score results to assess what is needed.

Instructional leaders focus energy on staff development, by challenging staff on teaching techniques, curriculum and disciplinary handling. An instructional leader, according to the School Leaders Licensure Consortium, should be able to:

- Facilitate the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community
- Advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
- Ensure management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
- Collaborate with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources
- Act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
- Understand, respond to, and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (NSDC, 2000)

Leaders will become effective if these skills are taught and followed.

All principals have the knowledge or resources that help them become instructional leaders. What must be encouraged is the distribution of leadership within the school. As a principal, I must partner with staff to improve classroom instruction and student learning. By allowing teachers time to receive instruction themselves, they can cultivate their own professional development. Just because teachers work within the classroom, does not necessarily mean they cannot be part of the leadership within the building. By allowing staff to assist in how the building operates, more staff members will take pleasure in their teaching environment. District support for a principal's role as an instructional leader is paramount. The District must allocate time for the principals, away from the building, to enhance their skills.

As an effective instructional leader, the principal needs to look at his or her school as a learning center. The learning center must be safe, clean, attractive, and well equipped and promote equity. A learning center must allow academic growth. Instructional leadership not only should focus on the core academic subjects but on the non-core academics, such as art, personal health, social skills, or technology. By broadening our educational goals and our instructional strategies, we will not only achieve an increase in student academic performance but also create healthy, self-fulfilled, active citizens who will help themselves and others, and serve their communities (Ames, 2003). Therefore, schools must employ new curriculum designs and motivational techniques in order to promote academic and social success.

The reality of the current principal is an average work week of 62 hours with less than one-third of that time spent on curriculum and instructional activities (Cooley & Shen, 2003). It is impossible for a principal to be in all places at all times. As omnipresence being outside the realm of possibilities, principals, need to find support and cooperation from staff. The complexities in schools and the community's demands place an overwhelming amount of stress on principals dealing with management issues. Principals are under the pressure of accountability and their involvement in professional job responsibilities indicates that they are working on multiple fronts (Cooley & Shen, 2003).

Professional development of principals as managers would be more effective if work was prioritized to meet performance-based goals. The goal of cultivating leadership skills could only be accomplished if more positive collaboration, communication, and a universal understanding of the standards occurred. Instructional

leaders must have a structure in which to delegate functional and operational decisions to the location closest to task performance (Doyle & Rice, 2002). Successful instructional leadership in the school environment needs to be set up to promote growth, have high expectations for performances based on analysis of student assessments and staff development, and have a continuing ethical contribution within the classroom.

### **Organizational Leadership**

The third ISSL Standard addresses organizational leadership. The manner in which a school organizes itself and the way it uses time reflects what is being taught and learned in the school. The school leadership must impress a strong message of safety on the staff and students. Principals must encourage an efficient and effective learning environment so that school procedures are a shared value. The principal can use school management to enhance learning and teaching by setting high standards, expectations, and performances. If an administrator has conceptual knowledge of learning, teaching techniques, and student development, that administrator has a better understanding on how to manage the school. By improving our high school programs, administrators can challenge the academic delivery system. They can become activists to assist our students (Olsen, 2002). A principal maximizes all opportunities to promote academic success in order to have an efficient school organization.

“Workplace learning is best understood...in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed” (Brown & Duguid, 1995).

Principals must take it upon themselves to become an organizational leader by focusing on student learning, honest dialogue, reflective of practice, collaboration, and the sharing

of norms and values (Scribner, 1999). Organizational leadership is the reorganizing of structural and institutional arrangements within the school. Principals must routinely examine and question values that guide organizational actions, generate new insights and knowledge, improve organizational memory through interpreting and sharing information, and build capacity for effective use and dissemination of knowledge (Scribner, 1999). Organizational learning can lead to change in values, behavior, and norms. Better decision-making could evolve, as well as more positive feedback.

A principal knows all students are not successful in the traditional school setting. That is not to say a principal should not stop caring, instead a principal needs to examine alternative ideas. Some students face a variety of problems, such as: parents who are divorced or were never wed; a lack of support for education in the home; financial instability and high mobility; a lack of friends at school; a history of academic failure; poor anger management; teen parents; drug addiction; gang member; sexual assault; poor health care, or family abuse (McGee, 2001). Unfortunately, these children are classified as disruptive, deviant and dysfunctional students who are not part of the normal traditional setting. What tends to happen is that principals and staff alike are ignoring these students, to the point of having them drop out of school. As a future principal, I feel it is important to teach all with all resources available. Principals must have “a commitment to learning” as the key to organizational improvement (Scribner, 1999). All students are quite capable of achieving success when presented with an appropriate educational environment (McGee, 2001). Therefore it is very important that principals organize themselves to the point of promoting academic success for all.

A principal not only has knowledge to promote academic success, as well as instructional success, but also must understand the legal issues that come to hand. A principal must strategically and promptly intervene in problem solving in potential school building problems, in maintenance, or with the disciplinary actions of students. Principals need to monitor and modify their schools, staff, and students, regularly to the point of having effective communication.

### **Collaborative Leadership**

Collaborative leadership is the idea of working together in order to achieve a successful goal. Collaboration must be purposeful, planned, and structured into the regular workday of teachers and administrators (Gideon, 2002). Collaboration is the key to school improvement, and develops over time. By exemplifying communication and presenting positive trust, school improvement can become successful.

A leader collaborates with the business community, government, higher education faculties, parents, and the staff. When collaboration occurs, it is usually done due to issues that could directly relate to the school or attempt to improve relations with the community. By having successful community involvement, students may improve social skills, which would have a positive impact on relationships (Olsen, 2002). Getting the community involved with the school would convince the general public to recognize the accomplishments as well as the needs or wants. "It is true that no one school or program can succeed without the support of the entire community" (McGee, 2001). What the principal must attempt to do is to form public relations with community leaders or businesses in the hope of achieving excellence for the school. By establishing

partnerships in education, the school is using applicable resources to strengthen progress and promote supportive school goals.

Two basic dimensions of working collaboratively are that of team building and team planning. Team building is the process through which group members find ways of shaping individual ideas, interests, and needs into a well-focused purpose and plan of action that all group members can support (SEDL, 2003). Team planning involves carefully assessing local needs and resources, identifying priorities, and finding manageable ways of addressing those needs (SEDL, 2003). Collaboration helps develop skills and cohesiveness, but people must bring with them “clout, commitment, and diversity” to the group (Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1933). Teachers, students, administrators, parents, business and civil leaders, informal community leaders, and advocates need to be involved in the collaborative process to bring about a balance within the school. Collaborative school-community projects require effort, patience, and new perspectives about what’s important in teaching and learning (SEDL, 2003).

Collaboration among educators along with social members of society, a principal needs to realize that there are risks to take and controversy to overcome, but rewards will benefit the school in the end.

Principals must foster relationships with others to broaden the school’s interest. One tends to serve together to benefit ones-self. By benefiting one another, goals can be achieved with efficiency, as well as problems being solved with thought process in conjunction with integrated programs. Teacher’s voices must be heard and principals must be willing to honor varying viewpoints. Principals must not take charge of group decisions, but must provide the time and space for faculty to process their thoughts,

explore resources and barriers, and come to their own conclusion (Gideon, 2002). The idea of collaborative leadership is beneficial to help achieve success for the school by placing it on the map and giving it recognition.

### **Ethical Leadership**

When I think of ethical leadership, I think of diversity. Celebrating diversity is in opposition to the idea of separating people according to their cultures or by their handicaps; it is the understanding that everyone is different. Having moral obligations to society, to the profession, to the school board, and to students, principals find that “it often is not clear what is right or wrong, or what one ought to do, or which perspective is right in moral terms” (Lashway, 1996). As a principal, one must promote success for all students by acting with integrity and fairness in an ethical manner. Our modern society is based on various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics.

Schools are moral institutions, designed to promote social norms, and principals are the moral leaders. Principals have a special responsibility to exercise authority in an ethical way (Lashway, 1996). An ethical dilemma is a choice between two rights.

Dilemmas arise when values conflict. Lashway (1996) suggested resolving ethical dilemmas:

- Leaders should have and be willing to act on a definite sense of ethical standards.
- Leaders must anticipate the consequences of each choice and attempt to identify who will be affected, and in what ways.
- Leaders can often reframe ethical issues, such as offering a third path that avoids the either-or thinking.
- Leaders should have the habit of conscious reflection.

The leader's responsibility is complex and multidimensional, but through positive actions, restraint, accountability, and honesty, ethical leadership can become very successful.

Ethical leadership is also the ability of the principal to generate a school culture where students feel safe. Students learn what we teach, so therefore it is very important to provide a positive backdrop for students' social experiences. Schools must be consistent in disciplinary actions, as well as empowering teachers the right to create a classroom culture holding all students accountable for their actions (Wiseman, 2003).

America's heterogeneous society makes schools examine the different philosophical and historical aspects that influence education and therefore the principal and staff. We must allow every student to have a free and quality education. Staff as well as students, must understand the common good of allowing other ethnic cultures, as well as handicap individuals, to attend. By having a heterogeneous school, administration can broaden the curriculum to be taught and shared. Shared leadership and empowerment of teachers and specialists are reviewed as an essential element for effective collaboration and achievement of educational environments where all students experience a sense of acceptance and belonging (Williams, 2001). Ethical commitments and beliefs do and should influence decisions, practices, strategies, and structures (Williams, 2001). There needs to be effective communication to extract the full potential of diversity on a positive value in order to broaden the educational experience for all students. Equity needs to exist within the school, so that students can achieve their fullest potential. If the curriculum taught is dominated by the culture of the majority, the need for understanding others has been lost. A need for a core curriculum that addresses all



with various cultural differences should exist (Williams, 2001). Maybe by getting to know others, we can start to respect others and encourage integrity. We need to look at ourselves, and realize to be an administrator; we need to treat all with respect and dignity.

### **Political Leadership**

With political leadership as the sixth ISSL Standard, I'm reminded that principals need to understand what it means to represent his or her school with social acceptance and awareness, the legality of related issues, and political collaboration. Principal Patrick Cwayna stated "the principal must be a political person in order to bring about the constituency and politicians into the process of change" (King, 2000). King (2000) stated that effective leadership is meeting the challenge of initiating change within your school. A principal needs to comprehend the political system. Increasingly, though, principals are caught in the web of influences created by community pressures and relentless community politics (Howe & Townsend, 2000). The most important qualities a principal needs when it comes to political leadership are skills in dealing with a range of people and issues. The principal's effectiveness depends on the ability to:

- Develop a framework for responding to challenges
- Analyze a problem quickly based on the best available information
- Identify and develop alternative plans to deal with the groups and the issues
- Make a decision using good judgment based on a clear analysis of the problem and its present or future impact
- Communicate resolutions clearly and sensitively to all parties (Howe, 2000)

Principals prepared with the best skills have a greater chance of success over those who lack skills. In order to be successful in political leadership, principals must develop an accepting view, be cautious, believe that every person who asks a question deserves a response, make decisions based upon the best information available, know and

observe stated policies, focus on the issue presented, maintain your objectivity, and listen carefully (Howe and Townsend, 2000).

Public relations play an essential role in sharpening public policy when it is implemented properly (Armistead, 2000). Partnerships with communities, businesses, media and politicians will help bring about reform in credibility and collaboration. Innovative instruction, integrated technology, tailored professional development, community service and work-based learning experiences, and strong partnerships with parents and the community is vital in attempting to achieve high academic success and student achievements (King, 2000). By having effective communication on public policy, community involvement will be benefited. A research-based approach that strategically focuses your message must provide awareness and interest. In the hope of influencing public policy, one has to keep communication consistent with public officials. Also it would be beneficial to host public officials at a social event or bring them into your school as guest speakers or visitors. Also out of respect, offer yourself as a resource, or donate student artwork. The more outgoing one is the better chance he or she has to influence public policy within the district. By introducing positive community trends, issues, and potential changes, a principal is seen as being a successful political spokesman, for that person is putting their school first above their own needs.

### **Personal Review**

To effectively act as principal, one has to have qualities of a leader. A principal needs to be rooted in established knowledge and skills. This person needs to be dedicated to instructional learning and preparation. Highly effective principals have to have

communication skills. If one wants to accomplish tasks most effectively, one must employ all available resources with the community, the student's parents, the local school board, the political organizations, the staff, and the students.

Communication leads to organizational leadership by improving or showing changes within the local school. A principal cannot be the only one to take responsibility, though. That principal draws on the strengths of his or her teachers. Teachers will provide the leadership essential for successful reforms. The job of a principal is to provide planning implementation, and long-range improvements within the school, but it is the teachers who perform the task. The principal is a leader. A leader accepts responsibilities and puts forward ideas of creativity or risks. If these reforms succeed, it would not be solely because of the principal, it would be due, in part, to the teachers. If reforms fail, the principal must find ways to readdress the issues. We must keep in mind that "programs are never the solution, and they are never the problem" (Whitaker, 8). In order to be an effective administrator, one needs to reflect on what good leaders are. Good leaders are those who realize that people, not programs, determine the quality of a school. So one must go about getting better teachers or improving the teachers you have (Whitaker, 8). By strengthening the social relationships within the building, a principal can improve the quality of the school.

People make mistakes every day. Principals are no exceptions. Mistakes can be avoided though, by following these simple rules, which were found in the article entitled, "The Top 10 Mistakes that Principals Make". They were 10) not notifying your immediate supervisor by keeping him or her out of the loop, 9) not respecting established policies and procedures, 8) being out of touch with reality, 7) having a lackadaisical

attitude toward discipline, 6) not practicing effective internal communication, 5) neglecting to follow through, 4) neglecting your teachers, 3) being too demanding, 2) overspending the budget, and 1) lacking balance in your life (McAvoy & Rhodes, 2003). These mistakes, which could be avoided, have to be practiced every day. Principals must remember they are prone to make mistakes, but in order to be a great principal one must work to avoid these types of mistakes.

A principal does not become a leader because he or she takes classes on how to become a principal. If a person wants to succeed on becoming a principal, a leader, that person has to understand what people want and need. A principal needs to learn how to listen and talk with people. He also needs to understand different cultures, because not everyone is the same. There is an important relationship between the law and protection of the students as well as the staff. A principal needs to have a sense of humor. Laugh with the students and the staff. Others will understand him as a human. He needs to be strong. People like to mock policies or complain when something doesn't benefit their needs. A principal needs to keep pushing forward with ideas and creativity. The school is a setting for bringing about knowledge and success. In order to succeed, he must find the best resources available to achieve his school's needs, even if they are limited. The principal doesn't become a leader because of his title; he becomes a leader because he can convince the community, staff, and students to believe in him.

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