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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools: A reflective essay

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Abstract

As the 21st Century approaches, changes in social, political, and economic environments have been accelerating. There is a change of attitude about the educational system and its role in our society. It is my belief that our school systems will be the stable institutions which will maintain and teach the values our society will need to survive. Education has a powerful influence on our children. The responsibility of the principal of an educational institution is great.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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As the 21st Century approaches, changes in social, political, and economic environments have been accelerating. There is a change of attitude about the educational system and its role in our society. It is my belief that our school systems will be the stable institutions which will maintain and teach the values our society will need to survive. Education has a powerful influence on our children. The responsibility of the principal of an educational institution is great.

Community is the basis of education. Without the community intimately involved in the educational process our democratic society and values will not survive. This paper reflects my vision of the role of an educational administrator as it relates in the coming 21st century.

The Organizational Nature of Schools

It is important to understand the basic make up of our current school systems before we can influence and guide the future of education. The organization and administration of

the traditional rational school is derived by Max Weber. His theories have had a profound hold on school systems for years. Weber's definition of bureaucracy is very specific as to the role of the ordered system of superordination and subordination. Weber's theory involves the monocratic, bureaucratic model which can be found in every advanced country in the world. It has been the basic model for organization of public school systems in the United States in past years (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

Weber's bureaucratic model is capable of attaining high degrees of efficiency and control over human beings. The underlying assumption of this model is to divide the population into two groups, leaders and followers. It also assigns the leader to power roles of control, which means the leader decides all. The delegation of power remains limited in capacity to the followers, with credit and failure the total responsibility of the administrator. Ideally, the leader defends

the subordinate in all situations whether right or wrong as long as the subordinate takes orders and is loyal to the leadership. Weber's theory implies that if a leader does not exercise authority it will be lost (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

As an educational leader looking forward to the 21st Century, I do not believe this form of leadership will be effective in our current and future community schools in the information age. Some of Weber's bureaucratic principles have a negative or dysfunctional consequence. If I, as principal, focus only on the rules to complete a project, I limit the initiative which can be taken by the staff. My philosophy of leadership is based on shared decision-making. Because my major function as an administrator will be to make decisions, I plan to use a process which includes the very people who will be affected by the decisions. We will need to identify the problem, select the best alternative, develop and implement an

action plan, evaluate the effectiveness of the project, and update changes as necessary (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

The decision-making process begins by building a network of trust and motivation between administration and staff to encourage sharing of effective educational strategies. I plan to work closely with and delegate responsibility to the natural leaders within the organization.

Based on Maslow's theory of human motivation, I also feel it is important to recognize and reward staff members for participation in the decision-making process (Guthrie & Reed, 1991). While the staff need to be responsible for their own professional and personal growth, I will reward and motivate through staff development (Cunard, 1990). In my school, an environment of respect will be encouraged, which in turn will create a positive school climate and enhance feelings of belongingness (Guthrie & Reed).

With an increase of mandated programs, learner outcomes and the added responsibility of encouraging life-long learning for the community, schools must have an open climate which emphasizes wide sharing of authority. An open door policy of communication along with creating a cooperative working spirit must be vertical and two-way in nature (Morphet, Johns, & Reller, 1982).

Good leaders are visionary, positive, decisive, and organized with a good knowledge base to motivate and keep staff on task (Morphet, et. al., 1982). To be an effective community education leader in the new educational environment, I must be a strategic planner. I must appraise the conditions in the external and internal organization continually. I must assess the organization's mission relative to environmental changes. I must consistently evaluate existing organizational procedures (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

The Role of the Community Education Leader

The role of a community leader includes that of communicator, evaluator, and strategic planner. Community educators have a variety of operating environments which require flexibility, adaptability, and innovation (Zemlo, Clark, Lauff, & Nelson, 1990).

Communication is an important aspect of the job of being a principal. Being a "people person" and genuinely liking people is an important quality in an administrator, and can make him/her a "natural" for the job (Black & English, 1986). As a leader I need to have certain personal and professional qualities which include a personal and educational vision, an extent of commitment, human relation skills, and the ability to be an instructional leader (Gorton & Thierbach-Schneider, 1991).

As principal, I will be faced with broad complicated problems and new expectations by the community. The devastating effects of drugs and criminal activity; the fear of

diseases with no cure; the fragility of our environment;

concerns generated by an aging population; and the impending

social and economic crisis associated with illiteracy, high

dropout rates, and teen pregnancy, I believe, will determine the

nature of programs and services the community will need now

and in the future (Zemlo et. al., 1990). The primary focus of my

role as principal will be to meet the needs of all students and

in doing so address problems of youth-at-risk due to the

involvement in these issues (Zemlo et. al.).

There must be a plan and structure where appropriate

education services are designed to accommodate those most at-

risk. The blame must not be on the at-risk students for not

fitting the system.   As an administrator, I will deal with the

problem of children at-risk by formulating a community wide

committee to look at school policy, curriculum, and area

educational services and agencies that are available to the

school and its students. The objective will be to develop and

strengthen the parent/school relationship and to encourage students to be more accountable for their own learning (Brehrens, 1991).

Some of the strategies I will suggest to a committee dealing with at-risk students is covered by The Urban Superintendents' Network in an article "Dealing with Dropouts: From the Urban Superintendents' Call to Action" (Brehrens, 1991). Strategies will support early intervention, especially in a disadvantaged population, where there is a need for consistent discipline and a sense of community and school-wide goals. Brehren's report calls for the creation of a positive school climate which includes parent involvement, peer counseling, tutoring, and high expectations from teachers and parents. All these elements are essential in developing the self-esteem that leads to academic success (Brehrens).

As an administrator of a school which has the belief that all students can learn and that students learn through instruction

guided by teachers, I will use teacher evaluation as a tool for

improving instruction.   I believe evaluation can help teachers

improve instruction.   An atmosphere of trust must be

maintained with goal setting as an integral part of the

evaluation process.   The persons being evaluated must have a

clear understanding of the criteria upon which their

performance is being appraised.   The evaluation process should

include a pre-evaluation meeting as well as a post-evaluation

meeting (Cangelosi, 1991).   I especially like the Toledo Plan

because the responsibility for teacher evaluation is divided

equally among staff.   The plan uses a controversial, but

effective combination of rigorous evaluation, training for new

teachers, remediation for veteran teachers, and peer review in

an effort to rid the faculty of incompetents. The administration

oversees the process of performance (McCormick, 1985).

Whatever the tool may be in any given school system, I

firmly believe that the   evaluation system must have validity,

reliability, inner-rater reliability, and intra-rater reliability (Cangelosi, 1991). I also feel that goal setting and professional improvement plans increase the teachers' level of concern and also encourages effective teaching (Cangelosi).

Pertinent to teacher evaluation is the discussion of the issue of teacher rights and due process. The administrator takes great risk when dealing with marginal teachers. These teachers are described as probationary first year teachers and experienced teachers whose dismissal from their position can be difficult if due process is not followed to the letter of the law. The National Organization of Legal Problems in Education (NOLPE) advised evaluators to be specific, provide documentation and to never use "hearsay" evidence. NOLPE also suggested that any complaints must relate to performance criteria. Also deemed as important is refraining from the use of "we" when recommending ways to improve performance (Cangelosi 1991).

The real victims of marginal teachers are the many students, who have their learning opportunities wasted; society which has not received the services for which it has paid; and the teaching profession which has had its image tarnished and status lowered by perpetuating the failures of marginal teachers (Cangelosi, 1991).

As a principal who will use evaluation as a tool for improvement, I believe there are changes in our understanding of learning and teaching that have evolved during the 1980s which are important to instructional supervision. The view of learning and teaching has traditionally been a teacher-centered concept. Generally, the supervisor used paper and pencil as observation instruments, with the supervisor and teacher meeting to relate the observed behavior of the teacher and students. Now, the creation of a new mindscape on human learning will be the emerging framework. James Nolan and Pam Francis (1992) reinforced what I have always believed about

learning. For students to learn, they need to actively construct meaning. When students are able to relate prior understandings and then view the world from a different perspective, that is learning. Students must be autonomous learners. If it takes cooperative groups to motivate and accommodate the learning styles of students, we should support it. As educators, we also need to know our content areas well enough to allow students to question, analyze, and to synthesize information (Nolan & Francis).

To improve instruction, the supervisor should collaborate with teachers to help them reflect on and learn about their own teaching practices. Supervision should not be viewed as a role, but as a function. Group supervision, peer coaching or colleague consultation could help involve more people in the evaluation process. The primary aim would be to learn about and improve teaching. I do not see myself as a critic of teaching performance, but rather, as a facilitator to the teaching staff

in attempting to understand problems, issues, and dilemmas that happen in the learning and teaching process. I will also stimulate new ideas and methods that will help raise student achievement (Nolan & Francis, 1992).

In addition to being an administrator and evaluator, I believe the principal must be a strategic planner. Strategic planning of community education will allow each school to have its own personality. With the use of its own talents and resources, each school can help to fulfill the mission established by the district and its own extraordinary goals (Psencik, 1991). There is a greater unity within the educational community with the role of an administrator as a leader of leaders. To have an effective community school, I must be an effective strategic planner. As that individual, I must continuously appraise the conditions of the internal/ external community, assess our mission relative to the environment, and evaluate existing

procedures to determine if they are truly effective in carrying out the mission of the school district (Guthrie & Reed 1991).

Personal Professional Vision: Tapping the Power Bases

Communication, evaluation, and planning cannot be carried out by one person. The community is a force waiting to "assist" an administrator. It can be an entity that can work for or against me as principal. I know it is going to be important for me to know something about the community because it is the key to my survival. In the words of Abraham Lincoln when asked how he felt after his first term in office as president, "I feel like the guy who was tarred and feathered and taken out of town on a rail...If it wasn't for the honor of the thing I'd just as soon as forgotten about it" (Black & English, 1986, p. 54).

Rarely does the community act as a single entity. The reality is that there are many elements within communities that react to events. People identify themselves by race, religion, ethnic background, position, geography, and common

interests. Many are minority communities and there may be many majority communities.

There are vociferous minorities that sound like the majority at board meetings. It will be important to identify the different groups of people in the district I will be involved with to determine the demographics. Racial background, age, type of homes, and many other indicators of wealth and culture are deemed important when piecing together the make up of a community. The power structure can be an informal and formal network of citizens who are influential in making things happen in the community. It is not always obvious where the power structures exist and must be approached carefully. But once identified it can be a source of support.

Another challenge facing educators in the restructuring of community education, will be to carve out a role for themselves in the external community. When involving the community with it's attitudes and actions, there will need to be a collaborative

effort to deliver services in order for reform to succeed. There will also need to be an effort made to involve parents, family support, health and social services, and lifelong learning programs (Layson, 1991).

The next generation of community education leaders will extend education beyond the school. My personal philosophy in education includes the focus on lifelong educational services. I believe that the schools need to modify and offer programs targeted for the community's needs. For example, in some communities there may be a need to extend the school day with enrichment programs, to offer homework hotline services, remediation classes and activities, summer youth employment programs for the youth at-risk, and cross-age tutoring programs to enhance learning (Zemlo et al., 1990). The responsibility of education will be seen as a partnership between school and community. By sharing the programs and services consumers move closer to the schools. The resources

should be available so that programs and services can be utilized by organizations which include buisnesses, other government agencies, service organizations, and industrial and manufacturing operations. Community-based school programs can be brought into the school. There are also a variety of other educational activities such as early childhood intervention projects, parents-as-teachers programs, environmental degradation awareness, crime and drug abuse programs, and social services agencies. Public and private organizations act as partners to support academic and enrichment programs. As the need increases, some schools are setting up full day and extended day programs in facilities provided by buisness to resolve enrollment problems and to meet the needs of working parents (Zemlo et al.).

I want to use the power bases in the communitys to improve the educational system. Unless the power that I am given can influence or actually be used to make changes, I may as well

not have it.   One view of a little known power arithmetic axiom

is: "The best way to multiple power is to divide it... the best

way to possess power is to give it away" (Black & English,

1986, p. 56).

Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer (1979) discussed the

bases of power which support what I believe; a leader cannot

automatically influence people, he or she must utilize power

so as to influence the bases of power. They noted there is no

best way to go about influencing people. Situational

Leadership is a management concept that Paul Hersey and

Kenneth H. Blanchard developed together in 1967. I will decide

as a strategic leader, the leadership style that I will need to

use with individuals and groups depending on the maturity level

of the people I am working with. Hersey and Blanchard define

maturity as a task-specific concept. People are considered to

be more or less mature depending on what is being attempted by

the leader and the ability and willingness of the individuals and

groups to take responsibility for directing their own behavior in a particular area. To be effective, I may also need to vary the situational use of power in my leadership style (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer).

The community needs to know that they are important and valued. They need to know that their contributions to the system and to you will be acknowledged. The proper use of power groups "enhance" the school. The misuse of these individuals can cut potential power passed to the school and the administrator in the future. Competent administrators survive longer if they believe in the community and it's power. If I am too busy doing my job to worry about politics, then I will not be doing my job (Black & English, 1986).

An influential leader in the community can be one whom people look toward to see "what" they should be doing. These leaders may not belong to a club or have official titles, but they are leaders nonetheless. These informal community leaders

may already work for the schools and usually are not in a professional capacity. They may be the head custodian, or in building and grounds, or in maintenance. Remember that the large majority of the districts' classified staff live in the community opposed to the professional staff, who may not. Thus they often know the community better and are listened to by the people (Black & English, 1986).

Administrators with strong commitments to functioning as instructional leaders, are aware of instructional problems and the areas which need improvement. As a principal I will have a clear and strong set of long-range goals, I will be more effective in managerial problem-finding and instructional problem solving (Gorton & Thierbach-Schneider, 1991).

State legislation impacts district long range planning. As instructional leader, I must keep my vision in focus, my beliefs and values in tact, for my community school to be successful. Its philosophy, program and services will be recognized and

valued in its own community. Thus, I believe that success of schools in the 21st Century will depend on the creativity and dedication of their leaders as to how quickly full potential is realized (Zemlo et al., 1990).

In a speech delivered as Director of the Iowa Department of Education, Dr. William Lepley (1990) refers to an ideal community school district as one which provides a framework of continuous education that spans a person's entire life. Dr. Lepley believes citizens should never be forced to leave the local educational system. He refers to the system as a deliver-based structure, which allows students of all ages to move in and out of the educational continuum without barriers.

The ideal community school can house a wealth of resources which can act as a catalyst for children and their families in the community. There are educational opportunities for adults that can range from childbirth and parenting classes to pre-retirement planning (Lepley, 1990). As a principal, I can be a

significant community leader who supports family services and

educational enhancement. I believe that the ideal district

should provide a continuum of education and services for

lifelong learning (Lepley).

Conclusion

It is evident that the role of the schools of the 21st Century

will be different than it has been in the past. Whether in higher

education or pk-12 schools, it seems we must all work together

to develop a system that works. Everyone must have a

legitimate role in shaping the outcome of the community

schools. Whether it be a special interest group or a branch of

government, we need to acknowledge that all of these

components are part of the educational system. As Dr. Lepley

(1990) states:

We must not tear down a system that has served us so well,

but we must have an educational barn-raising in Iowa, where

we all come together as partners bringing together our

collective commitment, cooperation, and hard work to

create an educational system for 2010 that gives us reason

to celebrate and be festive because we created it together.

(p. 7)

As principal I cannot be satisfied with the maintenance

of a system that must change in order to meet the needs of

learners in the 21st century. The new principal must be

visionary and be willing to work toward making that vision a

reality. The challenge I face as an educator is to develop the

new principalship so that our students will be better prepared

for their future role in society (Cunard, 1990).

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