

Marshall K. Christensen

LEADING HIGH PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

In the article creating and maintaining an effective educational system defined as one of the most important responsibilities of every society. Teaching students and leading high performance schools the author considers to be two of the most important callings in life. Much attention is paid to the role of school leaders in the development of educational system.

Introduction

Passing knowledge, skills and values from one generation to the next is both a primal instinct and a sacred trust of the human experience. Creating and maintaining an effective educational system is one of the most important responsibilities of every society. Teaching students and leading high performance schools are, therefore, two of the most important callings in life. As leaders of Ukraine's schools, I commend you for dedicating your lives to the noble challenge you face. It is a great honor for me to participate in this International Conference at BorysGrinchenko Kyiv University in The Year of Education and Information Society.

We do not need to be reminded that the challenges we face in fulfilling our task as educators are extraordinary. Financial pressures and political realities have placed many of our schools, indeed our systems of education, at risk. In the United States, for example, school budgets are shrinking, class sizes are increasing, academic programs are being cut, and teachers are under stress. Two of my daughters and my their husbands are teachers in the American system. They remind us of the personal stresses caused by the budget crisis in American schools.

Ironically, these pressure points come at a time when the demand for and the necessity of high quality schools has never been greater. High performing schools is a

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national priority in America. In 2001, during the administration of George W. Bush, the «No Child Left Behind» legislation passed by Congress mandated standards for schools and the education of all children. This legislation has, in turn, put pressure on state governments to specify standards for school leaders. At least 46 states have adopted leadership standards for the principals of schools (See Website: «Becoming a Leader: Preparing School Principals for Today's Schools». The Wallace Foundation, Perspectives, 2008, p. 2).

Accordingly, the role of school leaders is changing rapidly in American schools. As one national observer noted, «In addition to performing customary administrative and managerial duties such as budget oversight, operations and discipline, school leaders are taking on additional responsibilities as fundraisers, consensus builders, data analysts, negotiators, instructional leaders and public relations specialists» (See Website: «Strong Leaders Strong Schools». National Conference of State Legislatures, April 2008).

My conversations with Ukrainian educators lead me to the conclusion that the school system in this country is also in crisis mode. Are schools a national priority? Are educators valued for the contribution they make to society? Are local and national bureaucratic systems responding adequately to the needs of educators and the students in their schools? Is there a vision for reforming the school system? Is there the political will to fulfill the promise of providing quality education to every student? Are we cultivating values in schools that students need for life? Do teachers have the resources they need in their classrooms to prepare students for the future? These are the questions I hear in your country.

In our competitive world, students deserve the best from society – not second rate schools that are unable to prepare them for their future. The question we ask is how can we provide high quality education? In reality we are asking whether children of Ukraine will enjoy the educational resources and services that they need.

Leading schools in times like these requires heroic effort and new ways of thinking – especially about the task of leading high performing schools.

As school leaders, what can we do to assure high performing schools and effective leadership? I would like to propose three priorities for school principals.

Sharing Your Vision

One of your first tasks as a school leader is to articulate the vision for your school. A vision reflects the mission of the school, but does more. The vision includes three parts:

1) A significant purpose. The vision statement sets the direction for the school, explaining why the school exists, what role it plays in the community, and how it serves students.

2) The vision also paints a picture of the future. It states where the school is headed and what a better future will look like. The vision reflects a shared purpose. It inspires everyone involved because every teacher and staff member understands that she or he is making a valuable contribution to future improvements.

3) The vision outlines behaviors that guide daily decisions at the school. These behaviors may include respect for one another, commitment to the well-being of each student, and the safety of everyone in the school. The vision also states high academic expectations and provides the basis for monitoring teacher performance and student achievement. In your vision, we can see how behaviors represent the core values of your school.

The vision statement for Eastlake High School in Sammamish, Washington is a good example:

Eastlake High School is a community of learners in which every person is known well and valued for his/her intrinsic worth. Eastlake students conduct themselves with

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dignity, exhibit the highest personal standards of behavior, and demonstrate personal initiative in their education. Eastlake institutional structures center on what is best for students, promote creativity and excellence, and allow students to view knowledge as interconnected. Eastlake graduates possess the necessary skills and knowledge to empower their success in our diverse and interdependent world.

(See website: Eastlake High School, Lake Washington School District).

This statement identifies the school's priorities, expectations of its students, and outcomes of education.

Your vision for your school should be just as inspiring. Can we say that our schools exist to help each student reach her or his potential? Are we cultivating talents? Preparing leaders for the future of Ukraine? Will your school be known for high quality education in your Oblast? As principal, you are the one who must articulate the vision.

I don't know your vision for your school, but I know that stating it clearly and reminding teachers and staff about the vision is one of your most important responsibilities. The vision will help carry your school through difficult times.

Take every opportunity to discuss the vision of your school with teachers and staff. Invite individuals to share stories about how the vision is making a difference. And ask questions about how the vision might be clarified, strengthened, and made more vital to the school. Keep the vision alive, not a dormant document on a shelf. In high performance schools, the vision lives.

Creating a Community of Learning

The concept of the «community of learning» seems to have lost much of its appeal during recent decades, at least in the United States. This loss is tragic. The concept of community is central to the life of the mind. To know, to teach, to learn – everything we do as educators is carried out in the community of learning.

In describing the nature of reality (ontology) we do so in the context of community. In asking how we know reality (epistemology) the concept of community is

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fundamental. When we consider how we teach (pedagogy) we do so as part of community. And when we ask how education forms or distorts our behavior (ethics), again our dialog is in community (See Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, HarperCollins, 1993, p. xi).

To teach is to create an environment where the pursuit of truth is practiced. As leaders of schools, you create this environment. Is your school a place where teachers and their students embrace a passion for truth? The healthy school is a place where learners will pursue truth wherever it may take them. This passion does not dictate where we go. It is comfortable with diversity, conflicting ideas, a tolerance for ambiguity, even paradox. The learning community cultivates critical thinking and celebrates intellectual curiosity. The fear of being open to ideas is, as well-known writer Parker J. Palmer has written, the enemy of learning. «Fear gives ignorance its power» (Ibid, p. xiii).

The Center for Critical Thinking of Sonoma State University in California argues that «Critical thinking is essential if we are to get to the root of our (society's) problems and develop reasonable solutions. After all, the quality of everything we do is determined by the quality of our thinking». It goes on to state that:

Thinking is not driven by answers but by questions.... Questions define tasks, express problems, and delineate issues. Answers, on the other hand, often signal a full stop in thought. Only when an answer generates a future question does thought continue its life as such. This is why it is true that only students who have questions are really thinking and learning.

(See Website: Center for Critical Thinking/Foundation for Critical Thinking of Sonoma State University).

There are still far too many places in the schools of the world where a lack of critical thinking constrains the search for truth. Last fall I met a young man in Afghanistan whose education had been carefully designed to avoid alternative points of view. Then he was able, for a short time, to study at a university in India. That 4th June, 2011, Kyiv, Ukraine

experience, for him, was much like the man released from his chains in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. For the first time in his life this young man experienced the sheer intellectual pleasure of openly pursuing truth, wherever it might lead him. Now, back in Afghanistan, he is trying to create environments where students may openly discuss issues. He faces a daunting challenge in his society. Fortunately, you do not face the same obstacles in Ukraine. As principals of the nation's schools, you have the privilege of celebrating the open pursuit of learning.

Our task as leaders of the education system involves assuring students that their questions are welcome. Their exploration of ideas is encouraged. And that their teachers are not simply the source of all learning. In a high performance school, teachers are learners with their students. Creating environments where students and teachers enjoy the freedom to explore truth is one of our most important leadership responsibilities.

Therefore, as leaders of schools we must ask the question: How can we enhance the building of authentic community?

First, we can help members of the community develop core values by which decisions and actions will be measured. Our students will learn values by the models they see in their classrooms and throughout the school.

Second, we can create schools of mutual belonging and responsibility. As intellectuals like Jean Vanier remind us, it is in community that we find our belonging and recognize our mutual responsibility for one another. (See Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Paulist Press, 1999).

Third, we assign community leadership roles, affirming that every person has gifts to give the community. Members of the community should, therefore, be empowered according to their gifts.

Fourth, we can model openness and trust. The community of learning can be a place where we are free to celebrate with one another, tell our personal stories, share our struggles and fears, and be honest with one another.

And fifth, in real community we can replace «rules and punishments» with open meetings and removal of all fear. True community is a completely safe place, based upon truth, openness, love and acceptance.

The ideals for the community of learning may seem utopian, but they are realistic. They work in business; they can work in schools – schools that achieve the highest standards of performance. Strengthening the community sometimes requires redesigning schools and changing the assignments of teachers and staff. The effort to build community in a high performing school is, however, of paramount importance for every principal.

Situational Servant Leadership: A New Model for Schools

Principals determine the leadership culture of their schools. Two models of leadership are common. The first is sometimes referred to as the «administrative model.» This model puts authority for vision, goals, and strategies for the school system into the hands of top officers. These directors define the realities of the education system and determine priorities in meeting the challenges we face. In this system school principals are responsible for carrying out decisions handed down to them. They fulfill defined goals. They, in turn, relay these expectations to their teachers and staff.

A more open leadership model presumes a democratic process of goal setting and actions that lead to the accomplishment of goals. In this model principals and the people in their schools develop a fully interactive communication pattern, enabling ideas for vision, goals and strategies to emerge out of full dialog among all «stakeholders» in the school system.

The administrative leadership models offers efficiency at the expense of mutual ownership of the outcomes. The democratic system places high value on ownership at the expense of efficiency.

Situational servant leadership represents an alternative leadership option, one that holds the potential for tapping into and unleashing a tremendous source of energy for schools.

Ken Blanchard, a highly respected American leadership researcher and writer, makes the case for situational servant leadership. He suggests that leaders shift their attention from reaching goals to unleashing the human potential of each member of the team. He writes:

For years we defined leadership as an influence process. We believed that anytime you tried to influence the thoughts and actions of others toward goal accomplishment in either your personal or professional life, you were engaging in leadership. In recent years, we have taken the emphasis away from goal accomplishment and defined leadership as the capacity to influence others by unleashing their power and potential to impact the greater good

(See Ken Blanchard, *Leading at a Higher Level*, BMC, 2010, p. xvi).

We know, of course, that serving the new teacher is different from meeting the needs of the veteran teacher. That is how Blanchard's model of the «situation» approach works. The servant leader principal plays a directing role for the highly committed beginning teacher. A coaching role as the teacher gains competence. A supporting role as the teacher gains experience and competence. And a delegating role for the highly competent and deeply committed teacher (*Ibid.*, chapter 5, pp. 87-102). In other words, the situational servant leadership approach is a leadership art form. You, as principal, encourage and enable teachers to grow. You lead from your heart as well as your mind. As you do you encourage teachers to teach from the heart as well as their mind.

In exploring the implications of the situational servant leadership concept, we might find broad and powerful implications for our schools. We might also unleash new energy in resolving the challenges we all face in meeting the school crisis. This happens when we realize that the people in our schools want to be led, not managed. Your teachers and staff want your leadership. Research shows that they do not want to be

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managed like expendable resources (See James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, 4th edition, 2007).

Practicing servant leadership in schools is already proving to be an effective method. Four years ago Tim Snyder was appointed principal of Simon Rivera High School in Brownsville, Texas. The challenge he faced in this school of 2100 students and 225 staff was great. Ninety-nine percent of the students are Hispanic, many requiring extra training in English as a second language. Nevertheless, his leadership is now recognized by The Principal's Partnership, an organization of 1000 principals of American high schools in 21 states. The Union Pacific Foundation also cites his example of servant leadership. Snyder states that his first priority is developing personal relationships with his students and their parents. He describes what has happened at his school:

At my first faculty meeting, I asked the teachers to write an essay on what they expected from me and their administrators. . . . I read all of the essays and condensed their expectations into a list of 10. We called this the administrative pledge and everyone on the administrative team signs it each year. Many of the teachers post it in their classrooms, and we ask them to evaluate us based on those 10 items at the end of the year. Among the teachers' expectations were that administrators will be 'helpful to and supportive of staff and there will be open communications between teachers and administrators.

(See Website: The Principal's Partnership).

As a servant leader, Snyder makes himself accountable to teachers, who, in turn, have developed a pledge of accountability to their students. «It's really all about kids,» Snyder says. «The ultimate customer is the student, not the superintendent or school board. We have a large school, but we know our kids. Frequently, they will come into my office for help or just to talk» (Ibid.).

In the mid-1970's Robert Greenleaf introduced the concept of leading by serving others. The «Servant Leader,» he suggested is one who is servant first. His or her

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primary purpose is to enable everyone on his or her team to realize their potential. This type of leader is not one who commands and controls people. Instead, the servant leader measures success by the following test:

- Do those served (your teachers and staff) grow as persons?
- Do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?
- And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?

(See Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, Paulist Press, 1983).

As school principals, you should constantly apply this test to each member of your staff, asking whether the teachers are growing personally and professionally. If this is true of your teachers, your teachers will help make yours a high performance school.

Conclusion

Last year Lyudmila Ivanyuk, former English teacher at Kyiv National Linguistic University, completed her Master of Educational Leadership degree at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. As part of her degree requirement, she served as an intern at Nampa High School. In her report to me about that experience, she commented on the leadership of Mr. Peter Koehler, chief executive officer (principal) of the school. In many ways Mr. Koehler represents the ideal I have described in this paper.

Mr. Koehler is attentive to the vision of his school. Ms. Ivanyuk noted that the vision was projected on a screen and reviewed at every meeting of the faculty. It states: «We provide the foundation so that all students will develop a personal vision, opening their own doors of opportunity for meaningful and productive lives». This vision statement has a powerful impact in guiding the teachers and staff of Nampa High School.

Mr. Koehler is creating a genuine community of learning at the school. Ms. Ivanyuk learned that he set standards of academic excellence, thus meeting and surpassing achievement standards of the State of Idaho. He gives his personal attention to the professional development of each teacher; personally analyzed the performance of students, frequently personally commending them for their progress; and constantly reads current literature on issues in education, sharing books with the school's teachers.

Moreover, Mr. Koehler also practices servant leadership. Ms. Ivanyuk observed that he greeted the 1300 students as they entered the school each morning. He was always open and easily accessible to teachers who needed to discuss issues with him. Invariably, he explained difficult decisions so that everyone could understand the basis for these decisions. And, for poor children in the school, he made sure that they had coats in the winter and for children who were homeless, he found families with whom they could live.

In articulating the vision of the school, in cultivating a community of learning, and in demonstrating servant leadership, Peter Koehler is modeling the practices of leadership required for high performance schools.

In leading high performance schools, you are the creators of your school's culture. Culture defines how things are done, how people relate to one another, and how teachers and students understand their purpose at the school. Culture has been called the «invisible glue» that holds organizations together. The amazing reality is that culture is more important than carefully designed strategies in determining the level of high performance schools.

As school principals you have an awesome responsibility and a rare privilege. Your legacy as leaders will be determined in the way your vision for the future inspires others, in the learning community you create, and in your style of leadership.

You are leading in a time of great expectations and tremendous pressure upon your schools. In times like these, you may wonder what the future holds. Peter Drucker

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suggested that «the best way to predict your future is to create it». As leaders of Ukrainian schools, may you create a future of high performance schools.

I applaud your heroic leadership during these difficult times for schools. I encourage you to hold fast to the spirit of renewal in education. And I join you in anticipation of the generation of students who will become the leaders of Ukraine.

I wish you great success.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you in this conference.

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Маршалл К. Крістенсен

Ведення шкіл до високих результатів

У статті створення та підтримка ефективної системи освіти визначається як один з найважливіших обов'язків кожного суспільства. Навчання учнів та ведення шкіл до високих результатів автор вважає найважливішими викликами життя. Багато уваги у статті приділено ролі лідерів у розвитку системи освіти.

Маршалл К. Кристенсен

Ведение школ к высоким результатам

В статье создание и поддержка эффективной системы образования определяются как одни из основных задач общества. Обучение учащихся и ведение школ к высоким результатам автор считает самым важным вызовом жизни. Много внимания в статье уделено роли лидеров в развитии системы образования.