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A preferred vision for leading elementary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for leading elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

There are many qualities needed for a principal to be an exemplary educational leader. A leader needs to be strong in supporting parental involvement, providing meaningful staff development, attracting and retaining quality teachers, and being a leader in technology. By being strong in these four areas, a leader is off to a great start on the road to becoming "the main educational facilitator of the learning community" (Wilmore, 2002, p. 5).

A PREFERRED VISION FOR LEADING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

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Master of Arts in Education

by

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I grew up in a small town in northeastern Iowa. Both of my parents are educators and really stressed getting a good education. I was raised to truly value education. Throughout my high school career, I worked with younger kids of all ages in the classroom as well as in extracurricular activities. I taught swimming lessons to all ages of kids, coached swim team, helped at Bible camps, and helped out at sports camps. It was through all of these activities that I developed a strong desire to go into education. I really enjoyed working with kids. It was so rewarding to see how they improved and to see how much they looked up to me. I felt that I really had a way with the younger kids and decided that a career in education was the best route for me to take in life.

My Beliefs About Education

I believe that a good strong education is vital in making it in life. Kids of all shapes, sizes, religions, backgrounds, and abilities all need a solid education. Every student has the ability to learn. Some students may have more hurdles to overcome, but they do have the ability to learn. All students need to learn in order to successfully contribute to society after high school. It is essential for educators to create life-long learners. Students need to have the desire to continue their learning even after graduation. Students need to be educated in character development so that they have good social and emotional relationships with others. The support and involvement of the home and community is essential to achieve educational excellence. Finally, I believe that every student has the right

to have a positive educational experience so that they can develop a healthy social, intellectual, emotional, and physical self-concept.

I have been in several small leadership roles in committees at my school and have really enjoyed the roles. I had been thinking for several years about going back for a master's degree but could not decide what to get the degree in. I had considered several options and weighed the pros and cons of each. I have enjoyed other leadership roles and am good with people. One day my superintendent talked with me and recommended that I go into administration. This was an area that I had already been seriously considering. His guidance and confidence in my abilities helped me make my decision. After careful consideration, I decided that going into a leadership program to become a principal would be the best and most natural decision for me.

Leadership Philosophy

Throughout my career as an elementary teacher, I have developed a philosophy about leadership. I have worked with two different principals – one that had good leadership skills and one that had poor leadership skills. Being able to compare the two really helped me to see what characteristics a good leader needs to have.

First of all, I believe that a good leader needs to develop respect and rapport with and among the staff. A good leader understands all of the stresses of classroom teachers and works to help them in any way he/she can. They also

recognize in what areas the classroom teachers would like or need staff development. This is a very important aspect of leadership – by allowing for meaningful staff development the staff is aware that the leaders of the school encourage them to grow and develop throughout their career.

Next, a good leader promotes the success of all students. They work with the staff to develop programs and curriculum to best meet the needs of students. If there is an old program in place that just is not cutting it anymore, a good leader will recognize that and will take the necessary steps in changing the program to better meet the needs.

A good leader helps set a vision for the school to work towards. It is important that the leader makes sure that this vision is shared and supported by the entire school community. A school cannot be successful if everyone is not working towards the same goals.

A good leader will involve their best teachers in the decision making process as well as the implementation of staff development. Good leaders can ensure a more effective system by gathering the collective wisdom of their staff members. They also realize that it is the people in the school, not the programs that will make the biggest difference in the academic success of the students. One way a good leader can support this idea is by hiring and retaining good teachers. The hiring process is such a vital issue in school leadership. A good leader will

embrace the opportunity to hire new teachers because he/she recognizes it as an opportunity to shape the future of the school.

A good leader works with members of the community to help support the educational system. They also help to find resources in the community that can help the school. For example, a good leader would know what kind of support programs are found in the community that would be available to the school to use. A good leader also recognizes the importance of parental involvement in the schools and will take measures to help ensure that the greatest level of involvement is taking place in the building. School leaders will need to help support parental involvement as much as possible.

Another thing that a good leader demonstrates is the ability to run a school smoothly and with safety issues in mind. It is important for the students and the staff to feel welcome and safe while they are in school.

A good leader also makes fair and consistent decisions when working with students and with staff. If a leader expects one thing from one teacher and another thing from another teacher, then balance is lost and an atmosphere of jealousy or resentment could be made. Fairness and consistency are very important qualities in a good educational leader.

Finally, I believe that a good leader needs to be approachable, easily accessible, and visible throughout the school building on a daily basis. A leader that spends most of the day locked in his/her office or out of the building is not an

effective leader. A good leader will listen to your problems, either personal or professional, and offer good sound advice.

In summary, a good leader needs to demonstrate many fine qualities, some of which were listed and discussed above. From these qualities, I have chosen the following four to research and discuss in more detail: supporting parental involvement, providing meaningful staff development, attracting and retaining quality teachers, and being a leader in technology.

Parental Involvement

I believe that the support and involvement of the home and community is essential to achieve educational excellence. My belief is strongly supported by the following quotes: "Parental involvement has been shown to enhance student achievement in school" (Davies, 2004a, p. 1). "Today more than ever, experts agree that parents play a critical role in their children's school success" (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1991, p. 1). "A quarter of the attainment of top-scoring children at the age of 16 is explained by the interest their parents took in their education" (Johnstone, 2004, p. 7). It is quite clear that parental involvement is a key factor in the success of a child's education as well as the success of a school.

Levels of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement can come in many different forms. Parents can be involved in their child's classroom, volunteer in other areas of the school, serve

on school committees, help to educate at home, and/or simply show their child that they value education. The list of the levels of involvement a parent may choose could go on and on. It is extremely important that school principals make sure to offer a wide variety of ways that parents could be involved in their child's education. "Since parental involvement relates positively to student achievement, parents are encouraged to participate in their children's education in a variety of ways both at home and in school" (Davies, 2004b, p. 1).

One of the most obvious ways schools can involve parents is by encouraging them to work with their child at home. "Our recent survey of nearly 10,000 elementary and middle school principals confirmed that everyday home activities can have a dramatic impact on how well children do in school" (National Association of Elementary School, 1991, p. 1). A good principal will challenge teachers to give parents ideas on how to support the school's curriculum at home on an everyday basis. Leaders can encourage teachers to communicate the curriculum with parents in several ways: They can ask teachers who are already doing this to share ideas with the rest of the staff at a staff show and tell; they can provide time to grade level teachers to put together grade level brochures that outline the skills taught; they can require that teachers add a personal goal to the individual career development plans and give examples of goals that may include communication with parents; they can have some of the lead technology teachers provide staff development to the other teachers on how to create parent

newsletters; they can invest in a grading program that allows teachers to post assignments and grades online for parents to access on a daily basis; and they can have the curriculum committees create handouts to give to parents at conferences to provide suggestions on how to help in different curricular areas at home.

Leaders will also want to relay to parents the importance of parental involvement in education at home and can do this by incorporating this issue into the school and district newsletter.

There are many ways a good leader could encourage parents to become involved in the school. Some general ideas may include: volunteering in a classroom, tutoring a child, assisting with field trips, donating requested materials, participating in fundraising, serving on committees, attending school board meetings, helping with homework at home, volunteering to do work at home for a teacher, joining the parent-teacher organization, and attending school functions. Many parents are not aware of the different options for involvement. It is our job as principals to inform parents and the community of these different options. It is vital to the education of our youth to take advantage of the valuable resources that we have in parents and the community.

Even with our best efforts as effective leaders, there will still be parents that are not comfortable being involved in the school setting or even doing activities at home to enrich their child's education. Yet these parents can still be involved – they can show their child they value education. “At the most basic

level, parents can begin by encouraging the education of their children by showing that they truly value education themselves” (University of Illinois, 2004, p. 1).

The Leaders Role

Principals and educators should not just assume that if a parent is not involved, they are disinterested. There are many reasons why parents do not play an active role in the school. Some of these reasons include: too little time, lack of resources, social isolation, language barriers, not knowing how to contribute, feeling overwhelmed, feeling intimidated, feeling unwelcome, just to name a few. Effective principals will work to overcome these barriers in every way possible in order to promote positive parental involvement in their school.

As leaders, we need to remember that we are in position to help every child achieve the best education possible. In order for this to happen, we need to ensure parental involvement in our school. We need to develop a positive working relationship with every parent and provide ample opportunities for the parents to participate in the school. “In this complex world, it takes more than a good school to educate children. And it takes more than a good home. It takes these two major educational institutions working together” (University of Illinois 2004, p. 1).

I feel that I will do a good job of involving parents and the community when I am an educational leader. I am already seeking out the help of parents in

my classroom and encourage other teachers to do so as well. I am currently taking on writing a volunteer handbook for our school to help increase the amount of volunteers utilized in our school system. I have also created a form for the parents of the students in my classroom to indicate the desired level of their involvement. I believe that as a leader I will continue to do these two things as well as implement new things to involve parents in every aspect of the school.

I will also implement things such as: sending monthly school newsletters home, having school-wide academic celebration activities, honoring volunteers, providing parents with ideas on how to be involved at home, implementing and supporting a parent volunteer program, being actively involved with the parent-teacher organization, organizing school-business partnerships, promoting teacher-led informational meetings for parents, providing informational materials to parents at conferences, and implementing a room parent program. These are just a few ideas of what I can do to let parents know what a vital role they play in the success of their child's education.

Link to the Standards

Supporting parental involvement is an extremely important critical element that is essential for exemplary educational leadership. This is demonstrated by the fact that this element aligns with more than one of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. However, I think it is most closely tied to Standards 1, 4, and 6.

This element demonstrates Standard 1 because it is important to have the school staff as well as the members of the community support the school's vision. It also demonstrates Standard 4 because administrators need to collaborate with families and community members to promote the success of every student in the school. This element also aligns well with Standard 6 because an educational leader needs to be aware of social and cultural issues affecting the school.

As an aspiring educational leader, I know that one of the most important aspects of my role as a principal will be to get as many parents involved in the school in as many ways as possible. This will help to ensure the educational success of the school. Having an "informed and supportive parent body will do a great deal to raise the standards in a school and help children to achieve their potential" (Johnstone, 2004, p. 7).

Staff Development

I believe that providing meaningful and enriching staff development is essential to achieving educational excellence. A very important aspect of quality leadership is being able to recognize the needs of the school and finding ways to provide staff development opportunities in those areas for the staff. School leaders should encourage their staff to grow and develop professionally throughout their career by actively engaging in staff development, attending workshops, joining study groups, actively participating in professional learning communities, and working towards a master's degree.

Staff Development in the Past

“At its worst, staff development asks teachers to implement poorly understood innovations with little support and assistance; and before they are able to approach mastery, the school has moved on to another area” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 13). Yet in past practices, school districts were doing just that. They were providing staff development on a wide variety of topics with no real connection. The tendency was “to get too many projects going at once, with the result that none got done well” (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 65). Teachers were resistant to implement the ideas presented to them because they felt overloaded with new information and had no time to sort through this information and apply it to their teaching. Michael Fullan states, “The greatest problem facing school districts is not resistance to innovation, but rather the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of too many different innovations” (as cited in Sparks & Hirsh, 1997, p. 2).

It was becoming apparent that the way in which staff development was being implemented in schools was not as effective as it should be. Educators began to reevaluate staff development practices and started to recognize the link between staff development and successful educational change. Ann Lieberman, an active leader among school reformers states that, “It is important that teachers, administrators, and policymakers become aware of new and broader conceptions of professional development” (as cited in Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 3).

School leaders were realizing that while “schools are places where teaching occurs, they are also places for teachers to learn and to develop” (Flores, 2004, p. 297). Staff development would be the perfect place for this learning and developing to occur. They were also recognizing that

Teachers were not likely to change their teaching behavior unless they were given the skills, knowledge, and confidence to do so. When new content or new skills are presented over a series of training sessions that include a limited amount of information, and these sessions are followed by opportunities for classroom practices with coaching, changes in teaching become evident. (Gibbons, Kimmell, & O’Shea, 1997, p. 9)

One way to allow teachers the opportunity to change their behavior is by providing meaningful staff development that allows them time to implement new ideas and time to discuss implementation with their colleagues. It was becoming apparent that “Change does not result from one-shot workshops and that substantive change requires high-quality, ongoing staff development with support and follow-up in the classroom” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 28).

Staff Development in the Present

Today staff development practices are undergoing a dramatic change. Gone are the days of the typical “sit-and-get” in-services. In their place, you will find staff development that now “accepts the responsibility to fulfill the district mission of developing lifelong learners who value themselves, contribute to their community, and succeed in a changing world” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 32).

Teachers are beginning to express a different concept of staff development than in the past. They are now "...defining and requesting practical learning opportunities, time to plan with their colleagues, time to share and examine student work, and time to discuss issues related to their immediate practice" (Killion, 2002, p. 18). Because of this new concept of staff development, many schools have moved to incorporating professional learning communities into their professional development models. These professional learning communities give the staff an opportunity to collaborate together on a variety of important topics relating to student achievement. "In a learning community, members commit to ongoing learning and participate in learning experiences with a deliberate intent to transform teaching and learning at their school or within their district" (p. 19). The professional learning communities also allow staff time to reflect on information presented during staff development opportunities and brainstorm ways in which this new information can be implemented in their school. As Ann Lieberman states, "Teachers must have opportunities to discuss, think about, try out, and hone new practices" (as cited in Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 3). Allowing teachers to have the time to evaluate the programs or ideas that are being implemented is a very strong tool. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (2002) believe that by giving teachers the time to evaluate the staff development process and its effects on student achievement, it allows educators the time "to celebrate

the accomplishments and figure out how to do even better the next time around” (p. 58).

Staff development has also made the move towards having a more focused format that will occur over several years. It is now “focusing on specific content areas such as mathematics, science, language arts, or social studies” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 15). It is believed that “If schools are to attain their student achievement goals, the content of staff development needs to be aligned with those goals” (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 58). Therefore, “Selecting the content of staff development is one of the most critical decisions in the school improvement process” (p. 58). The idea behind zeroing in on a single content area is that by having a narrower focus, it will allow staff to concentrate their energies on implementing strategies that will help improve standardized test scores in that particular curricular area. “The faculty *must* narrow the focus of school improvement” (p. 65) in order for it to be effective.

The other key point to staff development today is that the changes that are being made are now focused and are occurring gradually over several years. “School improvement efforts in which the entire staff seeks incremental annual improvement related to a set of common objectives over a three- to five-year span are viewed as the key to significant reform” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 13). Staff development is now being centered around improving teachers, increasing student achievement, and implementing effective changes that will in the long run help

schools achieve the goals in the school's improvement plan. "Staff development should be powerful in design – generating long-term change in teacher practice and student achievement" (Killion, 2002, p. 17).

Staff development is now guided by the belief that "It is an essential component of school improvement and that its ultimate goal is to increase student success" (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 28). In order for this to happen, staff development needs to be geared towards improving the teachers in the district. Great principals know that they need to "Focus on students - by focusing on the teachers" (Whitaker, 2003, p. 35). When planning staff development, principals need to keep in mind that "their primary role is to teach the teachers. The best way to provide an exceptional learning environment for students is to give them outstanding teachers" (p. 35). A principal will work hard to improve both good and great teachers to make them all more effective so that the school improvement plan is more successful. "What teachers know and can do makes the crucial difference in what children learn" (Samuels, Rodenberg, Frey & Fisher, 2001, p. 310).

The Leader's Role

"As school leaders, we must recognize that no matter what programs we introduce or seek to strengthen, our most important work is to improve the people in our schools. Nothing makes as much difference as the quality of our teachers"

(Whitaker, 2003, p. 12). Leaders need to take steps to ensure that they are continuously seeking opportunities to improve the teachers in the school.

The leader of a school plays a vital role in determining the type of staff development that occurs. In order to do this, a leader must make sure that the school has a “clear, compelling mission statement and that measurable objectives are expressed in terms of student outcomes that will guide the type of staff development activities that would best serve district and school goals” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 13).

A leader needs to choose a group of lead teachers to help in the development of the school improvement plan. “A staff development program should have a solid, logical, and thoughtful plan” (Killion, 2002, p. 2). The leadership team can work together in coming up with staff development activities to help reinforce the goals that were written in the school improvement plan. “If staff development programs are well-developed, logical, and research-based, they will have a greater likelihood of producing results” (p. 32).

The leadership team can also be involved in actually presenting staff development activities to the rest of the staff. A good leader knows that when all the stakeholders are involved in developing, presenting, and implementing staff development, they are more likely to believe in it and support it and the school will be more successful in reaching their goals.

The concept of job-embedded staff development has come to mean that educators in many roles – superintendents, curriculum supervisors, principals, and teacher leaders, among others – must all see themselves as teachers of adults and must view the development of others as one of their most important responsibilities. (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 83)

I have already had several years of experience in planning and implementing meaningful and productive staff development in my current school district. This experience allowed me to see the importance of quality staff development and an effective school improvement plan.

One of the first steps I will take towards planning staff development will be to create a leadership team that consists of some of the lead teachers in the school. This team will be a key component in the decision-making process concerning staff development. The team will analyze data from the standardized tests and will determine the area of greatest need for staff development for our building. Once the area of need is identified, the team will delve into research-based best practices. Based on this research, the team will choose a best practice approach to implement through the staff development. The team will then work together in writing the school improvement plan – really focusing on what the staff development will look like for the year. I feel that by just focusing on one area, the staff will actually be able to implement the new ideas presented to them. I would want the staff development focus to stay the same for several years in a row to make sure that we are truly making a change for the better in a specific

area. Members of this team will also be involved in presenting the staff development plan to the rest of the staff as well as to the board of education.

As a leader I will enlist more lead teachers to attend training in our staff development focus area. These teachers would then be responsible for coming back and providing staff development to the rest of the staff based on the knowledge that they have gained from their training sessions. I feel that by having more teachers involved in the staff development process, the more likely that the staff will feel like they have some ownership in the process. Along these same lines, I will encourage other teachers to attend workshops and conferences on the focus area and share what they have learned in their professional learning communities or at staff meetings.

I will incorporate professional learning communities into the staff development process as well. I feel that these learning teams allow for some great opportunities for discussion as well as collaboration. Teachers will be able to implement ideas learned from staff development and then have time to discuss how the implementation went.

I will make sure that peer observations are also included in the staff development process. I think that teachers have a great deal of knowledge that they can share with each other. Peer observations will allow teachers to see the great teaching practices that are being used by their colleagues as well as provide them the opportunities to discuss these practices.

I will encourage teachers to form study groups to learn more about the focus area through reading, discussing, and sharing ideas. I can ensure that study groups are formed by asking a lead teacher to start one or by bringing in someone from the area education agency that specializes in the focus area to lead one.

I will make sure that my budget aligns well with the school improvement goals. I will make sure that there are funds to purchase supplies that may be needed to help enhance the staff development implementation. I will also make sure there are funds available to allow for some study groups for the staff in areas that relate to the staff development focus area. There will also be funds set aside to allow teachers to attend workshops and conferences as well.

By implementing my ideas, I will be able to be an effective leader by providing staff with many opportunities for meaningful staff development and personal growth and improvement as educators.

Link to the Standards

Providing opportunities for meaningful staff development is an extremely important critical element that is essential for exemplary educational leadership. This is demonstrated by the fact that this element aligns with three of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders: Standards 1, 2, and 3.

This element demonstrates Standard 1 because staff development should be aligned with the school's mission and vision. It also demonstrates Standard 1 because the stakeholders are involved in developing the staff development plan so

they are more likely to share and support the vision. This element demonstrates Standard 2 because the staff development will be aligned with the instructional program and is designed to increase student learning. The staff development will also be designed to help the staff to develop and grow as professionals as well. I also believe that this element demonstrates Standard 3 as well because as a school leader, I would allocate dollars in the budget to help support the staff development focus.

Staff development is one of the most important things principals can offer to teachers. When educators stop learning, the advancement of the school can come to a standstill and student achievement is ultimately effected. Principal Rosie O'Brien Vojtek really put the issue of staff development into perspective for future leaders when she stated,

As a principal, it is important to know when to push a little harder and when to help the staff pull back because they are taking on too much. All staff members need to continue to read, to question, to talk with one another, and to expand on the knowledge they have.
(as cited in Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 100)

It is the job of the principal to ensure that staff members have the opportunities to do just that.

Attracting and Retaining Quality Teachers

I believe that hiring and keeping quality and dedicated teachers is essential to achieve educational excellence. The people, not the programs in a school, truly make the difference towards student success. "Outstanding principals know that if

they have great teachers, they have a great school; without great teachers, they do not have a great school” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 7).

Hire Great Teachers

Many principals may feel nervous or unsure when one of their teaching staff decides to leave. However, I feel that “a principal’s single most precious commodity is an opening in the teaching staff” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 43).

According to The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “Many educators have come to recognize that teacher quality is the single most important school-based determinant of student learning” (as cited in Saban, 2002, p. 828). This means that being able to choose who is going to be on your staff is one of the most important gifts for a principal.

Hiring staff members is a key component in the school’s improvement plan. One of “the quickest ways to improve the school is to hire great teachers at every opportunity” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 43). The best way to implement change in the school setting is to hire great teachers who are willing to help work towards achieving the school’s change initiative. “Successful principals hire outstanding teachers to help them achieve their goals for the school” (p. 50). One of “the most significant ways to rapidly improve a school is to add teachers who are better than the ones who leave. Great principals know this and work diligently to hire the best possible teachers” (p. 43).

The Leader's Role

Exceptional leaders know that “A clear vision and hiring on the basis of that vision lie at the very heart of creating a successful school” (Heller, 2004, p. 52). School leaders will work hard to not only write this vision but to also take steps to uphold it at all costs. One of the ways they can support this is by hiring and keeping teachers that do their best to support the vision of the school.

Another one of the roles that the principal will have is “to lead the necessary changes to make their schools attractive workplaces for new teachers, with climates that attract applicants and encourage employees to stay, satisfying their professional needs” (Heller, 2004, p. 10). Strong leaders will make the school district a place new teachers gravitate to and really want to start their career at. If the leader truly does his/her job, once there, the new teachers will never want to leave.

Once a principal has a good teacher hired, it is important to take steps to keep that teacher in the school system. “The principal must now develop induction programs to integrate new hires into the system to ensure that they have a successful experience and remain with the school” (Heller, 2004, p. 28).

Charlotte Danielson (1996) states, “The complexity of teaching can be daunting for those new to the profession. Teaching is one of the few professions in which novices must assume the same responsibilities as veterans in the field” (p. 55).

One of the best ways to help with this is to make sure that there is a structured

induction program implemented to help support all new teachers to the school district. "The presence of a strong induction program can make a significant difference in the retention and quality of teachers in our nation's schools" (Stanulis, Fallona, & Pearson, 2002, p. 71).

I have already been involved in the hiring process for several different positions at school. I was also able to go through the screening process with the applications and also got experience with writing the interview questions. This experience allowed me to see how vitally important the hiring process really is. It is so essential to expect the best and to not settle for anything less when choosing a candidate. The success of the school district rests in the hands of its teachers so it is important to hire the right person for the job.

"New teachers learn mostly through trial and error. Knowing that, many schools have sought to help new teachers learn on the job through induction programs" (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005, p. 1). As a principal, I will need to make sure that some induction steps occur every time a new teacher is hired into the district. The Alliance for Excellent Education calls for "a comprehensive induction package" (as cited in Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005, p. 1) and believes that "Strong principal leadership is an essential element of a quality comprehensive induction program" (as cited in Wood, 2005, p. 42). According to The Alliance for Excellent Education, a quality induction program could include such things as: reducing the number of course preparations,

assigning a helpful mentor; providing staff development tailored to the needs of a new teacher; ensuring lots of communication with and support from the administrators; and allowing time for planning and preparation with their mentor and other teachers (as cited in Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005, p. 1).

I will have new teacher in-service days prior to the start of school to help familiarize the new teachers to the district. These in-service days will include: time to meet with their mentors; a tour of the district; a tour of the buildings; explanations of the district's policies and procedures; a training on how to use the copy machine, laminator, phones, and e-mail system; a demonstration on how to access the server; explanations of the curriculum they will be responsible for; suggestions on ways to communicate with parents; and an explanation of how to find or order materials.

I will make sure that new teachers are matched up with some of the strongest teachers through a mentoring program. I will do this immediately after the new teachers are hired so that they have time to communicate with their mentors before their teaching assignment actually begins. For example, if the new teacher gets hired in the spring, I would want them to be partnered with a mentor right away so that they could rely on them for support and guidance through the summer months. For new teachers, "Mentoring is vital" (The Education Digest, 2005, p. 42) and when a principal "...organizes and/or supports institutional activities that promote professional relationships among novice

teachers and experienced teachers, morale is greatly improved and beginning teachers' self concept is strengthened" (Wood, 2005, p. 45). Mentoring benefits more than just the new teachers. "Mentored teaching contributes to both beginning and experienced teachers' professional growth" (Saban, 2002, p. 835).

I have had the experience of not only being mentored but also acting as a mentor, to two different teachers new to the district. I have seen how truly effective this can be in supporting new teachers and keeping them in the district as well. One of the biggest reasons that the mentoring program was effective was the fact that it was a structured program. This helped to make sure that each new teacher is getting about the same mentoring experience and it ensures that the supports stay in place throughout the first two years of teaching for the new teachers. One thing that I would want to add to a mentoring program is to make the school schedule so that the new teachers and their mentor would have a common planning time either daily or at least weekly to help support the mentoring program.

There are other things that can be done to help support the induction of new teachers. Some of these things include: making sure that new teachers are not assigned the most challenging students; making sure new teachers are not overloaded with extracurricular activities and committee assignments; requiring both new and veteran teachers to observe in other teachers' classrooms at least once per trimester or quarter; doing walk-through observations on a weekly basis;

purposefully visiting the classrooms of every new teacher every day; and providing regular feedback to new teachers about their teaching strategies, knowledge of the curriculum, and their classroom management skills. As Pat Hould, a principal in Montana states, "With any new hire, the name of the game is support, support, support" (as cited in *The Education Digest*, 2005, p. 41).

Link to the Standards

Hiring and keeping quality and dedicated teachers is an extremely important critical element that is essential for exemplary educational leadership. This is demonstrated by the fact that this element aligns well with two of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. It is most closely tied to Standards 1 and 2. This element ties to Standard 1 because school leaders want to promote the success of their students by making sure that the school's vision is supported by the community. Obviously hiring the right teachers for the job will help to ensure that the vision is supported. It also aligns well with Standard 2 because the school leader is teaching the teachers to become the best that they can be. They are encouraging the teachers to grow professionally to ensure the success of the students.

It is evident that it is extremely important for a principal to incorporate a mentoring program into their school. "Strong mentoring...is vital to retention of strong novice teachers" (Stanulis, Fallona, & Pearson, 2002, p. 80). It is also evident that a principal needs to invest time and effort into developing an

induction program for new teachers as well. "Effective induction support can benefit student learning, as competent, collaborative teachers who are energized, feel professionally supported, and feel competent are best positioned to meet the needs of children" (p. 80). Successful school leaders remember that it is the people of the school that truly make the difference.

Leader of Technology

Exemplary educational leaders must demonstrate the importance of technology use in education. "Educational leaders must set the example in technology usage. They must demonstrate to students and staff that technology tools can benefit them in their everyday lives" (Hall, 1999, p. 2). I believe that the principal's role concerning technology issues today has greatly changed from the past. Today, principals are expected to be the leaders of technology. This means that in order for them "To provide the leadership necessary for success, principals and school district leaders must have sufficient knowledge of technology to guide them in their decision making" (Holland, 2000, p. 3).

Leaders are required to know more about technology today than they ever had to know about in the past. This includes not only knowing how to use technology, but also what kinds of resources are out there that the school could benefit from using. It also includes choosing the best resources that will help support the instructional programs of the school. This means that the resources that are chosen should be chosen because of the likelihood that student achievement will

increase because of them, not because they happen to be the newest things out on the market. Today, technology leadership

Means much more than simply purchasing and implementing programs 'stuffed' with fancy hardware and software. To really influence reform in schools, the principal as technology leader must stay focused on the individual needs of local teachers and students, rather than race to adopt the 'flavor of the month' program. (Creighton, 2003, p. 4-5)

Another issue concerning technology in education today is the fact that many leaders believe their school has a great technology program just because they have state-of-the-art equipment and programs. However, the crucial task facing principals now "is to decide how to implement technology effectively into instruction" (Creighton, 2003, p. 2). The key is to *effectively* integrate technology. Technology should not be integrated just for the sake of saying that it is being used. Rather, the integration should help make the learning experience more meaningful for students and teachers. The world today is constantly changing and new technologies are being invented every day. This fact requires that "the principal as technology leader becomes involved in discovering, evaluating, installing, and operating new technologies of all kinds, while keeping teaching and student learning as the guide and driving force behind it all" (p. 3).

The Leader's Role

"Principals as technology leaders are in the position to make sound instructional decisions regarding technology and program implementation"

(Creighton, 2003, p. 5). They need to enlist the help of teachers who are tech-savvy to serve on a technology committee. This team can work on technology issues for the school. One of the first things the team can do is to create a vision statement for the school because it has become quite apparent that there is a "...need for a written technology vision statement" (Holland, 2000, p. 6). Once the vision statement is completed, the team can move on to developing a technology plan that supports the student achievement goals for the school district because it is quite evident that there is a great "...need to create a technology plan that supports the instructional goals and objectives of the school" (p. 5). The technology team will be tackling quite a feat in creating a technology plan because "Creating a realistic technology plan that will prove an inspiration to staff, students and parents is not an easy task" (p. 13). The principal will need to be involved in all aspects of the development of the vision and technology plan because principals are being called upon "to be informed, capable and future-thinking in respect to educational technology issues" (p. 13).

In today's modern world, "Knowing that teachers need more equipment or more time to plan for technology use is critical, but it may not be enough" (Ertmer, Addison, Lane, Ross & Woods, 1999, p. 55). Principals now need to also know how teachers think and feel about the use of technology in their classrooms. They also need to know how to support teachers in implementing the school's technology plan. The principal needs to recognize that technology issues

and concerns will have to be addressed at monthly staff meetings and that extra support will need to be provided during staff development days. "A principal's mission must now include designing and implementing new strategies to help teachers recognize, understand, and integrate technology with teaching and learning in the classroom" (Creighton, 2003, p. 2).

One of the biggest ways that I can implement technology into my leadership is by using technology tools on a daily basis.

Part of setting an example through daily use is encouraging those around you to use the best tools for their job. Good ways to promote the use of technology among your staff and community include dropping the name of your favorite Web portal in a staff meeting, mentioning that you found a useful tidbit on the Internet, and asking people to send you information via e-mail. (Hall, 1999, p. 5)

Another way to implement technology is to allow teachers time to learn from each other. I will use my leaders of technology to help teach the teachers. "Demonstrations by peers, mentors, or staff development can illustrate ways to use technology to teach existing and expanded content. Time to learn skills, preview software, and explore available resources is considered critical by teachers" (Ertmer, et. al., 1999, p. 57). In addition, I will require teachers to observe other teachers at least once a trimester or quarter. These observations can include looking for ways in which technology is incorporated into the instruction. Teachers will "benefit from opportunities to observe and interact with other teachers..." (p. 57).

I will want to emphasize that I “use and understand the technology available” (Hall, 1999, p. 6). I will provide many training opportunities for the staff and will also take advantage of training opportunities myself. I will attend different training sessions or workshops myself to stay on top of the ever-changing technological world. I will want to provide study groups for the teachers so that they may learn different ways that they could use technology for their use in their daily work as well as integrating into their curriculum. I will designate some of our top technology teachers to act as technology coordinators in the building if the district’s true technology coordinator was spread too thin with duties. I will also encourage these teachers to show-and-tell some of the ways that they have incorporated technology into their instruction during our staff development time.

There are other individuals that may be more knowledgeable about technological issues than I. I will encourage those people to serve on a technology committee and will delegate some of the decision-making issues to the committee.

The core of e-leadership requires leaders to identify those who are expert in the new technology and support them, even stepping out of the way if necessary – and let new people point the direction giving them initiative – and to build an organizational framework (positions and culture) in which the new can displace the old.
(Creighton, 2003, p. 2)

There will obviously be some barriers to address concerning integration of technology. There will be many teachers that may be out of their comfort zone when it comes to using technology. Use of the following strategies to address these barriers may be helpful: using staff development days to help teachers realize the issues with technology and teaching; expanding the staff's thinking about how technology can be integrated into their instruction; providing instructional resources such as mentors, teacher models, and equipment during the implementation process; and providing teachers with opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and discussions with peers about how the implementation process is going (Ertmer, 1999). I think that it is vitally important to allow teachers the time to play with technology as well as time for collaboration and discussion with peers as well. I will accomplish this by having the professional learning communities spend time each staff development day discussing issues concerning technology integration.

Link to the Standards

Being a leader in technology is an extremely important critical element that is essential for exemplary educational leadership. This is demonstrated by the fact that this element aligns with two of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders: Standards 2 and 3.

This element demonstrates Standard 2 because the principal as a leader of technology will help write a technology plan that will involve technology

curriculum. This plan will look at ways that teachers can support student learning by integrating technology into their instruction. This element also demonstrates Standard 3 because the principal has to make some research-based decisions regarding technology tools and programs. Principals evaluate the curriculum and look for ways in which technology can supplement or enhance it. The principal also needs to ensure that there is money in the budget to purchase needed tools or programs that teachers need.

It is important for leaders to remember that, "Achieving meaningful technology use is a slow process that is influenced by many factors" (Ertmer, 1999, p. 55). Getting teachers to incorporate technology in a meaningful way on a daily basis is not going to happen overnight. The change process will need to be gradual and occur over a period of time. Ertmer (1999) put it best when he stated,

As with any professional development endeavor, it is critical that we 'know where we want to go, figure out how information technologies will help us get there; ...involve teachers deeply and continuously in on-site learning; hang in with them as the inevitable squalls of turmoil blow and recede; and, finally, have patience, for such changes in belief and practice will take years'.
(p. 62)

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many qualities needed for a principal to be an exemplary educational leader. A leader needs to be strong in supporting parental involvement, providing meaningful staff development, attracting and retaining quality teachers, and being a leader in technology. By being strong in these four

areas, a leader is off to a great start on the road to becoming “the main educational facilitator of the learning community” (Wilmore, 2002, p. 5).

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