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My philosophy of educational leadership

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My philosophy of educational leadership

Abstract

What is the true role of the principal? The principal has to be a reflective leader of learning, a leader of educational change, a leader for the improvement of learning for both students and adults, and the leader of service. The principal is the main educational leader of the learning community. As Wilmore (2002) states, "The primary emphasis has shifted from one in which the principal truly was a master teacher, a recognized leader in instruction, to one in which the principal is a manager of the school facility." Wilmore continues, "The role of the principal has transitioned again, from school manager to the school catalyst for success for all stakeholders." Clearly the role of the principal is continually changing. However, there has always been one constant: educational leadership.

My Philosophy of Educational Leadership

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What is the true role of the principal? The principal has to be a reflective leader of learning, a leader of educational change, a leader for the improvement of learning for both students and adults, and the leader of service. The principal is the main educational leader of the learning community. As Wilmore (2002) states, "The primary emphasis has shifted from one in which the principal truly was a master teacher, a recognized leader in instruction, to one in which the principal is a manager of the school facility" (p. 4). Wilmore (2002) continues, "The role of the principal has transitioned again from school manager to the school catalyst for success for all stakeholders" (p. 5). Clearly, the role of the principal is continually changing, however, there has always been one constant, with that being "educational leadership." Every standard for administrators' states,

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by...

1. Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
2. Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

3. Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.
7. Substantial, sustained, standards-based experiences in real settings that are planned and guided cooperatively by university and school district personnel for graduate credit. (p. 13-14)

I believe these standards are great for administrators to live by. They direct us as to what we need to do and give us the guidelines to lead our staff and faculty members to build a self-supporting learning community.

Educational leadership is the promoting of all students' success. If we are not here for that, why are we here? Educational leaders need to: (a) develop the vision, (b) articulate or communicate the vision, (c) implement or put the vision into action, and (d) steward the vision with the learning community on the direction of the vision.

The principal needs to share the vision that he or she has developed with the input of the learning community. This is a shared vision between the administration and the learning community. Get the backing and buy in of the learning community so everyone is on the same level. After that, I believe administrators have to create a culture that values enhanced performance.

By doing this, we develop a community with high expectations and performance. By developing this climate, we develop a learning community that makes learning easier. What we recognize in our learning communities will then get reinforced. Wilmore (2002) states, "The principal becomes a nurturer of the entire school community, the Shepard of the flock, the person who provides the sustaining lifeblood and passion of the school" (p. 34). If one person succeeds, then everyone succeeds. Curriculum and instruction are the fundamental purpose of what makes the school unique. Every educator has goals and those goals should be aimed at enhancing student achievement.

After we have developed/shared the vision, created a climate/culture for the enhancement of the learning community, we look at how to steer (steward) the vision. To steward the vision means that principals have to make data-driven decisions on facts and equity instead of presumptions, bias, wrong information or emotion. Sound decision-making is a must when leading an efficient school. Every decision that is made must be based on law and policy. Evaluation is a very important component in the decision making process regarding assessment,

continuation, modification, and cost-effectiveness. Educational leaders must evaluate everything they do and continually look at how they can make things better. Wilmore (2002) states, "Just because something has been done a certain way for a long time does not mean it cannot be improved with change" (p. 54). The image starts at the top with the principal, who needs to realize that even the small things within the school will reflect its image.

I believe that in order to get all of these done, leaders need to be collaborative and get some common ground amongst all members of the learning community. This may help support the vision or change it all together but by collaborating we will be able to support what the learning community wants to view as their vision. The educational leader then has to mediate the meeting. The leader can be influential in this process, but wants to have everyone feel their opinion's matter to this process. The leader needs to collaborate not only in meetings but get out of the school and be visible, proactive, and tell the story of the school to anyone and everyone.

We have to be able to get community interest and find out the needs of the learning community. While we are out, try and find out what community resources there are and what the school could use to help give back to the community. Develop partnerships with businesses in the community and work hand-in-hand for the betterment of the learning community.

An educational leader must be a person who is acting in the best interest of the students with fairness, integrity, and an ethical manner. We are supposed to be here for the kids. We need to treat everyone with equality. When you are sent a student, you should not make a critical decision without thinking it through first. Don't make rash decisions. If for some reason you make a rash decision and find out you were wrong, then you need to ethically say you were wrong in your decision and let everyone know you will change your decision-making process in the future. You then start becoming a political leader. According to Wilmore (2002), "Being an educational leader is more encompassing than being an instructional leader. It encompasses all these other venues because they directly or indirectly affect teaching, learning, and the success of all students" (p. 94-5). I think that statement says it all.

The principal has to be a reflective practitioner as leader of the learning community. Reflection is an important part of your everyday life and is controlled by our emotional states of mind. By reflecting each day, we are continually learning about what worked well and what didn't work so well. We are then able to look back on the educational trail of life when we have a similar incident. Leadership is not an inherent ability, but one that can be learned by developing a set of emotional competencies. According to Patti and Tobin (2003), "Great leaders are not strong in every competency but they typically exhibit a critical mass of strength in a number of them and generally have some

skill in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management” (p.12).

By knowing yourself and what you have within, greatly determines how effective you will be as a leader. Patti and Tobin (2002) use Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee to describe the personal competency of self-awareness. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) state, “The personal competency of self-awareness consists of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence and it serves as the foundation of all socio-emotional skills” (p.13). Overall, what this is saying is that you are in control of everything around you. What you learn as a child affects ultimately how you are able to react and manage things as you grow in life and what ever profession you decide to enter.

In the book, *What Great Principals Do Differently*, Whitaker (2003) writes about how “the principal is the filter” (p. 27). The great principals are going to realize that they have to reflect and understand what needs immediate attention and what they need to leave to the teachers to handle. They are the filters for the school. This process will be done very carefully. Many days our emotions play an enormous role in how the school day goes. We consciously and sub-consciously reflect on how we react to each and every situation we are in contact. This then affects our teachers and students. As principals, we have hundreds of decisions that need to be made every day. How we choose to make those decisions affect every other decision we make for the learning community.

Whitaker (2003) states, "If we have great credibility and good relationships, people work to please us. If we lack credibility, people tend to work against us." (p. 30) The atmosphere of the learning community is completely dependent upon how we are seen by our staff. The principal has to take a look at how people are treated and the result of his/her actions.

Disciplining a student that has done something negative, but that must be done with a clear head and not let emotions play a negative role in the discipline.

The principal is the center of attention at school, the heartbeat and life of the learning community. It should always be a goal to have the teachers more excited about teaching today than they were yesterday. The principal is going to decide how the day goes and how the mindset of the staff is for the day. As Whitaker (2003) says "Great principals know that putting others in an upbeat frame of mind comes back to brighten their own days as well. Keeping your school in a positive cycle enhances everything you do." (p. 31) Whitaker (2003) notes, "Consciously or unconsciously, *we decide* the tone of our school" (p. 33).

Emotions, ultimately dictate our decision making process. We start reacting to our emotions as early as the sixth month of living. As Patti and Tobin (2003) state:

Human beings develop their competency in emotional awareness to the point that they can use their emotions in the service of their goals. A person who possesses this competency exhibits certain characteristics:

1. A rich vocabulary of feeling words.
2. The ability to recognize and differentiate among emotions.
3. The ability to identify the physical cues (e.g. queasy stomach) that were used to appraise the type and the intensity of the emotion.
4. The ability to discern what external event or internal cognition triggered the emotion.
5. The knowledge that there are times when one might not be aware of the emotion because of unconscious dynamics or selective inattention.

(p. 15)

Being able to pick up on these cues allows people to become more reflective not only on themselves but on the learning community as a whole. People that are able to use these five characteristics have learned to test their emotional knowledge for any emotions that may be hidden from their awareness.

By using the art of reflection, we become more aware of our core values.

This is something that we continually have to examine. We will make our everyday decisions from our core value system. Patti and Tobin (2003) state:

These values can give meaning to our professional lives and keep us on course during the difficult times schools so often face. They also can be at the heart of the most intractable conflicts in a school community. For these reasons, school leaders must not only reflect on their own values but must lead others in similar reflection. (p. 16)

By knowing our set of core values will make the decisions we face everyday much easier. Also by practicing the art of reflection, will allow us to feel competent and achieving. These are needed for our everyday survival. This is a basic need for humans emotionally.

Reflection is a concept that needs to be taught to everyone. This will help people to analyze situations and control their emotions a little better. To be able to have the individual sit down and reflect about what happened allows him/her to have a clear mind about decision-making. Reflecting also allows a look at past decisions, whether good or bad, and see how they were handled.

Reflecting is a natural part of the ISSL standards. Standard 1 connects with implementation and stewardship of the vision because you always need to look back at what works and what doesn't. Standard 2 connects by promoting a school culture and instructional program that is conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. As in standard 3, we are trying to make the environment the best we can by making it a safe, efficient and effective for learning. We will use community resources and collaborate with families and community members to connect with standard 4. Standard 5 makes us look at our core value system by making decisions with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. Standard 6 is connected by the political phase of what we are able to do in a social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Reflecting should be a natural part of the everyday routine for a principal. This allows for the principal to explore possible areas and avenues of change for the learning community. By reflecting, it allows the principal to keep records of what has been discussed, failed, succeeded, and thoughts of other members of the learning community. Reflection is an integral part of the principal's role as the leader of the learning community.

Leader of Change

The principal's role in educational change is very important and is used on many levels of the educational community. Change is going to be used on every level of the Leadership standards. Education is continually changing each and every day. We are no longer just a pen and paper community of learners. Our basic class offerings will never change but the pathways that learning communities look at and try to incorporate for our students is continually evolving with every decision that is made, not only with our teachers but also in our government. We can not just change overnight; it has to be a continual evolution of what we want for our learning community and where we want it to go.

Trudy A. Salsberry, (2003) discusses Micheal Fullan's (2001) book, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (2001), where he organizes change on a three part system. "Part I on understanding change, Part II on educational change at the local level, and Part III on educational change at the regional and national levels" (p. 26) To be able to effectively change we need to know our history of

education and how it has changed. If we do not know our own history we are doomed to make the same mistakes repeatedly over and over. In order to accept and put our action plan of change in motion, we have to have our learning community buy into the change process.

In Fullan's (2001) book, we can place our standards within each part. In Part I we would look at Standard 1, Creating the Vision of a Collaborative Learning Community. In Part II, we would put Standard 2, Creating a Culture That Values Enhanced Performance; Standard 3, Facilitating the Organization and Operation of Learning Community Resources; Standard 4, The Strength of Collaborative Partnerships; and Standard 5, The Moral Dilemma. In Part III, we use Standard 6, The Politics of Administrative Leadership.

One of the largest areas of change in schools and society alike is the area of discipline. In the article, Schools, Prisons, and Social Implications of Punishment: Rethinking Disciplinary Practices, Pedro A. Noguera (2003) states, "Throughout the United States, schools most frequently punish the students who have the greatest academic, social, economic, and emotional needs." Schools have been notorious for disciplining in public as a display. Research has found that if you discipline by taking the offender aside, talking to him or her, and not giving the attention they want you will get better results in the actions of the students. This is an action that has been going on for centuries and needs to be changed in

society. This is also something that will not change in a short time; it will take lots of time and continual molding of the actions and behaviors we want.

Rogers (1995) defines innovation in terms of how it is perceived by individuals or workgroups in an organization. "An innovation is an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption....If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation" (p.11). At each one of our schools, we set up committees, serve on them and try to initiate a type of change. No matter how large or small the change is, we have to understand what it is the learning community wants to get out of the change.

As a leader, the principal has to be able to organize their time wisely and be able to give some authority to others. Principal's can not be power hungry and in control of everything. If they try to, they will burn out quickly and fail. The Principal has to be able to delegate authority to others and take responsibility if something goes wrong but yet give praise to those when things are successful. This is very tough for many young principals because they believe they have to be involved in everything. This is why agendas and summaries of the meetings are very important so that the principal knows what is going on and can help give advice when asked.

Change is a very important part of education. It is continual and never ending. As administrators, we must continually look for new and improved ways of educating our students and community. Educational change is located in every

one of the ISSL standards. Before you can have a change there must be a vision (standard 1), then a culture has to be created to enhance the performance (standard 2); then the administrator must facilitate the organization and operation of the process but allow the community to develop the plan while the administrator stewards the plan (standard 3), then develop partnerships to help develop the change plan (standard 4), then making sure that the change process is a moral change for the better (standard 5), and finally, communicating the change process to the community for the politics of the administrative leader (standard 6). The change process will only be as strong as the weakest link the process itself. Find areas of change that the community will accept and the process will occur. As the leader, you do not want to make many changes right away until you have had the opportunity to see for yourself how the learning community works. After researching that, you will be able to make firm decisions and be supported throughout the process.

Leader of Learners

The principal is the leader of learners for both students and adults by action. In order to lead you must be willing to follow also. The principal has to lead by example and continue to improve processes of leadership through research and practice. The principal has the obligation to improve the atmosphere of the learning community. The principal has the obligation to improve the learning techniques and allow educators to pass this knowledge along to the

learning community through their classes. To enable educators to do this, principals have to be willing to educate educators through in-services and allowing the educators' time off to go to conferences so that they can bring back the knowledge they just learned and share it with the staff. This would enable the principal to change some people's viewpoints as to how the learning community will improve learning.

The topic of leadership has been receiving a lot of attention in both business and education. The leadership literature reveals that there is a great overlap between the contemporary theories of effective leadership and the theories of effective counseling. An aim of an effective leader is that of self-actualization. Argyris (1965) states, "Effective leadership behavior is 'fusing' the individual and the organization in such a way that both simultaneously obtain optimum self-actualization" (p. 211). I relate the principal to a counselor. The principal is a counselor of staff. In this belief, "The counselor needs to be a real person in the relationship during therapy. Corey (1986) said, "It is his/her realness and aliveness which can inspire the counselee" (p. 358). Principals are authentic models of leadership. Some are great and some need work but they are all authentic models.

"The importance of leadership cannot be overstated in an environment where the goal is that every student will achieve at high levels. A systematic approach to student learning becomes vital" (Jacoby, 2003). The principal leads

the building faculty and staff but the superintendent has the ultimate responsibility of seeing the mission of the whole district. Philip Schlechty (2001) states, "...road maps are useless if all one knows is where one is going. It is important as well to know where one is presently located." (p. 33)

Another area that is of major concern is that of communication. It is very important to maintain and increase a sense of ownership and engagement that strengthens the learning community. Effective communication skills include not only the delivery of messages but also listening skills. West-Burnham (1997) states, "Most people can hear perfectly adequately but only a minority can actually listen in the sense of genuinely attending" (p. 125). The sense of active listening is about sensitivity to other people's feelings and perceptions. It is a total involvement in the communication process. Bennis (1994) believes, "The leadership skill of communication is a two-way process developed through listening and enabling every member to learn where he/she can fit into a team" (p. 38-39).

Fullan (1997) states, "One strong characteristic of effective leaders is that they extend as well as express what they value" (p. 20). The principal has to model his or her value system and core beliefs. They have to have a vision of what they believe. Fullan (1991) notes, "Much has been written about the importance of vision within the realm of organizational leadership". Gardner says, "Unless the leader knows where the whole venture is headed, it will not be

possible to carry out the other tasks of leadership.” (as cited in DuFour, 1991, p.

13) As Ubben and Hughes (1987) state:

A principal’s belief about the ability of all children to learn is extremely important. In most of the effective schools research findings, principals of effective schools have a strong belief in and commitment to the ability of all children to learn regardless of race, social conditions, or gender. These values and beliefs are extremely important because staff members will key onto what they believe the principal considers important. (p. 20)

As I heard one time, roles don’t exercise leadership; people do. This I believe echoes through much of the research being conducted on leadership in and beyond education today.

Leader of Service

The service leader needs to beware of the politics of administrative leadership. According to Wilmore (2002), “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.” (p. 92) As the principal I am going to have to be well read and cognizant of the current events and issues surrounding the field of education. I am going to need to understand, appreciate, and respond to all issues related to cultural diversity in the community and how these issues interact with the role of the school in promoting social justice. Wilmore (2002) states “Being an

educational leader is more than being an instructional leader. It encompasses all these other venues because they directly or indirectly affect teaching, learning, and the success of all students” (p. 94-95). The goal of the service leader is to do everything possible to make the world a much better place. The Principal has become more of a proactive advocate for the needs of all children.

In being the service leader, the principal has to be able to create effective and collaborative partnerships between the school and communities. Educational leaders must research and synthesize the specific and changing interests, needs, issues, and trends of the community to be able to respond appropriately and effectively. The principal has to be seen throughout the community. He or she need to listen to the needs of the community and see what they need. By getting the pulse of the community, the principal can try to make appropriate partnerships that will last for years to come. The principal needs to be available to the learning community, a good steward of the learning community’s vision, and be a diverse leader. A diverse leader is one that can do many things. The Principal must create a common bond of understanding in which everything he or she says or does is aimed at the enhancement of teaching and learning. The principal is always trying to make every effort an informational and meaningful instructional moment.

Service learning benefits the schools of America. According to Frank O’Bannon, (1999), “Democracy is founded on the principle of positive civic

involvement—parents volunteering in schools, community members attending city council meetings, Habitat for Humanity volunteers building houses for the poor”. These things are what describe the United States of America and the basis of our livelihood. We learn about hard work, responsibility, compassion, and caring by being able to put them into action. The best way to teach our young leaders of tomorrow is by getting them personally involved through clothing drives, food drives, and community clean-ups. Some students may never see the true effects of society until they get involved and see how a little work can improve our environment and society. It is the responsibility of the principal to lead the students. By doing these service learning activities, schools have been able to show an effective way for students to achieve higher academic progress and become better citizens by taking more pride in their community. Service leadership and service learning are connected through the event and involving the learning community to give something back to the community. The principal also has to be out there with the students to allow them to connect service leader to service learning.

According to Terry Pickeral (1999), “Service-learning is beginning to take center stage in efforts to provide high-quality education to help our youth take their role as active citizens and leaders in the 21st century.” (p. 2-3) This has been a proven fact that getting students involved in the service learning activities has helped break the cycle of violence and disrespect among young people. Alan

Melchoir, (1999), notes “The goal of service-learning is to help young people to develop as responsible citizens, improve their academic skills and develop as individuals while helping to deliver needed services to their local communities” (p. 4-6).

Fullan (1991) believes “The role of the principal has become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade” (p.144). The principal’s job has been changing from an instructional leader to that of transformational leader. Principals are being left with more and more responsibilities for the learning community. As our students become more distant from reality, it is my responsibility to show the students what they are missing and try to get them back in touch with our communities. Through service-learning activities I believe this can happen.

“The decision a principal makes concerning the issue of instructional leadership and the extent to which that principal develops the skills needed to exercise appropriate instructional leadership will influence what does or does not happen in classrooms throughout the country” (Anderson & Pigford, 1987, p. 71). Many of the responsibilities of the learning community fall on the shoulders of the principal. I must be ready to accept them and embrace them for the success of the learning community as a whole.

The leader of service oversees many aspects of the principal’s role. I must be a flexible person to take on this role and steward the ship of the community.

Not all learning is done within the classroom; some must come from outside the hallowed walls of our hallways and on the streets of our communities. The principal must seek out learning possibilities for all students so that they get the well-rounded education we all want for them. We can no longer keep the blinders on and then release our students to the world after graduation. We must, earlier and earlier, teach the attributes of hard work, responsibility, compassion, and caring by being able to put them into action. By being able to put them into action, we are leading our communities toward the rivers of success.

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