Compilation of critical element papers for principalship cohort

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Abstract
The most important role of an educational leader is the leader of instruction. It is crucial that you implement a quality atmosphere within your school that is conducive to high quality instruction. It is also essential that the curriculum being taught in the classrooms is rigorous and relevant to the students. If the material is not relevant, the student will struggle to understand the importance of learning the material. If the curriculum is not rigorous, schools are not doing their job of challenging and pushing students to excel at the highest levels.

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Compilation of Critical Element Papers for Principalship Cohort

A SERIES OF CRITICAL ELEMENT PAPERS

Presented to

Dr. David Else

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the requirements of the Principalship Program

By

Mr. Ryan K. Junge

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Michael D. Waggoner

Head, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
Willard Daggett, a leading educational reformist states,

We are not here to promote only the education of those who are easy to teach, who speak English fluently, and who fit school in between before-school athletics and after-school fine arts, who are clean and well fed, or who behave nicely every day. If we are not here to promote the success of all students, then why are we here? (W. Daggett, personal communication, February, 2005)

It should be considered a very high honor and privilege to be an educational leader in the world today. If it is looked at as a job instead of a passionate career, an individual may be in education for the wrong reasons. There will be thousands of kids influenced by decisions made in the classroom, on the playing fields, in the music and art rooms, that will affect the decision making of these students their entire lives. That is an enormous responsibility for an educator to have. It is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly, and it is a responsibility that should be relished.

The needs of children become more and more apparent every day, and every year. The needs of children to have a steadying influence in their lives more and more come from their time at school. With children growing up in broken homes it becomes imperative to provide a comfortable learning environment, where a child knows he or she is welcome, safe, and comfortable. That becomes the responsibility of the administration to first emulate that environment themselves, and instill that ability to create the ideal atmosphere for learning in their staffs. Every single student at a school
should have a staff member come up to them and call them by their first name on a daily basis. Whether it is by saying hello or calling on him or her in class to answer a question, every student should hear his or her first name. It gives them a sense of belonging and a certain level of respect. This is something that has been tried and tested many times and the effects are very strong. It is amazing to see the impact on a student lacking confidence, which you might not even have in class, walking down the hall with head down when called by their first name. My motivation in education has always been to create a learning environment where there is no hazing or bullying. To create an environment in which every student feels free and confident to voice opinions on topics in class. This environment can be created in the classroom, in the hallways, and it in the entire school. But it is our responsibility as leaders to ensure that this environment is carried out and enforced.

I have had the unique opportunity to be around some outstanding teachers and educational leaders in my lifetime. I knew growing up that I wanted to be an educator and coach. The teachers and coaches I had all lived what seemed to be such fulfilling lives, going to school activities and raising children in the “educational family”. The modeling of a teacher and coach’s life that I saw growing up has always been a great motivation to me to become an educational leader. I saw how kids adored them in public and always looked up to them as role models. I saw through elementary, middle school, and high school how much respect and admiration I had for good teachers and coaches. I
knew that I could have that same impact on children in my lifetime as a teacher, coach, and in the future as an administrator. I have always had a very large soft spot in my heart for kids of all ages, so there is no other place I would rather be than in education.

As a coach you always talk to your players and teams about setting goals for themselves and what they hope to accomplish as an individual and as a team. There is no difference when being an administrator. Your players are teachers and support staff who all makeup the team. Whether it is the cook, janitor, or teacher aid, everyone can play a highly vital role in creating a very comfortable environment for children. I hope to be the educational leader for a school that can also be the political leader to bring everyone together for a common purpose. There are always going to be differing opinions and different ideas on how to do things. But when these differences come up, it is the goal of an administrator to make sure that whatever decision is made, to be sure that decision is in the best interest of the children involved and the school as a whole. It is my belief that the atmosphere of a school starts from the top. The administrator must exhibit the ability to bring staff and community together for that common goal of educational greatness. There should not be a more important goal than to create upstanding future citizens that can be positive contributors to our society.

I consider myself lucky to have the coaching background that I have which has helped me move forward toward my goal of being a school administrator. I have had the opportunity to bring individuals together to make teams. I have had the opportunity to bring parents together for the common goal of creating disciplined and hard working
individuals. I have had the opportunity to rally a community around the school to create great school pride and school spirit. I often compare being an educational leader to being a coach. You have to be able to rally people for a common cause. You have to be able to present things to an educational team in a way that they understand and want to follow. That is a great responsibility, but I believe my experiences as a teacher and coach have given me valuable lessons and skills to become a motivated and passionate educational leader.

Creating Change In Teachers Using Reflective Practice:

Challenges And Advantages

Within this principalship program I have had the opportunity to learn about the process that an individual goes through to initiate change within his or her own career and life. Hunzicker (2004) explains that there is a process that individuals must go through to facilitate change within them. The first phase is Pre-contemplation, which is when an individual may be aware of a problem but has no intention of making a change. The second phase is Contemplation, in which the individual is aware of a problem and seriously considers change. The third phase is Preparation, where the individual attempts small behavioral changes but is not able to sustain them. The fourth phase is Action, which is where the person's behavior is modified enough to create a change in behavior for a short period of time. The final stage is Maintenance; this is where the behavioral changes become established.

Now that the process of how an individual changes has been established, an administrator must know how to lead teachers towards change. Jensen (1998) states,
"Changing a teacher’s beliefs requires that new information be presented repeatedly over time, to the point that the person begins to feel no difference between current beliefs and new information" (p. 2). I interpret this to mean that if there is enough of an influx of information that supports a desired change then the staff will feel less uncomfortable and threatened by that change. The information that you want teachers to be thinking about to open them to the idea of change must be brought up and discussed over time. It can’t be an overnight phenomena being introduced and expected to work. It must be done over time.

King (2004) states, “Prior research demonstrates that adult learners may experience dramatic changes in their professional perspectives when they progress through foundational courses for their future or current profession” (p. 3). This is a large reason why teachers are and should be continually encouraged to continue their education to improve their knowledge levels and to open themselves to new ideas. Teachers and educational leaders must think outside the box and critically examine their educational beliefs to get the full effect. To just follow along with what has been done previously and to not continually seek new and better ways to educate self and children is a negative.

Reflective practice or what I like to refer to as self-examination has a large and integral part in every educator’s life. This is something that I think is important in everything you do. Whether it is your job, being a spouse, or being a parent, you must use self-examination to evaluate where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there. Without self-examination you put yourself at risk of getting off the path you
want to be on and going away from your beliefs in being the kind of person, educator, spouse, and parent you want to be.

Stronge states (2002),

Effective teachers continuously practice self-evaluation learning tools. Reflective teachers portray themselves as students of learning. They are curious about the art and science of teaching and about themselves as effective teachers. They constantly improve lessons; think about how to reach particular children, and seek and try out new approaches in the classroom to better meet the needs of their learners. (p. 4)

I strongly agree with these ideas. Teachers must be continually challenging themselves to strive for greatness. While in education I have witnessed many teachers who get into a comfort level or routine and do not want to get out of it. The biggest reason for this is because it takes work to get better and to find new ideas and to challenge you as a professional. It is much easier to stay in the box where it is easy and comfortable than to get outside of the box and look at different ways to educate youngsters. The toughest part of this job is to get teachers excited and ready to change right along with everyone else. This takes time. These changes should not be made overnight. If the changes are known a year in advance the teachers have the ability to do some research on their own to better educate themselves to make an opinion change without being pushed from administration. Most teachers consider themselves their own bosses and have trouble being told that change is needed. So allow them ownership in the decision-making process.
The best way to build ownership within the staff is to allow teachers leadership roles within staff groups and organizations. These leadership roles will allow teachers a very strong say in the decision making process of the school. When staff is allowed a prominent role in the decision-making process of the school, the feeling of ownership will follow.

Borko and Putnam (1995) believe, “It is a necessity for teachers to have a deep understanding of the central facts and concepts of the discipline within the subjects that they are teaching” (p. 38). You can sit in any in-service throughout a school year and see the different behaviors that certain staff members are going through despite the change. I am referring to the rolling of the eyes, the sighs, and the looks. Most of these refer to the belief that the changes will involve busy work that is tied to very little long lasting effects to education. Some of the older staff use the mantra “Haven’t we used this before, but it was named something else?” The point they are missing is that with greater understanding of the central facts and concepts, they are learning in staff development, will improve their teaching ability.

Some staff members do not have enough confidence in their teaching abilities to take on different strategies. Even worse are the staffs that don’t want change because it may cause work for them. So as leaders we must find out how to create an atmosphere where change is not something that is dreaded. It is also imperative that the staff is a part of the decision making process. This could be through leadership teams, or curriculum teams that work with the principal to decide on changes that
need to be made. This will give the administration the ability to have teacher advocates
in the hallways, lunchrooms, and lounges selling the idea to their peers instead of just
getting it handed down from above.

The idea of creating change and using reflective practice as an administrator and
administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by
advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program
conducive to student learning and staff professional growth" (p. 37). A school's culture
is created from the top down, so an administrator must take great pride in creating a
culture and instructional programs that are beneficial to kids. To do that they must be
able to encourage staff to not resist changes that are good for kids, but to grasp them as
their own and be a true team player, not doing what is easiest, but what is best for the
school and the kids.

Leader's Role In Educational Change:

Educational Reform And Implementing Change At The High School Level

School reform is important when it is recognized that certain aspects of a school
are in need of improvement. Many schools across the United States are in the process of
reforming one way or another. So many different methods and ideas about school reform
exist today, and the appropriate method of reform depends on the situation that the school
is in.

The fact that change must occur in order for reform to be successful is a
realization that all school staff members must accept. An environment for change must
be created within the staff by quality leadership from the administration. The administration needs to get the support of the staff to have everyone moving forward in the same direction. The staff must be hired on a basis of being inventive and willing to try things. This can be hard with older staff, but you must be able to sell the reforms to the staff to gain support. You should have staff that already supports you and they will help sell it to the staff that does not.

Staff support is a main factor in school reform being successful. As an administrator, I must seek the input and ideas from staff members. They must know that they are a valuable and important part to this reform and that they will have chances to be active partners with regards to what happens with the future of the school. In an article about the reformation of the high school in Chicago, the following was stated, "...no reform has a chance of making any lasting change if teachers are not behind it, are not involved in originating, developing, and implementing it" ("Reforming Chicago", 2004, p.1633).

I believe that this is the very truth about staff involvement in high school reform. As an administrator, I must be able to motivate teachers and get them to believe that the changes that need to be made to the school will benefit not only themselves, but the students as well; which is the most important reason for reform.

One way to be sure you have staff members that are willing to embrace change and everything that comes with school reform is to hire and train high quality teachers. Hiring and retaining worthy teachers is an obstacle that many administrators encounter.

According to the article, "How to Fix the Schools"(2004),
We must reinvent the way we recruit, train, and retain teachers by addressing:

**Prestige:** Teaching would be more prestigious if we added a career ladder for teachers: teacher, senior teacher, and master teacher.

**Pay:** If teacher’s per-hour pay remained the same and they worked an eight-hour day and a 220-day year, they would earn $70,000 to $100,000 a year – enough to eliminate low pay as a reason to reject a teaching career.

**Control:** More teachers would stay in teaching if classes were grouped by achievement rather than by random assignment, which brings Herculean challenges for most teachers. It would also help if teachers had more power to place too-difficult-to-teach students in special classes. (p. 51)

If administrators could obtain and retain high quality teachers, then they would have more support from these teachers, and they would not face as much opposition to resist the changes that need to be made.

A way that an administrator can gather ideas about effective school reform is by taking a look at a school that has gone through a successful reformation. Understanding that each school is different, the administrator can at least get a base of ideas to take before his or her staff for discussion. Campbell High School, in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, is experiencing a successful reformation. According to the article, “Embracing Reform”, (2005), the school was at the bottom of most lists for accountability factors. Now the school uses two reform models and talks with redesign coaches for help with their reformation (p. 6). The Campbell High School reformation focused on different aspects for a successful reform. The first was that they focused on the students
at the school. Ninth grade students were targeted and data analysis was taken on attendance, students being retained, and thoughts of post-secondary education. After it was recognized that these ninth grade students needed some help, a reform coach was brought in and set some guidelines about the school reform.

**Professional learning community:** Professional collaboration is focused on implementing best practices of teaching and learning.

**Relationships:** Every student is known, fits in, and develops academic, emotional, social, and marketable skills.

**Citizenship:** Every student is responsible and contributes to society. Academic rigor and relevance: Curriculum and instruction are challenging and reflect real-life situations. (p. 5)

Another part of reform is that the administrators and staff are working to make the school more personal. They want a safe and comfortable environment, which means a flexible student dress code and open door relationships between students, teachers, and administrators. ("Embracing Reform", 2005). Leaders understand that students come first in the school and must be taken care of in a manner that supports each student the best way possible. I would work with staff to develop ways in which the students would feel comfortable communicating their thoughts and feelings to a staff member, and I would allow for students to help facilitate their own learning, but asking questions and encouraging them to challenge each other.

According to the article, "How to Fix the School", (2004), curriculum is another important aspect of reforming high schools. Life skills should be more of an important
part of the curriculum for high school students. Real-life situations are as important as
learning the basics of the particular field of study. I want real life experiences to be a big
part of the learning process of students. I will encourage staff to challenge the students
with real life situations that apply to the subject manner they are teaching. A national
curriculum is another idea that people have given as a way to reform schools. If schools
had a set curriculum that they had to teach for the grade level and subject matter, would
students benefit because they could go more at their own pace? More teachers might be
available for helping students, whether it's online or in person, if the curriculum was the
same throughout the whole nation.

I don’t agree with a national curriculum. I think the federal government already
has their hands in public education more than they should. I, however, would be for a
state curriculum that is written and put together by a large committee of teachers and
curriculum directors from around the state. This would allow many teachers across the
state to have a better understanding and grasp of what should be taught in their
classrooms. I also think it would create a stronger commitment from teachers,
curriculum directors, and administrators alike to come together and defend and support
curriculum work in our schools.

Recognizing that a school needs to be reformed is the first step to improving the
education of students. An administrator needs to have support from his or her staff
members. The staff members need to have appropriate training and they need to be able
to help with the decision making for the reformation. Curriculum is another major part of
reforming schools. As an administrator, you need to make sure that the curriculum is
appropriate for the students and it isn’t, you need to propose ways to fix the problem areas. Overall, the reformation of high schools needs to be a collaborative process that keeps the best interest of the students in mind.

As a leader it will be essential that you are able to also be a leader of change. A large part of change in education revolves around teaching strategies and curriculum. It is vital as an educational leader to be able to gain support for the changes needed to reform high schools into great educational learning centers. There are always situations in schools that will need fixed or tweaked, hopefully with the proper training and leadership qualities those changes and reforms will be smooth in their transitions.

A Leader Of Learners Role For The Improvement Of Learning For Both Students And Adults: Reflection For Action

Over the last two years I have had the opportunity to listen to Dr. William Daggett speak on the importance of high school reform due to the world wide competition that is emerging from countries such as India and China. Dr. Daggett believes it is important to reform our own high schools and increase the rigor relevance, and relationships of our curriculum. Darling-Hammond (2005) states:

Around the world, the importance of education to individual and societal success has increased at a breathtaking pace as a new knowledge-based economy has emerged. As a consequence, most countries have been engaged in intensive reforms of their education systems, and many have focused especially on improving teacher education, recognizing that preparing accomplished teachers
who can effectively teach a wide array of learners to high standards is essential to economic and political survival. (p. 237)

The most important role of an educational leader is the leader of instruction. It is crucial that you implement a quality atmosphere within your school that is conducive to high quality instruction. It is also essential that the curriculum being taught in the classrooms is rigorous and relevant to the students. If the material is not relevant the student will struggle to understand the importance of learning the material. If the curriculum is not rigorous schools are not doing their job of challenging and pushing students to excel at the highest levels.

There has been a very strong push nationwide for educational reform and at the top of the list has been teacher education and staff development. It is essential that we find ways to better prepare our teachers, which will result in better instruction and ideally better academic achievement for our students. We are so set in our traditional ways of training teachers that many people believe we are falling behind the changing ways students learn. I am somewhere in the middle of this argument, I think some institutions and areas do an excellent job of training new teachers, but I also believe the most important place students need to be is in the classroom learning from experienced teachers. The only true way teachers can gain experience and preparation is to teach. It might only be five lessons a semester during practicum hours for classes and then the extensive experience done during student teaching. But the experience must come by teaching.
As an educational leader it is my responsibility to create an environment of constant learning and growing amongst staff. This all starts with new staff and young staff, many which will probably be right out of college. It is imperative that schools use strong education and mentoring programs to allow support for younger staff. Most school districts have an abundance of good and experienced staff. The educational leader must tap the experienced teacher resource to allow new staff the opportunity to observe these highly qualified professionals and ask questions about techniques that are working and ones that aren’t.

The feeling of an atmosphere that maintains a spirit of team, facilitating change for schools, and improving a school’s faculty are all parts of the culture that I must create as an educational leader. This may be the most difficult part of the job. There must be a commonality of purpose within the staff, and a belief that the changes being implemented are best for kids and also best for staff. For that to happen I must create leadership committees to allow the staff input into staff development opportunities that meet teacher needs so there is a team belief in what is being done. The staff development opportunities within the district must meet specific needs and be user-friendly. There must be time for the staff to implement newly learned strategies without swamping them with extra work. For the staff to be supportive of the changes and the culture that is being created within the school there must be a sense of ownership. The principal is responsible for shaping the culture of the school.
The educational leader can also directly affect student achievement. Over time it is believed that instructional leadership from the principal has been identified as a strong contributor to higher student achievement. While teachers, supervisors, aids, and superintendents are able to contribute instructional leadership, principals must be the foundation for instructional leadership at the school level. Principals often are overwhelmed with paperwork, discipline, and the general workings of the school, but our first priority as principals must be as educational leaders and to focus on student achievement (O’Donnell & White, 2005).

My personal teaching style has always put a lot of emphasis on character and discipline. This would not change as an educational leader of a school. It is my belief that these two qualities bring learning to the forefront while also teaching valuable life skills and the ability to be good citizens. Some describe character education as psychological development, which affects a student’s ability to be an effective member of society. These traits include being socially and personally responsible, ethical, and also self-managed. Character motivation is most effective when it focuses on the educational and social factors that affect the psychological development of character. The main program we use at Benton Community is called Character Counts. This program is set up to work on effective character education. The main principle of this program is to promote core ethical values as the basis of good character, creating a caring school community, and engaging the entire school staff in sharing responsibility for character education. For a school community to work well, its members must understand and accept their obligations and be accepting of expectations others have of them. But for
this to happen the principal must take a key role in developing and sustaining trust among the communities of a school (Holloway, 2006).

It is of vital importance that the educational leader of the school accepts the responsibility of being a role model for the entire school community. Leaders must always lead by example and demonstrating the skills that are expected of staff (Holloway, 2006).

**How To Use Servant Leadership While Implementing A Service Leadership Style**

Witcher (2003) believes, “As educational leaders we must ask ourselves whether we are trying to create a better system or whether we are operating within the one we have out of resignation, fatigue, or expedience” (p. 28).

A visionary leader is someone who believes in challenging the process, is aspiring to a shared vision, allows staff to work and act, models the way he or she wants things done, and encourages caring and acting by your heart. Visionary leaders make the success of the student, service to the community, and collaboration an integral part of their personal goals or mission. The vision of the leader provides the motivation and the desire to achieve success (Stueber, 2000).

Stueber (2000), believes that there is a different kind of leadership that is closely related to visionary leadership, this being **servant leadership**. There are ten different characteristics of servant leadership. The first characteristic is foresight. Foresight is directly linked to anticipation of what may happen and taking the precautionary steps to prevent negative things from happening. I would describe this as taking a proactive approach instead of a reactive approach. It is very important to me to be a proactive
educator, coach, and future administrator. I try to look ahead and see possible train wrecks and take the action necessary to prevent them before they happen. This is imperative as an administrator; if an administrator takes a reactive position only to situations, conflict and negative situations that could have been avoided won't be. I understand that all situations cannot be foreseen, but some can, and we must always be looking for them.

Secondly, a servant leader is commitment to the growth of people. A principal must be committed to the growth of all individuals on staff. A principal must look at coming up with as much funding and resources as possible to allow for personal and professional development of staff. Stueber (2000) states, “The servant leader principal provides staff development activities that build trust and self-esteem” (p. 50). A staff that sees their leader or principal committed to their growth as individuals and professionals will go a long way towards a very positive working environment. Some districts reward staff for professional development hours. Some also encourage teachers to get their masters degree. This is an excellent stance to take towards improving a staff's teaching ability. As a leader I will always strongly support and encourage staff to better them in any way possible. I also understand that pushing staff to better themselves with higher education may cause me to lose some great staff members to better jobs. That selfishness can't creep into the leader's mindset; education is all about bettering people, not just students.

Third, a servant leader has the ability to communicate and understand concepts related to their own subject or field. As a leader I will have my own core values and
concepts; I must be able to communicate those to staff and parents. I must be able to look at the big picture, be able to look into the future and see the ramifications that decisions I make will have (Stueber, 2000).

Fourth, a servant leader must possess the powers of persuasion. As a leader in the classroom, on the practice field, in the administrative chair I must be able to sell what I want people to buy. This can vary as widely as getting students to buy into the importance of the Civil Rights Movement or convincing a team they can beat the opponent on Friday night. Getting a staff to believe that the changes needed to improve education are possible (Stueber, 2000).

Fifth, a servant leader must listen receptively to what staff and stakeholders have to say. There are always going to be fires to be addressed. Instead of making reactive or emotional decisions, the administrator must listen first to all scenarios and sides, then after compiling evidence, step in and make a controlled, cerebral decision to resolve the problem in the most positive way possible (Stueber, 2000).

Sixth, a servant leader has to be highly accepting of others and their opinions, and also show empathy towards them. The main idea behind this premise is to treat all staff, students, parents, and stakeholders with respect. Often, administrators overlook support staff. Support staff members play an extremely important role in the daily workings of a school and need to be treated with the utmost respect (Stueber, 2000).

Seventh, a servant leader has to have a very strong perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. When the leader can identify strengths and weaknesses it will better allow him or her to address the weaknesses and try to make them strengths. It will
also allow the leader to keep strengths as strengths and make them even stronger. By identifying our strengths, we can make that our backbone and by ensuring that it remains our backbone we will continue to grow in those already strong areas. The areas of weakness that are addressed by staff development and staff initiatives will improve as well (Stueber, 2000).

Eighth, a servant leader has the ability to develop a community within the school that creates a sense of teamwork and camaraderie. A positive school culture is very crucial to ensure a positive learning environment for all students. When people walk into a school there should be a positive feeling and a sense the school is a strong advocate for students. Creating a positive climate and strong culture is essential to success. One big aspect of the culture is to be very visible and to employ an open door policy. This ensures that staff and students alike feel they can come to you with questions, problems, and concerns (Stueber, 2000).

Ninth, a servant leader is to be able to manage the resources of the school to meet the needs of the greater good, rather than personal needs. This is to ensure that everyone involved is looking at the "big picture" of the kids and the school, and not just their own needs (Stueber, 2000).

Tenth, a servant leader is to have the ability to diffuse situations that are stressful, and allow the situation to calm and eliminate the stress. One of the most important jobs of an educational leader is that of a mediator. There are many situations that are between students, between parents, between teachers, or even between administrators that I will have to mediate. It will be imperative to be able to approach these situations with little to
no bias. It will also be imperative to have the ability to keep calm when being attacked to ensure no altercations break out.

I have often heard professors and administrators state that the principals’ job is the ultimate in management. As stated above in the ten different traits or characteristics that a good servant leader must have, it become very evident that the principal’s job is demanding, diverse, sensitive, and challenging all in one. As a leader I will have to wear many different hats; visionary, disciplinarian, and manager. For me to be successful at the different roles of a leader of service, it will be imperative that I incorporate the ten characteristics into my leadership roles.
References


