What I believe about leadership and education: a reflective essay

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Abstract
Good leadership is critical for a successful school. The school revolves around the leadership at the top. It is important for administrators to have respect from teachers and students. I feel one of the best ways to gain respect is to be fair in the area of discipline. Organized structure and high expectations become achievable if there is fairness across the board. I feel it is important to make no exceptions and stand by the school policies in order for people to believe in the integrity of an administrator.

I feel good leaders must exemplify the characteristics of good, caring citizens. Administrators should not be afraid to show compassion, joy, sorrow, and pride within their school community. I feel administrators need to develop a sense of family within their buildings.
WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Education shapes future generations. Teachers and administrators must look at education with a critical eye and be ready and willing to change in order to provide what is best for students. Being part of education is a great venture.

I became an educator because I love working with children. When I was younger, I babysat a boy named Zach who is legally blind and mentally disabled after being dropped in the bathtub when he was an infant. Zach has a wonderful mother, but his demands for attention made me reflect about what was in store for him and his family. I believe that everyone should be a productive citizen and have a job that makes him or her feel a sense of accomplishment. Since then, I have worked with many mentally disabled children who try so hard. Their dedication really makes me want to help them reach to their best potential.

Additionally, I have always looked up to my mother. She is a high school math teacher, and I watched the energy she got from her students and the feeling of accomplishment. She teaches AP Calculus and seems just as excited about her students' scores as they do. As a child, I enjoyed sharing my educational world and schedule with my mother. The educational community was a central focus for my family.

Another important reason I wanted to go into education is because I see people giving up on the so-called “problem students” too quickly. I am drawn to the at-risk students. Everyone has a purpose and will fill a role in society. Everyone needs self-worth, and I want to be there to help instill that worth in those students who don’t seem to matter to some educators. I was very lucky to be raised in a loving, caring home. So many children have homes where parents don’t give them the values and care that they need. Teachers often spend more time with many of the students than their parents do and assume many of the parents’ responsibilities. By modeling
enthusiasm for learning, displaying a positive attitude, and developing a fair structure for dealing with problems in behavior, I feel I have a great opportunity to make a positive difference.

Because I am a special education teacher, I may think somewhat differently than regular education teachers. I believe we need to prepare our students for living in society and being good citizens, not just preparing them academically. I feel we need to teach life skills and citizenship. Students that are not college bound can be overlooked. I feel compelled to put energy into this group that needs technical and life skills. I believe education helps shape students into the people they become so it is necessary that the school is a safe, positive environment for them to grow and learn.

As a teacher, my influence is somewhat limited to those in my classroom. I want to be able to have access to and influence more students, and I can do that in the role of a school administrator. I enjoy working with behavior management and feel that I get results. I am consistent and realistic in my expectations for students.

Good leadership is critical for a successful school. The school revolves around the leadership at the top. It is important for administrators to have respect from teachers and students. I feel one of the best ways to gain respect is to be fair in the area of discipline. Organized structure and high expectations become achievable if there is fairness across the board. I feel it is important to make no exceptions and stand by the school policies in order for people to believe in the integrity of an administrator. I feel good leaders must exemplify the characteristics of good, caring citizens. Administrators should not be afraid to show compassion, joy, sorrow, and pride within their school community. I feel administrators need to develop a sense of family within their buildings.
As an administrator, I don't want to be looked at as only a disciplinarian, but as an encourager and a positive motivator for staff and students toward a positive school vision. An administrator cannot do it alone. He/she must get everyone in the school community to see the vision and work together to reach it. Consistency in expectations, enforcement of policy, and work ethic are critical in reaching goals. Getting everyone to buy into the vision is the first step.

Being a good administrator requires collaboration with the community around the school. As an administrator, I want to be open to the lives and background of students. I want to keep up to date on family trends and community issues. I want to be the voice of the school in the community. Uniting the school with local businesses, colleges, and social programs is extremely important. So many students go to college without an idea about what they want to do for a career. When students are involved with the community, they can see themselves as contributing citizens later. I believe that promoting partnership in the community is essential in promoting career education. When I become an administrator, one of my goals is to lead in education for students who are not college bound. I believe schools should offer vocational courses and school-to-work programs. Schools need to provide more opportunities to develop technical skills for students that choose them.

As an administrator, I want to support new teachers with mentoring programs and experienced teachers with meaningful professional development. I want to use good communication techniques at every opportunity. I want to run effective meetings and have teachers see the importance of the meeting. I believe that I have good interpersonal skills that will make me effective in consensus and conflict resolution to facilitate change. I am not afraid of change; in fact, I welcome change because I am a high-energy person who works for continuous improvement.
As a teacher, I grow professionally and reflect upon my experiences every day. When I become an administrator, I will have high expectations for students, staff, and myself. I want to be a leader of an effective, efficient school by using data-driven research, wise planning, and sound judgement.

School-wide Discipline

School discipline is an issue that is debated when evaluating the effectiveness of our nation's schools. I believe that having a reasonable, fair, and consistent school discipline plan is a critical element essential for exemplary educational leadership. I feel that it is very important for administrators and teachers to be proactive to prevent behavioral problems. Over-punishment does not lead to respect. However, having a positive and safe learning environment is necessary for students to reach their education potential.

One of the biggest complaints by students and parents regarding discipline is the feeling that it is not administered fairly. I believe that being tardy, for example, should be dealt with as a school-wide rule. There needs to be a demerit system for this resulting in after school detention or Saturday detention uniformly so that being accountable for tardiness does not label some as "mean" teachers and some as "nice" teachers. The entire school needs to buy into the idea that all students need to be in class on time.

Reasonable rules give students little to argue about. Being informed of the policy in advance and then consistently seeing the policy enforced gives students a sense of structure that is healthy. Dr. Stephen W. Smith states, "Because classrooms sit inside of a schoolhouse, a school-wide approach is a necessary ingredient to managing the problem behaviors of students" (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001, p. 35).
Prevention

Striving for prevention of behavior problems is the most important intervention step (p. 31). Dr. Smith says, “Today, students bring many complicating issues to school. There are many students coming from home environments where they are not receiving adequate support to develop the social skills for interacting appropriately in school. Additionally, students are exposed to an increasingly violent and unpredictable society that causes stress” (p. 32).

Therefore, for exemplary educational leadership, a school needs to create a positive educational community every day.

Dr. Smith suggests 5 proactive prevention techniques that include:

1) kid-proofing the environment so potential problems are out of reach and under teacher control,
2) establishing rules and consequences,
3) ignoring inconsequential negative behaviors and refocusing on the positive,
4) redirecting rather than reprimanding students, and
5) allowing students a variety of choices to reach an agreed-upon instructional goal (p. 32)

I believe that teachers need to have professional development to continue learning how to manage behavior problems more effectively. Rules need to be made collaboratively with students and faculty, and students need to have a clear understanding of the rules. Teachers need to ignore the small, inconsequential behaviors that arise.

Praise

Teachers need to keep in mind that praise is a proactive intervention in behavior management. I feel teachers need to praise good behavior, redirect students’ attention, and keep students
engaged in their learning activities. Studies show that praise delivered by teachers reduces antisocial behavior and attendance problems (Mayer, 1999, p. 2). In today's society where children spend less and less time with parents, praise at school is even more important. With the push for Least Restrictive Environment, I feel that special education teachers need to help regular education teachers set up reinforcement strategies for students in their classes.

Model of a School-wide Plan

One model of a school-wide discipline plan is called Unified Discipline. It promotes school-wide establishment of unified attitudes, expectations, correction procedures, and team roles (White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr, & Ellis, 2001). For the goal of unified attitudes, all teachers, administrators, and other school personnel agree to a consistent point of view that encourages appropriate behavior and correcting misbehavior. With Unified Discipline, all personnel 1) support the belief that all students are able to improve their behavior; 2) provide correction in a professional manner; and 3) believe that anger and high emotions harm instructional effectiveness (p. 4). Teams must have the attitude that they are not "out to get" students in trouble. Teachers need to be professional in promoting each student's well being.

Formulation of Rules

A teacher can be firm with students without being a "bully" (McDaniel, 1994, p. 2). Thomas McDaniel suggests three principles as guidelines when formulating rules. The principles are: 1) Rules should be clear and firm; 2) Teachers must use action, not anger, to control behavior; and 3) Provide structure for the classroom and the lesson (pp. 3-4). When a student violates a rule, I want to encourage teachers to discuss the infraction privately, if possible, so there is not an audience to the discussion.
Students need to know rules and expectations at the start. If students know the rules, then they are not surprised by consequences that follow if they have violated them. If students do not know the rules, arguments arise about the consequences. I believe that we need to set our expectations for behavior high. Rules are necessary to ensure the safety and well being of students. High school teachers should not assume students know the rules. A list of rules on the wall or in the handbook is a good idea. Teachers should discuss the rules and give examples. Rules should be positive. Teachers should give students an overview of the class activities and the objectives at the start of each class period and establish structure.

Before rules are violated, the correction procedures need to be defined. I believe that the student should state what they did wrong. They should find the rule in the handbook that they have violated, and find the corresponding consequence, if possible. A rule cannot be made for every specific problem, but well thought out general rules can cover most incidents.

Consensus

A consensus must be achieved with staff, students, and parents on the reasonableness of these rules. Parents need to understand and know the school discipline plan. They need to “buy into” the plan as well so they will back up the school. Today many parents do not like to discipline or they do not feel adequate to discipline. They let teenagers raise themselves. Schools need to work with parents in this area, and they need to communicate their discipline plan clearly.

With Unified Discipline, team roles promote a partnership. “This aspect of the model promotes faculty support of administrators and administrator support of faculty and eliminates second-guessing when proper disciplinary and classroom actions are taken” (White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr, & Ellis, 2001, p. 5). Knowing that there is no doubt as to the application of a rule
and its consequence to every student who breaks a rule is essential in operating a school where fairness and equity is desired.

**Application**

As an administrator, setting a school-wide discipline plan would be a key component of my leadership style. I would use in-service time to educate and motivate teachers in the area of discipline. Teachers and administrators need to be on the same page with discipline to create fairness and a positive feeling among students. Joining administrators and teachers as partners in this area results in a more effective school environment.

A school-wide discipline plan aligns with Iowa Standards for School Leaders, Standard 5: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. It supports Performance 13: The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that the school applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and consistently.

**School Vision**

Having a vision of learning is important for every school. However, the vision must be more than words. The vision of learning needs to be shared and supported by administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community members.

I believe it is very important to create a vision of learning and effectively communicate it to the school community. It is important to refer to the vision and mission as much as possible in the day to day operations of the school. Many schools have a nice vision statement, but they don’t live by it. Administrators must live by the vision and model it at every opportunity.

I feel that new teachers must be introduced to the school vision as soon as they come into the district. It is important that they connect to the school’s mission and develop ownership with
its philosophy. I believe that time should be provided during new teacher in-service days for them to become familiar with the vision and become excited about its implementation. They need to see how their beliefs can tie in with the vision that has been established. I believe that the vision and mission must be revisited and refined periodically.

Creation and Implementation

As the pressure for school improvement increases, administrators must look for effective means to unite efforts to put change in place. Change is never easy. According to Schwahn and Spady, “The school’s mission, values and vision must be discriminating, clear, concise, and inspirational to develop a compelling reason for change.” Schools need to compile their own beliefs and values to create a mission statement and student learning goals. When revising the school’s vision of learning, administrators need to realize that:

1) People don’t change unless they share a compelling reason to change.
2) People don’t change unless they have ownership in the change.
3) People don’t change unless their leaders model that they are serious about the change.
4) People are unlikely to change unless they have a concrete picture of what the change will look like for them personally.
5) People can’t make a change – or make it last – unless they receive organizational support for the change. (Schwahn and Spady, 1998, 45-50).

It is very important to include a variety of members when working on the mission and values. There must be consensus about the mission. Everyone needs to be informed and understand this mission. The mission should be at the core of every decision. Teachers should hear it over and over. An effective administrator should even use the vision to prepare the agenda
for faculty meetings. Administrators need to remember to model the desired change at all times. People will follow the administrators’ lead.

According to Elaine Wilmore in *Principal Leadership*, creating a school vision and goals is a four-step process (Wilmore, 2002, 20-21). First, collaboration needs to take place for development of the vision. It is wise to include as many people as possible. This team needs to include teachers, parents, students, business leaders, and community members. Having more people included provides diverse voices and facilitates understanding between different groups. When people hear others’ points of view and hear an advocate for a cause, they can look for common ground and what is best for every student (Wagner, 1995, 40).

When forming a vision of learning, Dr. David Else, lecturing in Personal and Professional Development, suggested asking the following three questions:

1) What do you like about your school?
2) What would you like to improve in your school?
3) What would you like your school to look like in three to five years?

Secondly, articulation of the vision is necessary so everyone connected to the school can hear and understand the vision. It is important to enlist everyone’s help in achieving the vision so it must be communicated through symbols, activities, and even ceremonies.

Next, implementation of the vision means that everything said, every action taken, every plan designed, and every purchase made should focus on the vision. Everyone should be willing to support what they have helped to collaboratively build. People must be willing to take risks in implementation of change so that students become better prepared to work in today’s world and become more active, involved citizens (Reese and Martin, 1998, 285).
Finally, stewardship of the vision is required to sustain the energy to keep the vision going forward. Administrators are responsible to keep the vision alive and on the front page. They need to act as cheerleaders during the good and bad times to keep everyone focused on the vision.

Application

As a new administrator, the focus of my efforts would be infusing the vision of learning into my daily activities. I would gather a team early in the fall to make personal connection and look at the school’s vision of learning and mission. I would use the three-question format, asking the group what they liked about the school, what they would like to improve, and what the school should look like in three to five years. Then in the spring, I would meet with the team again to see how we should rewrite or refine the vision.

The crucial element that aligns with Professional Visionary Leadership is Standard 1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the community. The administrator has knowledge and understanding of the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans (K 1.2). The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to a school vision of high standards of learning (D 1.2). The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated and revised (P 1.15). Developing and refining the vision of learning and mission is a continuous process that must address educational needs in a change world, holding on to fundamental values and ideals.
Collaborative Leadership

Since many children today are exposed to adverse emotional, physical, and social conditions, schools must reach out to the community as a partner to help them succeed. Because both parents often work outside the home, the responsibility of preparing children from school has shifted away from the home. The school on its own is limited in what it can do to alleviate hunger, poverty, abuse, neglect, and hopelessness at home. The collaboration of schools with families and community members is an essential component to responding to the diverse needs of the community and to utilizing community resources in solutions to these problems.

Areas of Collaboration

Research shows many models for school-community coalitions for development of programs and delivery of services. Martin J. Blank targets five areas of collaboration (Blank, 2000, p. 17).

1) Quality Education. This includes a challenging curriculum that meets standards and benchmarks and links the students to community resources.

2) Youth Development. Schools need to provide leadership opportunities for students to connect and serve peers and adults in the community. Adults can serve as mentors to students.

3) Family Support. This involves linking the family in their children's education throughout the educational process from pre-school through high school.

4) Family and Community Engagement. Families need to be actively involved in designing and supporting their children's educational programs and activities.

Research shows that parents who are involved and informed about their children's
education rate their level of satisfaction much higher than parents who are not involved (Costa & Liebmann, 1997, 15).

5) Community Development. With this area, the school is involved in economic development of the neighborhood and its physical development.

Blank also suggests six operating principles for community schools to follow in the development of the programs and services (Blank, 2000, pp. 17-18).

1) The school should foster strong partnerships with parents and community members.

2) The school and community should share accountability results. Data is used to measure the results.

3) The partners should set high expectations for everyone. Students and adults are expected to have high standards for learning and are expected to contribute to the community.

4) Community schools must be built on the community's strength by using all available local resources.

5) Diversity is embraced. Community schools work to develop respect and positive identities for people of all backgrounds.

6) Community schools should avoid "cookie cutter" solutions. Every community is unique in its make up. Every community needs to come up with its own vision to meet their needs.

The collaboration between schools and community is an effective and powerful means of enlisting the forces of many people to solve problems. All the partners have a stake in the successful solutions.
**Full Service School**

A full service school is a school where there is collaboration between school personnel, human services, and families to identify problems and help find services in the community to resolve them (Kronick, 2000, p. 27). A full service school can provide adult education, child care, health services, casework, economic services, mental health counseling, and media services. During school hours, the child care center could be run by private adults. However, the center could provide part-time jobs to students for work experience. Another advantage would be that high school students with children would have easy access to day care.

The collaboration between schools and community can result in human services being delivered in an effective manner. All local human service agencies should work together with the schools for medical and nursing care, attendance control, and vocational counseling. Human services should not just be crisis-oriented and categorized.

**Benefits**

Schools and community collaboration should use strategies that provide the most valuable needed services. Prevention and early intervention should be targeted. The funding for the human services needs to come from multiple sources of private, local, state, and federal dollars. Members of agencies should represent schools, social services, mental health services, court services, and human services (Rist, 1992, p. 12). Also results of the inter-agency collaboration should be documented to assess and share results of the efforts.

The collaboration can result in providing a safe place before, after, and during school when achievement can be promoted. The use of parental and community involvement means that resources can be used efficiently. This encourages everyone to be a lifelong learner while stimulating hope and opportunities for both students and families (Jordan, 1999, p. 55).
Application

As an administrator and educational leader, I would like to see a community service requirement for graduation from my high school. The volunteer service could include job shadowing, helping the elderly or handicapped, helping the sick, reading to younger children, being involved in a Big Brother/Big Sister relationship, volunteering in local political events, serving in local city activities, and helping non-profit organizations such as the local food bank, churches, and the Red Cross. Involving teens in their community can help form lifelong connections and commitments to service.

Another way I would want to infuse the collaboration of the school and community would be through speakers about diversity that reflect the community. A Diversity Fair with cultural food, dances, and demonstrations of customs would be an activity I would promote. Special events such as this can increase students’ attention of diversity.

I would work to link the school with human service agencies. The school needs to advocate for families that are not advocating for themselves. This must be done tactfully and with confidentiality. Some families need help with the basic needs of food, clothing, medical care, and counseling. Educating families about eligibility requirements for welfare and other services, helping them fill out forms, and transporting them to agencies can be accomplished by the assistance of the community school (Rist, 1992, p. 13).

The school also has an obligation to educate the community in personal hygiene. I would commit resources of staff, secretarial assistance, guidance counselors, and nurses to deliver services in the community.

As an administrator, I would advocate for a free or reduced activity pass to be available to those students who qualify for free or reduced lunches. This would allow students from homes
in financial need to attend home athletic events and extra-curricular activities at no charge. This would give them a safe and positive place to spend evenings and allow them to freely participate socially in the school's after-school activities.

To gain collaboration between the school and community, I would encourage greater parental involvement in the school. This would include parents reading to students, helping decorate for dances and holidays, helping at concession stands, and volunteering at athletic events.

Opening the school library and media center to parents during or after school hours would bring parents into the educational community. I would set up workshops to teach parents how to use the internet, navigate the school's web site, and access other resources through the use of school computers.

The attitude I would promote in my school would be that education is a partnership between parents and teachers. Teachers need to remember that all parents care deeply about their children, and we are equal partners in the process to make every child successful (Scheurich, 2003, p. 124). This attitude is critical in the collaboration between schools and community.

Standard 4 of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders states: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources. As an educational leader, I would take this standard very seriously. Vision and commitment in this area can make a significant difference to students and the community. James Comer said, "The school is the most natural place to help children for there is no stigma attached" (Kronick, 2000, p. 30). I believe the school community is the best environment for children to explore possibilities and reach their potential.
Professional Development

Becoming a good teacher does not just happen when a beginning teacher sets foot in the classroom on the first day. Professional development needs to be designed to help that new teacher as well as aid in the continual growth of every teacher. According to the NEA Today, 20 percent of teachers leave the profession in the first three years ("Fanning first-year fires", 1998, p. 23). Avoiding this loss of newly certificated teachers is one of the goals of professional development and a mentoring program.

Mentoring Programs

The goal of a plan to help beginning teachers is to provide ongoing assistance to new teachers through a mentoring program that will enhance their effectiveness as teachers and increase their retention in the teaching profession (Blair-Larsen, 1998, p. 602). Beginning teachers need supervision and support during their first year. Many state legislatures, including Iowa, have set up mentoring programs with the goal “to offer intervention that orients new and returning teachers to the school and community and to provide instructional and interpersonal support that fosters professional development and retention as teachers” (p. 602).

Research has shown that the greatest concerns of new teachers include discipline, classroom management, personal life adjustment, the teaching assignment itself, motivation of students, planning lessons, and dealing with individual differences within the classroom (p. 603). By surveying new teachers, researchers have found that they want to be given information about childhood diseases, grading systems, parent-teacher issues, classroom management, and discipline (p. 603). These issues can be overwhelming to a beginning teacher so a school district needs to put tools in place to help.
Successful models for mentoring programs include an introductory session at the beginning of the school year centering on classroom management and discipline, group meetings regularly scheduled throughout the school year to discuss relevant issues and to provide moral support, and classroom visits during the school year by the mentor team (p. 604).

I feel that teacher mentoring programs are a key to the successful adjustment of beginning teachers and teachers new to the district. However, if not fully and properly implemented, it can be a waste of time and money. Beginning teachers in Iowa are required to have a mentor. However, I feel it is important for teachers new to large districts to have mentors. Coming from student teaching into "real teaching" is a huge jump. One thing in particular is the lack of materials provided to you. Many supervising teachers give the curriculum materials they want used for their classes to the student teachers. As a new teacher, you must look for these yourself, especially if you are in a newly created position, not just replacing someone.

A key component to the success of mentoring is selection of the mentor. It is important to have a mentor that has a similar content teaching assignment and who teaches in the same building. According to Ganser, mentors should have eight to fifteen years of teaching experience, including several at the current school (Ganser, 1995, p. 307). I feel that fewer years are acceptable as long as they are considered competent teachers at their current school. In order to match new teachers with their mentors, schools should ask mentors for letters of nomination, written statements of their beliefs about teaching, portfolios, and interviews. Although this would take the school administrators some time, the best match between a new teacher and the mentor is that critical (p. 308). Not every good teacher makes a good mentor. For this role, the mentor needs to be effective in working with adults. The mentor needs to share with the new teacher that the classroom is only a part of the picture of teaching. New teachers need to understand the
organization of the school and the community/family values in the district. If the new teacher is very idealistic, the reality of day-to-day experiences can be overwhelming.

According to Ganser (p. 309), there are three key principles in the successful selection of a mentor which include:

1) Beginning teachers and their mentors need similar teaching assignments.

2) Beginning teachers and their mentors should hold compatible ideas about teaching, children, learning, and so forth.

3) Beginning teachers and their mentors need to have convenient times to meet.

I feel that having a convenient time to consult with a mentor is especially important to a new teacher. If they share a planning period, many questions can be answered quickly. In larger school districts, this should be possible. If it is not possible to have both a teacher close by and in the same content area, two mentors could be used, one with the same content area and the other in the same building. During the first semester, the teacher and mentor may want to meet weekly for more detailed discussions and reflection. During the second semester, classroom visits should be made by both the mentor and the new teacher, and probably less frequent meetings would be needed. Allowing new teachers release time to observe more experienced teachers might be advisable.

As a principal, I feel I would want a strong mentoring program. Also I feel that new teacher orientation is extremely helpful. New teachers should receive extra compensation to begin a week early to familiarize themselves with the building and the routine, to meet his/her mentor, to set up his/her classroom management plan, to organize the classroom, and to get curriculum materials ready.
Quality Professional Development

Quality professional development for all teachers is a critical element for a successful school district. Huffman identifies five categories of professional development that include:

1) immersion strategies which involve the teacher “doing” the assignments;
2) curriculum implementation which involves teachers refining instructional materials;
3) curriculum development which involve teachers creating new instructional materials;
4) examination of practices in real classroom instruction;
5) collaborative work which includes study groups, peer coaching, mentoring, and classroom observation (Huffman, 2003, p. 379).

I feel that professional development for teachers is very important, but I have not seen it to be very effective. In the past, professional development was often random topics presented in isolation and quickly put on the shelf. Today the Iowa Professional Development Model is working to change that. Schools are looking for areas for school improvement and then using data-based research models for school improvement. Schools focus on these models and revisit them, evaluate them, revise them, and revisit again. My only concern here is over-kill. In my school, we are getting assignments to use specific strategies in the classroom and are required to journal about them. Some of the strategies are ones I have used before and some may not be the most effective for my special education students.

I also feel that it is important for teachers to get professional days to attend workshops. Funding issues and cut-backs make this difficult. Therefore, I feel teachers need to look for workshops, courses, or seminars in the summer that can be paid for by the district, but will not also require pay for substitutes. Then I feel it is the responsibility of the teachers to come back
and share the information and ideas gained so the cost of the seminar or workshops helps others in the department or building as well.

Infusion

To infuse professional development, I would rely on department heads to some extent. Department heads need to be leaders in professional development in their areas. Providing up-to-date research-based information should be a component of their duties. I would like to see every department meet one day a week before or after school to internally network for professional development. This is something I think would be beneficial, but might not be popular in the beginning. However, I believe teachers can learn a lot from each other. Department heads should stay up-to-date in their field and feel a responsibility to keep their departments up-to-date as well. According to Morris (Morris, 2003, p. 764), internal teacher networks build strong professional community and provide opportunities for teachers to:

1) gain deeper subject matter knowledge;
2) develop greater pedagogical expertise;
3) foster a collaborative culture, rather than isolation;
4) develop the skill of examining one’s own practice in a safe, supportive context;
5) form links with other professionals in a given content area;
6) learn strategies for organizational change and prepare for leadership roles.

Linking externally beyond the school can double the benefits of sharing (p. 766).

Another means of infusing professional development is being tried by my principal now. Our principal bought a professional development book for every teacher. We are responsible for reading selected parts and discussing the content with him. I am interested to see how this idea is received by teachers and how beneficial it is.
Many schools are using teams to organize professional development. The teams work to explore new ideas, review research, try new practices, and discuss experiences. During meetings, teachers look at student achievement data and identify strengths and weaknesses. They then work together to use that information to make assignments that meet grade-level standards and look for new ways to design their lessons to facilitate learning (p. 766). This method of professional development will work well if the principal models collaborative leadership, encourages and supports team concept, and values risk-taking. These are goals I have for myself as a principal some day.

Application

For professional development to work, teachers need to be part of the process. They need ownership because they ultimately make the decision whether to implement change or not. The teacher must see the change as relevant to the needs of the school, the teacher must be ready for change, and the teachers must have the necessary resources to support change (Huffman, 2003, p. 385). Therefore, as a principal, I want the teachers to have a major role in selecting what they feel they need for professional development. I want to help provide the time and the resources they need for the professional development. Online learning offers tremendous support for professional development sources now and for the future (Mather, 2000, p. 25).

The crucial element that aligns with Professional Development is Standard 2: A school administrator is an education leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture. The administrator has knowledge and understanding of adult learning and professional development models (K 2.8). The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to professional development as an integral part of school improvement (D 2.5). The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that
professional development promotes a focus on student learning consistent with the school vision and goals (P 2.2). The link between professional development and student achievement makes professional development a high priority for school administrators’ attention.
References


