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What I believe about leadership and education

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What I believe about leadership and education

Abstract

Whether you are a leader reflecting on past experiences, a leader whom is adjusting to changes and motivating others to adjust to changes, a leader who is challenging him or herself and all others to continue education, or a leader who is serving every stakeholder involved in the school, you need to make sure that students are not missing out on the greatest educational experience they can possibly get. The students are the number one reason why anyone goes into education, and no matter what happens in our busy lives we need to remember that. Every student needs to be given the best chance available to learn as much and as many different things as we can possibly give to them. A good education starts with a good school leader. If that leader puts students first, then everything else will fall into place.

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

A Research Paper

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The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,
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By

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Growing up, I was always involved in educating kids through coaching. I coached youth soccer and hockey all the way through high school. As I got into my last couple years of high school, I started to think about what I wanted to do with my life. Every time I thought of a career, I reflected back on my coaching experiences and how much fun it was to help people.

I started talking to my high school teachers and they all agreed that teaching would be a great fit for me. Wanting to become a teacher was not hard, deciding what I wanted to teach was the difficult decision. I originally thought I would go into history education. Then in my senior year of high school, I took two industrial technology classes, and I found an area that I really felt passionate about. I bonded well with one of my technology teachers, and he mentored me into a program that I now have established as a career. With my past experiences with kids and my new found subject area, I knew what I wanted to do with my life.

Industrial technology education had continued to be my passion all the way through college and now into my fifth year of teaching. Since industrial technology classes are elective I feel that well-rounded education is the most important thing a student can possess. In my experiences, the well-rounded students are usually the best students.

All educators see education as one of the top values in their belief system. Students should have all the opportunities in the world to experience anything and

everything of interest. By providing students these opportunities, they are going to have more choices in life. Students should know that they can do whatever they want, and we should help them discover those hidden talents and choices. My philosophy reminds me of the old saying; “He/She is very book smart, but lacks in street smarts” (and vice versa). This is what a well-rounded education will prevent from happening. As a leader, I would instill a feeling of choice and variety in all students. In the spirit of a well-rounded education, I would involve as many local businesses and colleges as possible to further educate students.

You can only learn so much in a classroom. This is why more practical experiences for students are so critical. I attended college for four years to get my undergraduate degree. In the last semester when I did my student teaching I learned more than I did in all of the previous three and half years. This concept of practical learning experiences is what I would apply as an educational leader. I would like to give kids opportunities to go into work settings to get as much experience as possible. By offering more practical experience students would not only get real life education, but they would also get a better idea about career choices. My plan would be for these opportunities to be offered to the older students, while the younger students learn basic skills in a variety of classes at school.

Getting people prepared as much as possible for life encounters is what I would like to do as a leader. I asked a student one time why she was taking an

auto class. She told me that she owns a car and she does not want to pay someone else to repair the car when she has the chance to learn how to do it herself. This is what I mean about a well-rounded education. This type of education will help a lot of students in many walks of life.

Every student can learn as much as possible if they are given the opportunity. A student's main goal is usually to graduate and move on to the next step of his or her life. As an educational leader, I want to not only make students' time in school go as smoothly as possible, but also I want to prepare them for that life transition. A good leader should be future-oriented and focus on everyone's success. With the opportunities I would provide students, I would be opening students' eyes to a lot of new experiences and giving them the skills to prepare as much as possible for the future.

Any skills students learn will always help in the future, therefore we need to prepare them for as many things as possible. A world of well-rounded people would be my dream. Giving students chances to find hidden talents is another dream. I would try to open up a world of opportunities for every student, so every student can see that he or she can have a promising future.

A good education, along with a well-rounded education should be the goal of every school leader. No matter what a school leader does it should always benefit students as much as possible. There are several steps a good school leader needs to go through to run an effective school and give all kids a quality

education. In the following pages, I am going to talk about what it takes to be a good school leader. I will discuss four different aspects a school leader must acquire to be a great leader: How to be a reflective practitioner, the leader's role in educational change, the leader's role for improving student and adult learning, and the role of a servant leader.

A Reflective Practitioner

Becoming a reflective practitioner is not an easy process. Not only does this task require constant and continual observation, evaluation, and subsequent action, but it is also imperative to understand the "whys" and "what ifs" as well. This understanding comes through the consistent practice of being a reflective practitioner. Through reflection, the leader begins the ongoing process of blending the art and science of good teaching practice, philosophy, and leadership experience. Describing the reflective practitioner is, noting the importance of reflective practice, and infusion of reflective techniques are essential to the successful principal.

Donald Schon (1983) says that when effective practitioners were faced with a problem in their practice, they worked through it instinctively and, drawing on previous similar experiences, they tried and tested out various possible solutions until they resolved the issue. This is a process where a reflective leader uses a mixture of knowing and doing. The principal bases decisions and choices

on previous experiences. There are no textbooks that can teach you what you can experience first hand.

Schon (1983) proposes that professional practice involve the use of knowledge-in-action. He puts forward three ways of acquiring such knowledge (cited in Waks, 2001). The first method is through self-instruction. The second method is learning via an apprenticeship in a real world context. The third and favored method is by means of a practicum or virtual world in which the novice practitioner is closely supervised by a master practitioner and coached in solving the problems posed in professional practice and how to negotiate the leader of reflection. Experienced practitioners will identify with the process of reflection-in-action, the “thinking-on-your-feet” (Smith, 1994, p. 1) type of instinctive response to an unexpected problem. This theory will help guide new practitioners into becoming effective practitioners.

This reflective approach has been around for years; it just takes time and experience for leaders to become effective. Kolb (1984) says:

Reflective leadership is a process, whereby people learn and create knowledge by critically reflecting upon their own actions and experiences, forming abstract concepts, and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations. Practitioners can create their own knowledge and understanding of a situation

and act upon it, thereby improving practice and advancing knowledge in the field. (p. 4)

An empowered leader is a reflective decision-maker who finds joy in learning and in investigating the learning process. When an educator enters a leadership role, he or she needs to keep gaining as many experiences as possible. When I first start out on the job, I will draw from my real-world experiences as a teacher and from my practicum hours. The longer I will be in a leadership role, the more and more experience I will have from which to draw. From everything I have read, seen, and experienced, I find that this reflective approach is the most practical. You can read as many things as you want, but until you live through experiences you will never have that vital first-hand education. It is possible to be an effective practitioner without experience, but in most cases you cannot just take anyone off the street and throw him or her into an educational leadership role. It takes years of practice to become an effective principal. You first need the years of teaching experiences, and then I feel you should next become an assistant principal for a while; then you would have enough experiences to become a principal of a school.

As a classroom leader, I have found that reflective teaching is ideally the more efficient way to reach every student. I have been reflective of teaching strategies, curriculum, behavioral management, and every other day to day issue. According to John Dewey (1938) reflective teaching entails us to not only be

open-minded, but to be responsible about our work, and to be wholehearted. The experiences I have had in the classroom can be applied to being a principal. I would infuse all my experiences from my classroom to the entire school. From what I read, I can see that I will need all the experiences I can get to be an effective leader.

When becoming a principal, I will need to go to every meeting, every event, everything I can to gain all the experience possible. I can read and hear about all these experiences, but until I experience them first hand I will not be as effective as I could be. This reflective approach even aligns with the ISSL teaching standards. If I keep gaining experiences and continue to reflect on those experiences, then I will have no problem meeting the ISSL standards.

All ISSL standards would be more easily achieved if school leaders would work at becoming good reflective practitioners. Zuber-Skerritt (1982) says "Reflection in teaching is vital to student learning" (p. 26). She goes on to say "Reflective practitioners not only look for ways to improve their practice within the various constraints of the situation in which they are working, but are also critical change agents of those constraints, and of themselves" (p. 27). When relating these thoughts to the ISSL standards, we can see that these standards are more easily achieved when you are an effective practitioner. ISSL standards Two and Five should be more attainable by becoming a reflective practitioner.

ISSL Standard Two is easier to meet if you have past experiences to reflect on. Instruction and learning are two huge areas of the educational field. When would be a better time to draw on past experiences than dealing with student learning and achievement? In ISSL Standard Five ethics, relationships, sensitivity, philosophy, and interpersonal relationships are all things that you would need to have prior experience with in order to be successful. These issues are based on what the principal's personal feelings are. In order for a principal to build a philosophy on these issues, they would have to have experiences with the issues.

Reflective leading to meet standards and to become an effective leader is not a new idea. The National Education Association (2000) has come to support reflective leading. On their website, it says that the NEA is supportive of the progressive movement and feels that reflecting on your leadership will make you become a better leader. They feel that the more interactions and experiences the leader has, the more success will be realized. As an educational leader, we need to look at every experience as an opportunity to gain knowledge that we may need at a later date. If we continue to keep this thought in mind, then we all have the capacity to become great educational leaders.

I would implement this belief of a reflective practitioner onto staff members by encouraging all staff members to sit down at the end of each year, or semester, or unit and ask themselves what went well and what did not go well.

Simple reflection upon what went well and what did not go well, should make the staff members become better instructors in the future. If everyone would learn from their mistakes and build on their success, then schools would have reflective practitioners.

Leaders of Change

Along with being a good reflective practitioner, school leaders need to learn to be good leaders of change. School leaders deal with changes on a daily basis, some big and some small. The leaders who can deal with change the best, will have the most success in their careers.

Our world is changing at an incredible rate. The immigration rate is twice that of a century ago. The difference in mean income between the wealthiest and poorest continues to grow (Fullan, 1999). Home schooling and charter schools have become more of an alternate choice for students. Accountability in schools is increasing. Technology advances and the Internet have given us a tremendous amount of knowledge at our fingertips. All of these changes are forcing schools to change, and one of the key people involved in these changes is the principal.

Research shows that school principals are vital to successful restructuring, change, and improvement of student learning (Newmann & Associates, 1996). Principals do many things for schools to help them achieve success. They shape the vision and mission, provide instructional leadership, manage and administer complex organizational processes, shape the school culture and climate, build and

maintain positive relations with community and parents, and lead school improvement and change. If principals do not provide leadership in these arenas, the school is at risk for failure.

No matter how successful a school is, it must always seek new ideas and keep up with changes or the school will falter. Research on successful schools shows that the principal is necessary to improvement and change (Deal & Peterson, 1998). Without the principal providing support for risk-taking, encouraging teacher leadership, and working on the processes necessary to implementing improvements, change will never occur.

Effective principals are the keys to large, sustainable education reform. Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) found that school capacity is the crucial variable affecting instructional quality and corresponding student achievement. At the heart of school capacity are principals focused on the development of teachers' knowledge, skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources. Not only do good leaders need to know how to make changes, but they also need to know how to sustain changes. In order for a principal to sustain changes, he or she needs to know who and what to take into account before any change is made.

Principals need to keep looking at the big picture in order to make correct changes. They need to be sophisticated conceptual thinkers who transform the organization through people and teams (Fullan, 1999). A principal needs to know

people in order for changes to be successful. When dealing with people, a principal needs to believe they are the leaders in learning, valuing human resources, communicating, and listening effectively in order for educational changes to be a success. Leaders not only need to be concerned with organizational tasks, but they also need to be concerned for individuals and the relationships between them. Leaders of educational change show this with their vision and belief that the purpose of schools is to value students' learning. These effective leaders respond to the human as well as the task aspects of their schools. "Effective change requires skilled leadership that can integrate the soft human elements with hard business actions" (Joiner, 1987 p. 1).

I can see from the research that making changes in a school is not going to be an easy process. There are so many people and factors involved in each change, that it makes the process very unique and time consuming. When I am going to implement change in school I will need to get as many people involved as possible. Allowing everyone to be involved in changes will give people a sense of ownership. If I engage staff on the importance of change, then they will have an easier time recognizing the need for that change. When people think they have a say and they feel involved, then the principal will have a higher success rate in making and sustaining changes. I will need to make sure I am sensitive to all issues and not just make changes without making everyone aware of what is happening.

Along with knowing the school community, a leader needs to always look into the future. Leaders need to be aware of cultural, political, and social changes. If a leader can see ahead of time when things are going to happen, they can make corresponding changes to accommodate these future issues. Issues such as No Child Left Behind and teacher accountability are examples that principals need to make changes for to have a successful school. Meeting ISSL standards also require change.

The ISSL standards need to be met every year. With everything in the world changing so much, principals need to continue to stay on pace to make sure these standards are met. Standard one deals with planning and vision. Without thinking ahead and making changes to accomplish plans, a school leader will be lost.

Standard Two is all about instruction, curriculum, and learning. With new technology and methods being invented every day, a principal constantly needs to make changes to make sure that his or her school and everyone in the school is up-to-date.

Standard Three is about the management and operations of the school. This would include such things as scheduling and budgets. When proper planning is done, you need to make changes from year to year, or even semester to semester, in order to accommodate things like rising expenses and enrollment fluctuation.

In Standard Four the principal needs to stay up to date with what is happening in the community. He or she needs to come up with new ways to get parents involved in the school, make changes to accommodate the ever changing diversity, and come up with new ways to keep community members and local businesses involved in the school.

Standard Five is also going to require continuous change. Standard five deals with ethical issues. This includes philosophy of education and interpersonal relationships. Since it is evident from my research that the educational system is constantly changing, then a principal's philosophy will also be changing. What is thought of to be right or wrong is also changing, so a principal would need to continually adjust how he/she relates to people.

The last standard of the ISSL standards is where the political, social, legal, and economical changes come into action. Politics always play a role in education. With constant reforms and programs being introduced every day, a good leader will have the vision to make proper changes in order to meet the requirements of the new ideas.

Standards are set up to make schools more effective. Changes need to be done in order to meet those standards. Experience has shown me that principals play a vital role in school change. Change needs to be done to keep up with our everyday world, and it also is necessary for individual schools to be successful. School improvement depends on principals who can foster the conditions

necessary for sustained education, in a complex, rapidly changing society. Never has the time been better for change leaders than right now.

Leaders of Continuous Learning

Along with change, comes a continuous education for a leader and the staff he or she leads. An effective school leader, will always be a leader of education for both students and adults. With all the changes that schools have to deal with, it is the responsibility of a school leader to make sure everyone involved in that school is continuing their education.

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement. Ever changing learning goals for students and educators require the leader to stay on top of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and leadership practices. All leaders, school or industrial, see quality professional development as the key for significant improvements. Good leaders are able to make the link between improved student learning and the professional learning of teachers. They make sure that everyone involved in the school understands this link and develops the knowledge necessary to serve as advocates for high quality professional development for all staff (Lawler & King, 2000).

Skillful leaders establish policies and structures that support ongoing professional learning and continuous improvement. They ensure equal distribution of resources to accomplish goals and are always evaluating the staff

development's effectiveness in achieving student learning. Good leaders make sure that staff members have adequate time for learning and collaboration during the workday. In addition, they believe demonstrated knowledge and improvements in student learning are just as important as continuing education hours.

Creating a culture of adult learning examines the importance of providing quality, team-based professional development. With the professional development in place, the school is able to produce higher student achievement. Student achievement, cognitive growth, and skillful mastery are not only possible, but are preferable and can be ultimately empowering and transformative (Cranton, 1996). Through education, anything is possible for adults and children

The importance of education has to be seen at the top, and then it will trickle its way down to the students. Leaders of learning need to show that continuous learning is a core value and it is central to their own work. When teachers and students see the principal continuously advancing his or her education, then they will see how important it is. Leaders can do various things to show that an education is important. They can just regularly visit classrooms, or review student progress to show that they care about education. Another big thing a principal can do to show staff that continuing education is important, is to offer worthwhile staff development.

Good instructional leaders know they just cannot throw a staff development session together in one day. They need time in order to develop a learning plan that will provide opportunities for staff to become more successful. Teachers need sessions where they will gain understanding, see demonstrations of the teaching strategy, and have the opportunity to practice in a non-threatening environment. Research shows that skill acquisition and the ability to transfer vertically to a range of situations requires on-the-job support (Joyce & Showers, 1995). This support is given to teachers when they have a leader who sees professional development as being important to continuous growth. By having good teacher inservices, you are showing teachers that learning is important at any level. When teachers see how strongly the leader feels about a good education, hopefully they will portray this to students.

An effective principal supports the success of every student in every facet of his or her life. In so doing, the principal facilitates the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by everyone involved (Wilmore, 2002). This is the key idea for anyone in education. As a principal, you need to make sure everyone shares the vision of learning and that you support that vision more than anything else. To make sure your vision of learning is effective, you need to make sure you refer to the ISSL standards.

The ISSL standards state that an educational leader needs to promote the success of all students and is conducive to student learning and staff development (Brown, Danzig, Flanary, Martin & Wright, 2005). To be a great school leader, you need to always promote learning for everyone involved. If everyone sees how you feel about learning, then everyone will achieve more. The principal must be aware and involved in all issues that effect school. Almost any new issue that is going to be implemented into a school system is going to effect education in one way or another. Good school leaders need to stay alert to this and make sure they are educating themselves and everyone involved in these issues, so everyone can be prepared when the changes take effect. You need to lead learners so they have all the correct knowledge to make any change go as smoothly as possible.

Leading learners is an ongoing process. To be successful you need to make sure everyone knows how important you see education. I would implement this leadership by integrating standards, revamping programs, and continuing the never-ending improvement of our schools. I would give staff time every week for staff development by setting up some workshops before or after school that deal with issues currently going on in the school. These workshops could just be short sessions that meet for 15 minutes during the contract day. I also will encourage all staff members to take advantage of the local Area Education Agency (AEA) and all the classes they offer. I will try my hardest to have district development

days be informative to everyone. Finally, I will work hard to give staff opportunities to go to conferences, classes, and anything else that can further their education. If we all work together, our learning community will continue to grow stronger. We must use this power to make sure every child has a chance to make it in life. The children, are the main reason why anyone goes into the educational field. Leaders need to make sure they keep the idea of serving children first as their number one priority.

Servant Leaders

Great school leaders' passion is embedded in their desire to serve. Whether serving the school board, government agencies, social service department, businesses, staff, or parents, leaders must always keep in mind that all services are done to better one group of people, students. A good effective principal should have the desire to serve based on the love of children, and what is best for children. Leaders see themselves directly responsible for the educational opportunities their children receive. Many outside the field of education may lack an understanding of this great compassion and natural empathy that drives educators to give endlessly to their schools. Yet others might say that it is exactly this kind of passion that more leaders need to create a broader ethic of service and compassion in our society and our world (Patti & Tobin, 2003).

When I think of great leaders in the history of our world, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, and Mother Theresa, I think that these people lived to serve others.

Everyday we see people inspired to help others in our communities. Some of these people are more obvious; police officers, fire fighters, and clergy members, but we need to make sure that our educators, and especially, our educational leaders are also inspired to serve everyone. Principals may not always see themselves as people of service, yet that is exactly what they should be doing.

Servant leaders will give us a society rich with a caring and ethical nature.

Sergiovanni (1973) says,

Stewardship involves the leader's personal responsibility to manage her or his life and affairs with prior regard for the rights of other people and for the common welfare. Finally, stewardship involves placing oneself in service to ideas and ideals and to others who are committed to their fulfillment.

(p.2)

Whether you are a school servant or steward, the school leader's passion is what sustains him or her when all else fails. This passion to serve students is the school leader's number one goal as a service leader, but there are other challenges and responsibilities facing a service leader of a school. A school principal must always assume new roles and skills when making school-linked service efforts. It is likely that no principal has had the proper training when it comes to the collaborative leadership and shared decision making with other community

agencies. These skills, however, are essential to becoming an effective leader of service.

Jehl and Kirst (1992) talk about four things it takes for a principal to become a good service agent to the community. First, the principal must be an active participant in developing whatever is to happen on or near the site, sharing information about the children and the community, connecting the planning group to parents and teachers, and providing a 'reality check' for planners who are connected to the day-to-day working of the school and the community. I will do this by keeping the community involved in the school. Invite parents and community members to the school for tours and open houses, so they can see what is happening in the school. I will take advantage of any community member or business that is willing to help the school. If you make them feel they are important, then they will always be more willing to help the school when you need them.

Second, the principal must serve as an advocate for an expanded school role in working with families and other agencies, making the case with his or her peers, communities and school staff. Teachers especially need encouragement and assistance from the principal to expand their agenda to work more actively with families while maintaining their primary focus on academic success. Having staff members be more vocal with families is a huge issue in schools. I will implement a system where parents have constant contact with the school. I will

have all grades and assignments on-line, so parents and students can check them at any time. I will also make sure that every staff member has his/her own phone in his/her room, so parents can contact teachers easily.

Third, the principal must reorganize and link teachers and other staff members on campus with staffs from other community health and social services agencies. Sometimes the strength of a major collaboration can be broken by a lack of interpersonal communication and understanding among these staffs. Making all staff members aware that they are mandatory reporters will support this effort. Staff members will need to attend classes to get certified as mandatory reporters. I then will make sure that all staff know how to deal with situations and who to call if a situation were to occur.

Fourth, the principal must act as an 'enabler,' promoting the involvement of other staff and community members in planning and monitoring a school-linked service effort. This can easily be accomplished by pushing the issue of safety. As principal, the children's safety is a big concern, so you need to make that fact known to other staff and the community. When community members know that we are trying to keep our children safe at all events, then the community will be more willing to serve the school.

In general, what Jehl and Kirst (1992) were trying to say is that a school administrator acts as interpreter between the school staff and the outside staff, controls the traffic flow, facilitates the use of services, and is in charge of

whatever happens under the school roof. As I become a school leader I will have to remember that a school is not just a building it is a community, with a lot of stakeholders involved. I need to really concentrate on my practicum experiences in the next couple of years. I have seen as a teacher, that you can have all the training in the world, but until you live the experiences, you will not be prepared. This is why my practicum is important. I can now get a chance to see first hand how a principal serves the school and the community in many different facets.

The ISSL standards all apply when serving the needs of children. The ISSL standards are set up to keep educators accountable for what they are doing. If a school leader is doing his or her best job in doing what is best for the children, then he or she should have no problems in meeting these standards. Whether they are serving the school or the community, leaders need to always make sure they have children's best interests in mind. If this is done well, then meeting the ISSL standards will fall into place.

As a principal, I cannot get caught up in this web of outside political agendas. I need to always serve the school in a way that best serves students. The students' best interest is always the most important thing as a principal. I just need to continue to serve them as well as a principal, as I feel I am doing now as a teacher. Whether I am leading a classroom, a school, or a district, my motivation needs to remain the same; proper service to give all children a chance

to succeed. Those who give service to our community know at the end of the day that they have done a day's work that really matters.

Whether you are a leader reflecting on past experiences, a leader whom is adjusting to changes and motivating others to adjust to changes, a leader who is challenging him or herself and all others to continue education, or a leader who is serving every stakeholder involved in the school, you need to make sure that students are not missing out on the greatest educational experience they can possibly get. The students are the number one reason why anyone goes into education, and no matter what happens in our busy lives we need to remember that. Every student needs to be given the best chance available to learn as much and as many different things as we can possibly give to them. A good education starts with a good school leader. If that leader puts students first, then everything else will fall into place.

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