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A vision of secondary level administration : a reflective essay

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A vision of secondary level administration : a reflective essay

Abstract

There are many different elements necessary for success as an educational leader. For example, it is essential that a leader be able to effectively communicate with all, this includes teachers, staff, parents, students and community members. Also, complete knowledge of the six Iowa Standards for School Leaders is important. Any educational leader in the state of Iowa must not only know the standards, but must also be able to demonstrate his or her ability to meet each one. The key phrase in each of the six standards is "who promotes the success of all students". This is what I plan to keep in mind during each decision I make.

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Master of Arts in Education

by

Stephanie N. Mohorne

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The decision to become an educator was a very easy one for me to make. Throughout my life some of the most influential and important people to me have been teachers. I can vividly remember those teachers in my life who cared about me as an individual. Those were the people who I worked my hardest for, and from whom I learned the most.

I am a firm believer that being an educator is not just a career, yet it is a way of life. I am an educator because I cannot imagine myself doing anything else. It was extremely difficult for me to choose the exact field I wanted to specialize in because of my love of learning. I chose elementary education, as well as Spanish because of my belief that all students need to become fluent in another language before they graduate from high school.

My teaching career began in a small, laboratory school in Iowa. The student and staff population was very homogeneous and income levels were fairly similar. The pre-kindergarten school consisted of students used to help train pre-services teachers from a nearby college. Class sizes were small and teachers rarely had to worry about issues such as money for supplies or conflicts between students. To some, this seemed like the ideal teaching situation.

In May of 2002 I did a great deal of reflection about my career and whether or not it was at the place I wanted. My goal as an educator was to reach those students who needed it the most. Many students fall through the cracks of

our school system when all they really need is a person to care about them and help guide them in a positive direction. In order for me to reach my goal I needed to be working in a public school in an urban area that had a diverse student population.

In June of 2002 I was hired to teach Spanish at East High School in Waterloo, Iowa. The student population at East High is one-third minority, with over forty percent of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. For me this was the opportunity to work with the students who needed me the most. I viewed the opportunity as a chance to work in what I considered my ideal teaching situation, a school where I could make the greatest positive impact.

My philosophy on education is very simple. I believe that it is my job as an educator is to teach the “whole child”. Issues such as diversity, values and responsibility are ones that many educators may still believe should be taught to students by parents. The fact is in our society today, schools are deemed as responsible for teaching students not only the basics, reading, writing and math, but also how to be an overall productive citizen in our world.

Each and every child can and has the right to learn. The key is, teachers must encompass each student’s individual needs into their teaching styles. This means understanding the cultural differences between the students in our classrooms. Our world is an amalgam of different cultures and we as educators

are responsible for teaching in a way that all students can learn no matter what their background.

In an article dealing with culturally sensitive instruction Pewewardy gave teachers practices to incorporate into teaching in order to become educators who are more culturally sensitive (Pewewardy, 1999). I strive to do this and will continue to research and read literature on this issue throughout my education career.

My beliefs about leadership are what helped me to decide to enter the leadership program at the University of Northern Iowa and become a principal. Many people confuse being a leader with being a manager. I feel that a manager's job focuses on things or products, a leader's job focuses on people. To be a leader and a principal of a school, is to be a servant. Principals in essence are servants to the people in the school that they lead as well as the community as a whole. Principals will make decisions that affect many people, and they will many times have to defend those decisions. Those of us who have chose to become principals are willing to dedicate our careers to serving others.

Being in a leadership position of any nature, especially a school principal has its challenges. With those challenges comes great responsibility. Principals are responsible for hiring teachers for their buildings. This is one of the greatest responsibilities they will have. Principals' effectiveness, or lack thereof, should not be based on how many workshops on reading they attend. It should not be

based on how well they are able to present a PowerPoint presentation or even how well they handle discipline. The effectiveness of a principal can be judged on the actions of the people he/she leads. It is often obvious from the moment a person walks into a school what type of leader that school has. The teachers in the hallways have a different attitude, you can see them interacting with many different students or staff and the students care about their school.

Just as there are critical elements for success as a doctor, lawyer, or engineer, there are also elements that are critical for exemplary educational leadership. All principals must strive to create positive interethnic relations in their schools. This not only includes fostering the relationships between the students but also between the staff and students as well.

A strong knowledge of special education law and policy is critical for any principal. Every school has students with special needs and those students, and their parents, have rights when it comes to education. At the same time, the schools also have rights when it comes to handling cases of students with special needs.

It is also extremely important that a school principal promote parental as well as community support for students' education. The often heard cliché, "It takes a village to raise a child" is absolutely true. In order for students to be successful they have to have support both at school and at home. It is our job as principals to encourage all of the parents in our school to be participatory when it

comes to their child's education. Lastly, an effective leader must have the knowledge and background required to effectively evaluate teachers and help them develop professionally.

My philosophy on education and educational leadership helped me to mold my beliefs about four critical elements for exemplary educational leadership. Each individual part is critical, but it is absolutely necessary for leaders of a school to show that they can meld these elements together in order to make the school and the students and staff within it successful. The four critical elements that will be discussed in this paper are: promotion of positive interethnic relations, promotion of parental and community support for students' educations, knowledge of special education law and policy, and knowledge of effective evaluation procedures.

Promotion of Positive Interethnic Relations

Although many towns in Iowa are still rather homogeneous in their populations, the fact is that our society is more diverse than it has ever been. With the increased amount of diversity also comes a possibility for increased conflict between people of different cultures. Many times the root of these conflicts is the lack of knowledge a person or persons has about a certain culture. As a leader I feel it will be my responsibility to promote positive interethnic

relations between teachers and students, all students, as well as teachers and parents.

One of the fundamental building blocks in promoting positive interethnic relations between teachers and students is the education of the teachers. This is not a goal that can be achieved overnight, but a process that we will continually work through together. Colleges and universities need to initiate this process by educating the pre-service teachers in education program on diversity and how to teach to encompass learners from different ethnic backgrounds. Hiring teachers who have knowledge of how to teach to students who are of different cultures should be a principal's objective.

The United States is a nation rich with diversity. Our population is enriched with people of different ethnicities who all have their own values, beliefs and backgrounds. This same diversity is also seen in thousands of school districts nationwide. Minority students represent one-third of the overall student population (Galguera, 1998). While this figure continues to steadily increase, the number of minority educators is depressingly low. While attempts have been made to recruit and retain minority teachers (Halloway, 2002), whites continue to make up ninety percent of the teaching population.

As a minority in the field of education I not only empathize with the constraints and frustrations minority students, parents and teachers face, I have also experienced and continue to experience them. My strong belief that effective

leaders must promote diversity in the school they lead is built from my experiences as a minority. Promotion of positive interethnic relations is critical in order to improve minority student achievement and create an overall positive culture within a school. All students, parents, teachers and community members should feel valued for who they are and what they can contribute to the educational process.

A principal's sincere dedication to promoting diversity begins with self-reflection. All individuals have past experiences that influence their values, perceptions, and behaviors. For some, it is the lack of experiences with people of different ethnicities that shape these values, beliefs and behaviors. Unlearning (by principals) any negative values, beliefs, perceptions and behaviors is not only possible, but also absolutely essential to beginning the process of creating a positive culture within a school.

Principals are responsible for ensuring the success of all students they lead. Meeting this responsibility requires different elements. A principal should recruit and retain quality minority teachers as much as possible. Having a staff that represents diversity and quality in teaching is beneficial to all those involved. Staff diversity can also be the first stepping-stone to building positive relationships between teachers, students, parents and community members (Daft, 2002).

Daft (2002) explained how the Allstate Insurance Company has grown to understand the importance of recruiting minority workers and the impact of that recruitment on the relationships built between workers and minority community members.

The company's diverse workforce enabled Allstate to establish solid relationships within culturally and ethnically diverse communities. At the Sunnyside neighborhood office in Queens, New York, one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the country, customers often relate to sales reps like members of their family, consulting them on problems that may have no relation to insurance. Mike Kalkin, the agent who heads up the office (and who himself is from an immigrant family), often recruits employees from within the community because they understand the local people's unique needs.(p.492)

The preceding story represents exactly what we as school leaders need to strive to accomplish. Students and parents oftentimes feel an automatic connection with a teacher who is of the same ethnicity. They long to have someone who understands their background, way of thinking and communication style. Parents of minority students can many times feel intimidated when it comes to dealing with teachers and principals. For some, there is a language barrier that puts a huge restraint on the extent of their involvement. Minority parents want to be a part of their children's education, but fear being judged. Having a diverse teaching staff assists in breaking down these fears and building that strong sense of value that is so important for building these crucial relationships.

Another extremely important role a principal has in the promotion of a diverse school is the education of the teachers within it. This is crucial for a variety of reasons but most importantly because it can lead to higher achievement for minority students. Educating teachers can sometimes be more difficult than educating students. Teachers tend to believe that their practices are sufficient and students must adapt to their ways of teaching in order to be successful. Helping teachers to understand the differences in the beliefs, traditions, learning styles, and especially communication styles of these groups is essential. Educating teachers on these differences in the first step is a process that cannot be achieved overnight.

Communication between student and teacher is essential for learning, yet students of different ethnic groups are many times negatively judged by teachers because of their communication styles. For example, students who are not native English speakers are automatically viewed as being illegal immigrants. This is something that I have seen happen many times in my teaching career. At the same time African-Americans communication style, which is usually a louder tone of voice and more animation, is sometimes perceived by teachers as being a threat, when in actuality it is a part of the culture (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, Walker, 2002). There are many other situations that occur on almost a daily basis within schools that is directly related to this breakdown of communication. I hope

to decrease these situations by educating the staff in my school on all of the differences between the various ethnic groups.

Step two of this process is guiding teachers along through the process of changing their teaching styles to encompass minority students. Many teachers tend to have teaching styles that involve passive participation, participation that is only teacher solicited. This is not conducive to minority student learning (Gay, 2003). Minority students generally learn and retain information by actively participating and being constantly engaged. Certain ethnic groups such as Hispanics and Native Americans place a high value on family and community and making decisions as a unit. These students benefit greatly from cooperative learning projects. Using the scaffolding method when teaching is also extremely important. The scaffolding method uses the background knowledge that students already have on a particular subject and then builds on that knowledge until the goal is met. This process creates significantly greater meaning for students, which in turn increases the chances that the students will not only learn for the moment, but retain the information as well.

The final step in the process of promoting diversity within a school requires a principal to be aware of what changes have been made and how they have impacted the school. Principals must observe classrooms to ensure that teachers are using the methods taught in their individual teaching practices. Collecting data on minority student achievement after the implementation of the

changes is also vital. For some educators and community members data and the correct reporting of this data is the only way that a principal can prove that promotion diversity in a school, and forcing teachers to change their practices along with spending a great deal of time on teaching training on diversity is beneficial to all. Teachers changing their individual teaching styles to encompass minority learners will not sacrifice the learning of the non-minority students. All students benefit from teaching that uses many different strategies to ensure learning. The greatest benefit may be, however, that those students who were falling through the cracks of our educational system because of the lack of understanding. The greatest number of students who are falling through the cracks in our educational system are minorities. With the implementation of these strategies, minority students will have a better chance of success.

Promoting diversity within a school is very important to me. Throughout my career as a school leader I plan to strive to create a school where all students, regardless of their ethnicity, can have success in learning. I want to lead a school where parents and other community members feel that the teachers within the school genuinely care about their child's education and will do whatever necessary to help him/her succeed. Promoting diversity within a school not only benefits the students, parents and community members, but it also benefits the teachers. Nothing is more rewarding for teachers than seeing so many of their students succeed. I will continue as a principal, just as I do now as a teacher, to

constantly educate myself on the best practices in the teaching of diversity. I plan to keep up on the most recent literature and attend conferences to keep current. Unfortunately, I expect resistance to this change; however, I plan to stay true to my beliefs. All students deserve a chance to be successful and the school that I lead will give each and every one of those students that chance.

The promotion of diversity within a school directly relates to each of the six Iowa Standards. All principals in the state of Iowa must demonstrate their competency in being a visionary, instructional, organizational, collaborative, ethical and political leader.

Visionary leaders who are leading for diversity must create a vision for their school that ensures the success of all students not just those who are seen as the "norm". Once this vision is created it must be communicated to the stakeholders. A visionary leader must understand that this communication is important to the success of the vision. A visionary leader must also understand that communicating through newsletters, parent-teacher conferences and special meetings at the school is necessary while remembering that in many parts of Iowa we are beginning to have a large population of parents who are non-English speakers. Possibly the most important part of this standard is the implementation of the vision. Without implementation all of the work that has gone into the creation and communication is null. As a school principal it will be my

responsibility to not only make sure that the changes have been made but also to communicate the progress to all those involved.

Showing instructional leadership in diversity requires that a principal take the initiative to create a culture that ensures the value of diversity and that it is conducive to learning for all those within it, including teachers. As I have previously discussed, I will demonstrate my commitment to being an instructional leader by ensuring that the curriculums used within the school are representative of all ethnicities. There is a wealth of information on minorities who have made significant contributions to each and every discipline taught. I plan to assist teachers in finding out who these people are and incorporating who they are and their successes into the curriculum. Also the adoption of textbooks that are representative of all ethnicities is an important component to being an effective school leader.

In order to demonstrate my effectiveness as an organizational leader I must ensure that the school I lead is a safe environment for all. This not only includes the actual physical facilities but it also includes the safety for all who are teaching and learning. Communication is the key to achieving this goal. By communicating with students, teachers, and parents, issues that arise can be solved in a timely manner. Also, the community as a whole can be involved in the decisions that we make within the school that affect student learning.

Collaborative leadership is a standard that I will greatly enjoy working on while I am a principal. Working with people in the community and building the relationships that are so vital in creating a school that strives for success of all students, cannot be done without the input of the community. I have made the issue of encouraging the parents and community (especially the minority community) to become more involved in students' education a critical element on its own within my reflective research paper. I do not believe that students can be successful without the support they need.

Any principal who leads must be an ethical leader. On the issue of diversity and the promotion of a diverse school, this is the reason that self-reflection and evaluation must be done before the process can begin. A principal who does not treat all people with fairness, respect and is not sensitive to the needs of others cannot effectively lead a school. Being ethical also includes protecting the rights of students and teachers within the school. I expect that all teachers within my building will treat everyone, teachers, students and parents with the respect and fairness they deserve. I will not tolerate anything less from anyone. Not only will I expect it from them, I will and do expect it from myself. "Walking the walk" and not just "talking the talk" is essential if those I lead are going to follow my example.

The final Iowa standard, political leadership is one that I will demonstrate by creating a community within the school itself, which actively encourages all

parents and community members to be involved. This may include having an informational meeting before the school year starts, especially for those people who are Spanish and Bosnian speakers. Communicating the purpose, date, time, place and most importantly conducting the meeting in Spanish, helps to ensure that more families will attend. This may seem very minor, but to those parents who want to be involved but do not speak English, it demonstrates our school's commitment to the success of all students.

Promote Parental and Community Support for Students' Educations

The mission of the Waterloo Community Schools is, "to provide the highest quality education, involving the entire community, which prepares each student to function successfully throughout life in an increasingly complex world". Within that mission statement is the phrase, "involving the entire community". Anyone in the field of education, and many who are not, understands the importance of parental and community support concerning a student's education. Unfortunately in the Waterloo district, as well as many other urban districts, encouraging parents and community members to be supportive of student's education and to be participatory is difficult. This is especially true for minority students. In 1998, Hispanics had the overall highest dropout rate, almost thirty percent, of any minority group (Rice & Dolgin, 2002). I not only understand how crucial this element is to a student's success but as a principal I

plan to work diligently to increase student achievement by encouraging parental and community support.

As a new principal it is often easy to forget that the academic success of students has as much to do with what happens outside of the school building as with what happens inside the classroom (Villa, 2003). Promoting parental and community involvement, not just in a passive role but in an active one, is extremely important to the success of students. The difficulty lies in how to encourage these people to become involved.

In an article by Kevin Swick, et al. (1998), the concept of using parents as leaders within a school in order to encourage more active parent involvement is discussed. In this particular school the parents involved in the parent group entitled HOST (Help One Student at a Time), worked regularly with teachers in order to become more familiar with teaching styles and opinions on active parent involvement. Because parents with children of similar ages usually connect socially as well, this provided the opportunity for parents to talk with and encourage other parents to be participatory within the school. This assisted with student success. Parents assisted in the classrooms with activities such as storytelling, reading with children, and helping to coordinate special events.

Many teachers, especially at the middle and high school levels, tend to believe that the lack of parental involvement comes from the lack of caring, when in actuality this is far from the truth (Turner, 2000). Many factors contribute to

low participation by parents including cultural misunderstandings, time and health (2000). Teachers and administrators must understand these challenges that parents face and assist these parents to overcome these obstacles. If there is a parent who fails to attend parent-teacher conferences, it is the teacher's or principal's responsibility to make a personal contact with that parent to see if there can be another time arranged or even if a home conference is needed. At the same time, if an administrator is aware that there are families that are not English speakers then it is important to send out all information, including conference times and school activities, to them in their native language. This helps to show parents that the school embraces their culture and wants them to be a part of the school learning community. Many non-native English speakers are too intimidated to attend functions at school because of the language barrier. Having an interpreter is extremely important.

This past November I had about a forty percent turnout rate at our parent-teacher conferences. The most memorable and heartwarming conference I had, despite the low turnout was with a mother who only spoke Spanish. As the woman sat down, the first thing she said to me was how nice it was to have the chance to talk with a teacher that spoke Spanish. Her fifteen-year-old son had to translate for her during the conferences with the other teachers. After we discussed how her son was doing in class and all of the academic issues, she began to tell me about a difficulty that she and her husband were having at the

school her youngest child was attending. The fact that these parents only spoke Spanish and no one at the school spoke any Spanish was very difficult. Her child was coming home from school with marks and bruises on his body, crying because he did not want to go, and she was unable to understand, because of the language barrier, when the staff from the school tried to explain the reasons behind this. She was very upset and wanted to move him to another school, however, the language barrier and lack of knowledge about the Waterloo community made the situation even more difficult. By the end of our conference, this mother had given me her home telephone number and invited me to her house for dinner. I told her that I would call the school her child was attending and assist her in getting this situation resolved. Over the next few days I called the school and visited some other schools that had Spanish speakers on staff. The little boy was then able to transfer to a school that had other Hispanic children and staff that spoke Spanish. Needless to say, this woman and I formed a bond. She understands that I not only care about the success of her son, who is my student, but I also care about her and her family. These are the types of relationships that need to be formed with parents in order to establish that foundation of trust. It is only then, that parents can feel comfortable enough to be active participants in the school.

I feel that it is the responsibility of the principal to work around these contextual factors, such as language, and to educate the teachers on how to do

this. Specific strategies for reaching out to families and community members must be in place. Of course participating in parent-teacher conferences and helping with homework are often thought of as the main ways parents can participate, however, there are others. Having parents volunteer in the classroom, sending home activities that require parent involvement, and having parents assist in the coordination of programs and activities are some of the other strategies that can be used. A principal must use these strategies to encourage all parents to participate.

Encouraging community members to be active participants in the school is sometimes forgotten altogether. I truly believe that having community members involved in day-to-day activities and special events is very encouraging for students and can be a valuable asset for schools. Programs such as one-to-one reading with a community volunteer can assist those students who need that extra reading assistance. Listening to others talk about their heritage and culture can help students appreciate the diversity that exists within the community.

How can we encourage these people to donate their time? I believe that one would be amazed at the number of people within a community who want to volunteer in some way. There are many retired teachers who love to return to the schools and work in classrooms. Doing things such as inviting a member of the community to come and eat lunch with the students can have a great impact on

students. Reaching out to potential volunteers and taking advantage of the resources they have to offer is something every principal must do.

I believe that in my role as a principal I will encourage parents and community members to be active participants in the school. I understand that especially in an urban area there are issues that parents have and that it is my job to put their minds at ease and help them understand how important their participation is to the success of the students. I plan to use the strategies mentioned in the articles I have read, as well as working with other principals, teachers, and parents to develop more ideas. Student learning begins at home, and we as educators are there to expand on that learning, and in some unfortunate cases, we are the only structured learning a child will receive.

The six ISSL standards state that all principals should be visionary, instructional, organizational, collaborative, ethical and political leaders. The critical element of promotion of parental support for students' education ties in to all six of the standards, especially visionary, collaborative, and political leadership. Striving to encourage parents and community members to be a part of a student's education is necessary in order to assist in the vision of success of all students. My goal as a principal will include working as hard as possible to ensure that all students are as successful as they can be. All teachers and principals know that a student's education begins at home but is continued at school and in the community. Working with parents on ideas of how to improve

education both at home and at school gives everyone the opportunity to become involved. Many times this is a political issue. City councils and school boards deal with education issues regularly and they can sometimes get very heated. Education has always been and will no doubt continue to be a hot political topic. Presidential elections often focus on education and the changes that need to be made. A leader always has to be aware of the politics involved.

Knowledge of Special Education Law and Policy

It was almost thirty years ago that the first federal law dealing with students and special education was enacted. In 1975 the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was passed. Since then, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have also been put into law (Bartlett, Weisenstein & Etscheidt, 2002). Each of these laws is very specific about the rights of students, parents, and schools when it comes to special education.

In all honesty my knowledge of special education law and policy was minimal before I entered the Principalship program. During my undergraduate studies I was only required to take one two-hour course on disabilities. The class provided very limited information on some physical and learning disabilities but did not at all prepare me for working with students with disabilities on a daily basis. This is unfortunate considering that in the Waterloo district, where I work, more than fifteen percent of the total number of students are labeled for special

education. It was not until I took Special Education Law and Policy during this program that I understood the laws and policies of special education and the implications on learning.

The school where I currently work, East High School, has approximately 1,200 students. Of those more than one-third are labeled and receiving special education. That is approximately 400 students. Of those students, many, if not most are included into regular classrooms at some time throughout the day. East High has nineteen special education teachers on staff. What this means is that at any given time, a regular education teacher has a class with at least one special education student included. Many of these teachers, myself included, do not have the background knowledge or experience to assist these students in order to help them be successful.

Almost all teachers both special education and regular education, agree that as an instructional leader, the principal has a major role in the success of special education programs and students within the school he or she leads (Bowling, Marshall & Patterson, 2000). This role not only requires the principal to have a strong background knowledge of the laws and policies, but also to hire teachers who have special education backgrounds. It also includes providing staff with the training necessary to successfully include special education students in the regular classroom. This is especially crucial when considering the fact that from 1994 to 1995 alone the inclusion rate for special education students

increased more than 200 percent (Bowling, Marshall, Patterson, 2000). In many cases students are being integrated into classrooms with teachers who have limited or no knowledge of special education.

One of my responsibilities as a building principal will be to ensure that all special education laws and policies are being followed. In order for me to do that I must first educate myself on the state and federal special education laws. This seems like a big task but at the same time it is a very important one. In an article by Lynn Boyer, Mark B. Goor, and John O. Schwenn (1997), they described how important it is for principals, as leaders, to set the tone for special education within the school. If a principal places importance on special education and stresses that to the students, parents, and teachers, then in turn it will assist in creating a school culture that places a high value on special education. The article also stresses the importance of training principals in order to be effective leaders. A complete training program should include these main components: a) knowledge, b) essential beliefs, c) skills and d) reflective behaviors (1997).

Unfortunately I have found that principal training programs do not adequately prepare people for the important role of special education leader. I plan to constantly continue to read as much information as possible on special education laws and policies. Keeping up on current literature as well as working collaboratively with teachers, parents, and the local AEA 267 will assist me in assuring the success of all students.

Knowledge of special education laws and policies directly correlate with the ISSL standards. In order for principals to be a visionary leaders, they must continue to look ahead and develop a plan to help ensure that success and inclusion of all students. Also, understanding the importance of instruction in the classroom, both in regular education and special education classrooms, is crucial. The building principal is the instructional leader for the entire building, and should be the person that all others can come to for instructional guidance. Special education and ethical leadership are very closely related. A principal must demonstrate ethical leadership when it comes to the topic of special education. Special education rules and regulations differ from those of regular education students. Discipline procedures, which are a major issue, are also different and are sometimes scrutinized by those looking in from the outside. The issue of special education is extremely political. With issues such as students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Other Health Impairments (OHI) coming to the forefront, a leader has to understand the political implications of decisions that are made. This does not mean that a leader must make decisions based on politics, that is where the ethical leadership along with ethics and values comes in.

I believe that this critical element as well as the promotion of positive interethnic relations are very closely related. For many years the overrepresentation of minority students in special education, especially African

Americans has been an issue. African Americans are more likely to be singled out and labeled as learning disabled or having a behavior disorder (Patton, 1998). There also continues to be a major problem of African American males being diagnosed with ADHD and prescribed medications such as Ritalin. This is a direct cause of mistrust and feelings of resentment by African American parents and community toward educators. It has been my experience both personally and from years of research, that this overrepresentation is directly related to inadequate knowledge on the part of educators, about the African American culture. As a parent of an African American child with ADHD, I have found this all too often to be true. I truly believe that a school that has a leader, who believes strongly in promoting positive interethnic relations and has a strong special education knowledge base, will not have the problem of overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

I feel most uneasy with this particular critical element. Of all of the issues I will be forced to deal with as a principal I feel as if this is the one for which I am least prepared. I understand that I have more to learn on this particular topic and I will to continue to do that throughout my career in education.

Knowledge of Effective Evaluation Procedures

Teacher evaluation may be one of the most critical jobs a principal performs. Traditionally the purpose of teacher evaluations had been to ensure teacher quality (Danielson, 2001). The traditional evaluation procedures included

a formal observation where the principal observed a lesson being taught and used a simple checklist to evaluate the teacher. This type of evaluation is no longer adequate for use in today's schools. Today's evaluation procedures are both formal and informal and not only focus on teacher quality but student learning as well. Evaluation should be a process, where both principal and teacher play an active role.

In order for principals to be effective evaluators they must not only understand what effective teaching practices look like but also how practices impact student learning. Conducting research on effective teaching practices is a must. Not only does understanding what the current research says assist principals with observations; it also assists them with the guidance of teachers who need to improve (Protheroe, 2002). Traditional evaluation processes usually included a simple checklis, which did not provide the opportunity for conversations on effective teaching practices and student learning.

Current evaluation procedures include a more interactive process. Formal evaluations are still performed, but there are specific points principals are looking for. They include a classroom climate that is supportive of all learners, teachers making learning goals clear and teachers presenting skills within different contexts (2002). In addition to formal evaluations principals also need to perform "walk throughs". Walkthroughs allow a principal to spend a few minutes in

various classrooms throughout the day and give teachers immediate feedback on what was observed.

As an educator in the state of Iowa it is nearly impossible not to be aware of the newly adopted teaching standards and criteria for new teachers. Unfortunately, these new standards and criteria are only being used to evaluate new teachers leaving room for the question, should not veteran teachers be required to meet these same standards? The idea of being evaluated using a brand new model and being required to create portfolios demonstrating competence in all of the areas makes some veteran teachers nervous (Howard & McColesky, 2001). As a principal I plan to work very hard to ease the transition for veteran teachers. I believe that this begins with information. Giving all teachers written copies of the evaluation process and purpose can help alleviate fears. Also, making sure that all teachers understand that the main goal of teacher evaluation is not to criticize teachers, but to improve student learning. Creating portfolios that demonstrate competence in all of the standards is something that is new to many veteran teachers, however, few of them realize that they already have the evidence that they need to meet the required criteria. Items such as parent call logs, assessments, and classroom rules and expectations meet several criteria and are usually things all teachers already have.

With the No Child Left Behind legislation that schools are being required to meet, teacher evaluation is extremely important. Schools are being forced to

consistently improve and the only way to increase student test scores is to make sure that all teachers are using the best teaching practices possible. Of course, not all teachers will be able to meet these standards. It will then be my job as the principal to assist low performing teachers in improving the quality of their teaching. As a principal, my job will be to ensure that all of the teachers in the building I lead are not only competent, but will continue to do research and professional development in order to ensure their effectiveness and improve student learning.

This critical element aligns with each of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders, especially instructional, collaborative, and political leadership. The topic of teacher evaluation, especially in the state of Iowa, is extremely political. Legislators tend to base opinions of a school's quality only on standardized tests and teacher evaluations (Danielson, 2002). This causes controversy within the education field. Suggestions have been made for salary increases for teachers deemed "Master Educators". Legislators are toying with the idea of performance based pay for teachers. I believe that teacher evaluation is a collaborative process between teacher and principal. Although observations will give me, as the principal, opportunity to see first hand how a teacher interacts with students and individual teaching styles, I am a believer that not all can be understood through an observation alone. I hope to be able to work with each teacher within my building on teaching practices as well as professional goals. Talking with

individuals can be very powerful and can assist me in understanding the differences in teachers. Finally, teacher evaluation focuses on instruction. If ineffective teachers are teaching students, it is impossible for them to meet the high standards required of them (Howard & McColskey, 2001). It will be my job as the instructional leader of the school to ensure that all the teachers within the building are effective. Effective teachers are the only way to ensure student learning.

Conclusion

My background, experiences and education have all helped to shape the person I am both personally and professionally. I have a deep love for education which is why I chose a career in teaching. Each day brings new challenges and rewards. I feel that now I am ready to take the next step in my career. The idea of transitioning from a classroom teacher to principal is exciting and intimidating at the same time.

When I began the Principalship program in the fall of 2001, my philosophy of educational leadership was not completely formed. Over the course of the three years, classes, textbooks, journal articles, professors and interactions with other cohort members have assisted me in developing my personal philosophy of educational leadership. These things also aided me when deciding what the four most critical elements of an effective educational leader are.

There are many different elements necessary for success as an educational leader. For example, it is essential that a leader be able to effectively communicate with all, this includes teachers, staff, parents, students and community members. Also, complete knowledge of the six Iowa Standards for School Leaders is important. Any educational leader in the state of Iowa must not only know the standards, but must also be able to demonstrate his or her ability to meet each one. The key phrase in each of the six standards is “who promotes the success of all students”. This is what I plan to keep in mind during each decision I make. Leading a building that is truly focused on the success of all students is very important to me.

In this paper I deemed promotion of positive interethnic relations, promotion of parental and community support on students’ educations, knowledge of special education law and policy as well as knowledge of effective evaluation procedures, four critical elements to success as an educational leader. Each of the four elements directly contributes to student learning, which is the goal of educators. These elements encompassed with the six standards help to create a positive learning environment for each and every student within the building.

The experience of researching and writing this paper was very positive for me. It helped me to reflect on what I feel is important as an educational leader and reinforced my values and beliefs about education and educational leadership. It is simple to say what I plan to do as an educational leader; however, I

understand that it will be more of a challenge once I am in the position. I feel that as long as I stay true to my convictions and always put student success first, I can and will be successful as a school principal.

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