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A preferred vision for administering schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

Just as the role of the school is changing to fit the needs of our students and society, the role of the school administrator is changing to meet the needs of the school. The school administrator should be viewed as important liaison between the school and the community. More and more, their role is proactive as opposed to reactive, as it appears to have been years ago. If an administrator takes the time to make contacts and build relationships, the loyalty and commitment by students, parents, staff and community will help to assure success and prosperity for all.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SCHOOLS

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership

Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Vicki Mueller

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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When a person enters a masters program in educational administration, one might logically assume that this person will graduate with visions of eventually becoming an elementary or secondary principal. This appears to be the common goal for the majority of people who are near completion in this course of study.

My situation is somewhat unique in that I entered this program for entirely different reasons. Over the last eight years, I have had the opportunity to present reading and motivational strategies at conferences, do presentations based on the results of an inclusion pilot program, conduct workshops for the Mobile In-Service Training Lab (MISTL) and work with several area education agencies and school districts in the state, including Council Bluffs, by conducting in-services on various areas of classroom management. Unfortunately, classes taught by a person without a masters degree cannot be offered for college credit, so the time came to rectify the situation since this is an area in which I would like to continue. Administration seemed the best option for building credibility with both teachers and administrators.

I'm still not convinced that being a building principal will be part of my future, because my heart is in the classroom working with kids. There have been some recent developments in my personal life, however, which may require some re-evaluation regarding this decision. Within the next year, my husband will possibly be transferred. If a teaching position is unavailable, administration may be an option. Originally, I thought I'd like to work with staff development and/or personnel. Recently, however, there are more and more times I find myself thinking, "If this were my building, I would...." I find myself watching my own building principal - especially when there are situations I'm not sure I would know

how to handle. I find myself more aware of things happening around me based on discussions that we've had in various classes. So, at this point in time, anything is possible.

Philosophy

My personal philosophy regarding education is based on the phrase by William Spady displayed on posters in many classrooms and school hallways. It is simply "All children can learn and succeed, just not in the same way or on the same day." This philosophy correlates with the results of the Life Style Inventory (LSI) we have taken in our coursework. My highest area was the Affiliative area which supports the belief that when people are happy and comfortable, they are better producers. This is true for both staff and students. If both groups feel they are surrounded by caring and nurturing - risk taking, problem solving and learning will transpire. Looking at Mr. Spady's phrase as a possible, future administrator, I would, however, like to change one word in the statement. I would like to change "All *children*..." to "all people can learn and succeed, just not in the same way or on the same day." I am a firm believer that given the right time and circumstances, all people can learn. I love to learn and helping others to love learning is what my philosophy is all about.

As I reflect on what I have learned and reaffirmed over the last three years, I see many parallels between teaching and being a building principal. The major focus is still on students and learning, as is building relationships with colleagues, staff, parents, and the community. There are budgets to be considered, although on a much larger scale in administration. Careful planning is required to make sure things are at their most efficient level, and constant decision making and

problem solving are routine. Expectations for teachers and administrators are constantly changing as we strive to better meet the needs of our students and society. Both areas have visions for the future which will only help to better our present education system.

Having been a teacher for thirteen years, with experience in both elementary and secondary education, I have had opportunities to work with whole language, phonics, teaching the same class for two years, teaching talented and gifted classes (TAG), working with many special education students in my classroom before and after inclusion was introduced, and integrating curriculum through interdisciplinary units. I feel quite comfortable in my present role as I am familiar with curriculum, district expectations, many special education laws and requirements, and have built a reliable network of fellow teachers to help with my own questions or problems. "Networks are particularly good at helping school-based educators discuss and work on current problems, while exposing them to new ideas from peers in other school districts" (Lieberman, 1996, p.53). The thought of stepping out of that comfort zone to assume an administrative role is overwhelming. There are so many risks to consider: What if I'm not effective? Will I be able to get along with everyone? Will I deal fairly with someone whose philosophy doesn't match mine? I will have to build a whole new network of colleagues for a support system. What if I miss the classroom? What if a veteran teacher is no longer effective, will I be able to handle this accordingly? The idea of moving into a completely different level of education causes a lot of insecurities to surface.

After completing the LSI, many concerns were addressed. I *do* believe one of my strengths is in my ability to get along with people which is supported by the affiliative area being my strongest. There have been many times when I have had to *sell* a new idea to an administrator, diffuse or de-escalate a situation with an angry student, parent, or upset teacher. As a New Teacher Induction Facilitator, before I even attempt an observation and conference, I make several short, friendly visits to a new teacher to establish a comfort level. "Often times a very promising new teacher can lose their enthusiasm quickly when left to pair up with people without guidance" (Boice, 1992, p.322). By the time I am ready to do actual observations, most teachers are willing to ask questions, or let me know if there are areas in which they feel they need assistance. Many call my home for suggestions, answers to questions, or just someone to listen. "What Damon Moore remembers most about the first year of teaching was how unprepared he was to cope with the realities of the classroom. He was alone. As a novice, he should have been guided by a veteran teacher"(Checkley, 1996, p.5).

Overall, the LSI scores indicated my competencies to be in about the right places. This was very reassuring. Although I had perceived many of these areas as strengths and/or weaknesses, this provided a more reliable tool with which to confirm my perceptions. I found this inventory extremely helpful, not only to indicate strengths, but to highlight areas in which I need more work. As a future administrator, I would strongly consider having my entire staff complete this inventory. I would also encourage learning style inventories to be administered to students so teachers could consider their teaching styles and the learning styles of students when planning lessons so as to use time more productively. There is so

little actual teaching time in the classroom as it is, time needs to be used as wisely as possible. Focus on the most efficient use of time, by administrators and teachers, can be assisted through the use of available inventories.

Obstacles Facing Education Today

We are presently at a place in education where we are dealing with a whole new breed of kids with a whole new breed of problems. Not very often are we working with the old philosophy "If you get in trouble at school, you'll be in twice as much trouble at home!" We are more likely dealing with the attitude "Let's go get the teacher!" The traditional two-parent, two (or more) children, family with a dog, and white picket fence is becoming rare. The reality of the world in which our students now live is divorce (at least one), step parents, live-in boyfriends or girlfriends who may be here today and gone tomorrow. It is the constant bombardment of sex, drugs, and violence through television. It is the baby or small child being entertained by a videotape because parents are too tired to snuggle and read a book, resulting in many children who have never really experienced the joy of reading. The reality is children living with grandparents or other relatives because Mom or Dad are too involved with drugs, or alcohol to take care of the children, or have decided they just don't want to be parents anymore. Reality is a student being dragged to a shelter in the middle of the night to avoid an abusive parent or family member. Reality is the family living in a van or tent by the river with no money, no permanent address, no hope for work without an address, nothing suitable to wear to school, and not much hope for things to ever get better. It's the seven year old walking to school having no more than a lightweight windbreaker jacket in a wind chill of twenty below zero with

no hat or mittens. It is the idea that if you don't marry the right person the first time, try, try again. Reality is a girl coming into class with a big, capital C branded into her upper arm by a metal coat hanger indicating her initiation into the Cryps, or the fifteen year old returning to school following an abortion. Reality is a constant threat, and often attempt at suicide. Today's reality is truly frightening.

> The society in which adolescents grow up has an important influence
> on their development, relationships, adjustments, and problems. The
> expectations of the society mold their personalities, influence their
> roles, and guide their futures. The structure and functions of the
> society either help them fulfill their needs or create new problems by
> stimulating further tension and frustration. Because adolescents are
> social beings who are part of a larger society, we need to understand
> this social order and the way it influences them (Rice, 1996, p.13).

I have lived with these realities for the last thirteen years and realize as an administrator it will be my responsibility to understand and try to do everything I can to help these children within the legal boundaries established by the school district and state. "Difficulties faced by children and families persist despite the fact that increasing numbers of programs and services and additional fiscal commitments have been directed at attempts to resolve these problems" (Iowa Dept. of Ed., 1992).

The Changing Roles in Education Today

The roles of schools have changed a great deal over the last ten to twenty years. "It is the schools' responsibility to prepare students to work, raise a family, and enjoy life as adults in the next century" (Epstein, 1991, p.41). As parents do less for and with their children (for whatever reasons), the schools seem to fill in

those gaps with breakfasts, day care, homework hotlines, counseling, free and reduced lunches, and all-day kindergarten. "Schools are not only looked at as a major avenue for problem solving, more and more they are being looked at as the major avenue for problem solving" (Dillon-Peterson, 1991, p.48). They are the only stable environment many of our children have, and, when schools become more involved, naturally, so do administrators.

This challenge becomes even more complicated as schools face the implementation of technology, inclusion, changing curriculum, staff changes, staff problems, budget cuts, staff development, ever-changing district expectations, and the attempt to stay current in new programs and strategies.

The foundation for success in any school program starts with trust. Teachers must be able to trust administration, and vise-versa. Teachers must be able to trust their colleagues, and students, parents, and the community must be able to trust both the teachers and administration. Although, initially, this trust-building process may seem to take a lot of valuable time, it will eliminate questions and backtracking in the end.

<div align="center">Leadership</div>

Shortly after we were notified a new principal had been hired for our elementary building, each staff member received a personal phone call from this man requesting a time when he could stop by our respective homes to meet us in person. The visit lasted only about thirty minutes. During this time, he had the impeccable knack of getting us to talk about the school, our philosophies, our visions, and our particular areas of interest. As I look back, I realize he did very little talking himself. He just listened to get as much information about each one

of us so he could get a real feel for our building. I was so impressed that he placed such a high priority on getting to know us personally, and making an attempt to build a comfort level right from the start. He spent the better part of his first year observing and becoming acclimated to the culture of our building. It wasn't until he had the support of the staff that, in the second year, he proposed any indications of change in the building. By this time, there was such a high level of trust and respect, his suggestions were well received. Although I didn't always agree with some of his decisions, in retrospect, he was a very effective and encouraging leader. He was always supportive of his teachers and encouraged professional growth and development. I wouldn't be where I am today had he not taken the time and interest to get me involved in a lot of training opportunities. I hope I can return the favor by doing the same for someone else. Our building won a FINE award during the time he was principal.

I have worked with several districts where the teachers feel it's us against the administration. Educators need to be realistic. We're all in this together for the students. When teachers and administrators work against each other - there's a lot of wasted time and energy that many just don't have.

"If you don't know where you want to go, almost any road will take you there" (Guthrie & Reed, 1991, p. 11). Another important quality for an administrator is that of vision. "Every administrator must not only become knowledgeable about various goals and objectives proposed for the schools, but must also develop some vision and convictions about the direction that education should take in the future" (Gorton & Schneider, 1991, p. 3). Although I don't condone the practice, I have done one-day workshops for various school districts. There is no follow-up,

no importance placed on training in the classroom during the days that follow. Principals float in and out of the sessions showing no real commitment themselves, then are concerned because their teachers place so little importance on staff development. When setting goals or designing a new program or project, an end result must be visible. No one knows if they've arrived when they don't really know where they are going (Sparks, 1992, p.43). In an interview with a school board member, it was obvious they, also, had difficulty because they all had visions and didn't usually have a problem deciding what was best for kids. The problem arose when it came to agreeing on the best way to get there. For visions to become realities, staying current and knowledgeable in various projects and programs across the state and country is important as a leader. When facing decisions impacting an entire staff or building, knowledge of present and prior research can be extremely time saving.

Practicum Experiences and Observations

Two years ago, a Building Improvement Plan (BIP) was required by the district for each building. In our building, a Building Improvement Team (BIT), was created consisting of four teachers (I was one), one counselor, the principal and assistant principal. Our goal was to establish a mission statement for our building, and decide on a goal or vision as to where our staff development would focus for the next couple years. Aware of the growing concern regarding the declining reading ability of our junior high students, we were all in agreement that our building would probably select an area in building reading skills. The final decision was presented to the staff so that all input could be considered. Although the need was obvious, and everyone agreed, that we should work

on building reading skills with our students, many teachers felt that teaching reading was the job of the language arts teachers, so we had to select a program which best fit the needs of the entire building.

For the first year, various speakers with various reading strategies presented at our meetings. We realized, however, that we were missing the continuity of an on-going training program. "Just as any person or organization goes through stages of life, so does staff development. At conception, programs may seem disorganized. At the birth stage stress is apparent because there are no previous rules or experience" (Dillon-Peterson, 1991, p.49).

The BIT selected another teacher and myself, both with a strong reading background, to attend a three-day workshop for trainers in Denver, Colorado, entitled Teaching Reading in the Content Areas. We attended a two day follow up session in Kearney, Nebraska a few months later. This year, the other teacher and myself have been responsible for providing staff development training for our building. We have not only presented information, but have carefully and deliberately built in time for practice, processing and reflection for the information that has been disseminated. "Through reflection teachers reconnect with their thoughts. Just as reflection and process time aids students in solidifying learning, teachers find that by taking the time to really focus on questions, they can often come up with answers or solutions themselves" (Canning, 1991, p.21). "Time to reflect is a luxury, not all teachers possess" (Moren, 1990, p. 210).

Very few decisions in this whole process, from its origin to the present, have been made without staff input. It has been a teacher designed and directed project

from the beginning. Because teachers have had input into the design and implementation of this project, it appears that they are willing to work harder and are more committed to its completion. Involvement by teachers does not erode authority, but rather increases the impact. The basic message is that creating collaboration in schools is more than just installing new programs. It is, in fact, creating a whole new culture and to keep any new program going, there must be follow-up, support, and plenty of communication.

Opportunities for feedback have indicated the in-service sessions have been productive and useful. "The only way to keep the things that are working and get rid of the things that are not, is to get feedback from the people receiving the information" (O'Brien, 1990, p.40). The informal sharing of ideas and strategies that have been taking place in the lounge, hallways, and work areas keep staff members motivated to continue trying new things. As a follow-up piece, teachers have been asked to observe co-workers using reading strategies in their classrooms, as well as be observed by others. Both observations are followed by a conference so as to the attempts and results of the strategy. These successes and attempts that were not so successful have been the topic and focus of study team meetings.

> The active participation of the teachers and administration along
> with the encouragement to experiment with new ideas rekindled
> the staff's professional commitment to continued growth. Many
> risks are taken to implement a program such as this, but staff
> and teachers alike believe it is worth it (Grube, 1988, p. 20).

The role of our administrator was that of directing, guiding, encouraging, suggesting, and envisioning. Although the vision was shared by all, she was the

one who could see the end result and ways to get there. She built in accountability by requesting individual implementation logs of various strategies and results be turned in periodically. She placed importance on the project by providing substitutes for teachers as they did observations so personal plan time did not have to be used. Without the trust level that had been established, not only would presenting information to the staff as trainers have been very difficult, but the sharing and observations would have never taken place. Although staff development is one of the most effective ways of maintaining and strengthening existing skills, as well as provide new knowledge:

> In a study discussed in this article it was revealed that of all
> sources of job-related knowledge and skills, staff development
> ranked last in the districts with only 13% saying staff development
> sessions were effective. 60% of the teachers' studies reported
> they did not get to participate in decisions about staff development.
> 70% believe they should. 85% did not often discuss their own
> training needs with their principals or administrators. The authors
> of this article felt teachers should be involved in the planning and
> use of teachers for training. It is the schools' responsibility to
> students to work, raise a family, and enjoy life as adults in the
> next century. This goal will be best met through staff development
> and a positive school climate in which everyone feels they have
> ownership (Epstein, 1991, p. 36).

At a recent meeting, various BIPs were being discussed. Teachers from other buildings were overwhelmed when ours was described. "Your whole building works together? Everyone participates? How do you get everyone to do it?" It was explained that reading was a concern of the entire building, and everyone had input and ownership. This was something we had decided to do for ourselves and our students, not something done to us.

"A shared vision is a powerful force in shaping staff attitudes and
behavior. Faculty members viewing staff development as an
important responsibility will have a major influence on how the
schools will meet the challenges presented by a new breed of
students" (Sparks, 1992, p.44).

"Risking new behavior is less threatening in schools where cooperation and
experimentation are the norm" (Sparks, 1992, p.43). In an attempt to increase
staff collegiality, compared to her predecessors, our principal has attempted some
pretty risky things at staff meetings, drawings for door prizes, the Macarena, and
singing. To venture out of the comfort zone knowing things could fail just as
easily as succeed takes a certain confidence in one's self and one's abilities, and
one's staff.

Our building leader demonstrated her skills in problem solving as she
worked with the BIT. We strategically planned each step and analyzed the long
term impact on students and the building. Many options were considered. She
would encourage as things became stressful or overwhelming. She would also
play devil's advocate, so we were always prepared to deal with concerns voiced
by the staff. She was more able to see the big picture and impact for the entire
building as opposed to the more directed focus possessed by most of us coming
from our individual content areas. "Strong leaders are necessary in collaborative
schools because they take an active role in reducing isolationism and directing the
faculty to establish new norms and behaviors" (Roy, 1991, p. 47).

Our principal modeled the importance of lifelong learning and belief in this
project as she, herself, participated in every facet of the training along with the
staff. She not only "talked the talk, but walked the walk." I have worked with

principals who set up staff developments for their staff with no intention of participating. It is difficult for teachers to view them as credible evaluators when they are not aware of the instruction their staff is receiving, especially if evaluations depend on the use of the newly acquired information.

Just as in teaching, administrators need to be intuitive and flexible when things don't seem to be going well. "Flexibility, recognizing if something is not working and fixing it, is a key point in meeting the needs of participants" (Sparks, 1992, p. 44). There are times, if an on the spot decision needs to be made, a reason for a particular decision cannot be put into words. Based on the cirumctances at that particular moment, the decision just *feels* right. Again, administrators need to have the confidence in themselves and their abilities to feel comfortable making these choices.

The Council Bluffs School District offers its employees many opportunities for personal and professional development. I feel very lucky to have had so many learning experiences during my time with the district. One area mentioned previously is that of a New Teacher Induction Facilitator (NTIF). My responsibility, along with two other teachers, is to work closely with the personnel director as we plan a year of activities designed to assure our new teachers a successful start in the district. One of these activities is to a two-day orientation for new employees. These two days are followed with a picnic where new people have the opportunity to meet central office personnel, school board members, principals, and, as a result of the Community-School Relations class, we added a new piece this year. The mayor and president of the Chamber of Commerce were invited to meet our teachers and give a word of welcome.

Other district expectations of the NTIF include the planning of monthly meetings designed to address the needs of new teachers, as well as conducting classroom observations and conferences with individual teachers. We have 62 this year. Working with the new teachers has opened opportunities to work closely with building principals. I have learned a lot by observing principals as well. I have seen things I would definitely try in a building of my own, and I have seen things I would do much differently. I know I would want to be a principal that is involved and visible in the various activities going on in the building. These administrators have eyes that light up when talking about their staff and students because they are a part of what is going on. I have observed the results of an attempt to have building-wide behavior expectations and guidelines in and outside the classrooms. This particular project allowed and encouraged all teachers to remind all students of the proper behavior expected when in the building or on the school grounds. I have seen the importance, with students and parents, of carrying out discipline policies fairly, consistently, and quickly. I also realize the value of building support from staff, students, parents, and the community. Taking time to build relationships is a crucial, foundational piece.

Several years ago, in an attempt to build additional support for new teachers, our induction program expanded to a two year program. Second year teachers continue to attend monthly meetings focusing on the Essential Elements of Instruction based primarily on the theories of Madeline Hunter. Following careful scrutiny by district administrators, these effective teaching strategies were found to best fit in with the expectations of the district. Having had extensive training in these theories, I am responsible for teaching most of these classes.

As the new Pom Pon sponsor for a local high school in Council Bluffs, I have worked closely with the activities director who is also an assistant principal. He states the most frustrating part of his job as a newer administrator is, first, time management and the inability to be in two places at the same time. He then explains that he has so many visions and ideas he wants to implement. He finds it extremely frustrating because he wants to make the changes *now*, but change takes time. Suggestions for change have to be presented at the right time and in the right way so as to gain and maintain support.

In this position I have the responsibility of planning calendars and learning to follow proper channels for money and permission for various activities. I have been involved in planning pep assemblies for the high school, as well as planning activities to get the squad into the community for service projects. Not only have I had to manage to keep seventeen girls informed as to upcoming events, but informing and maintaining the support of parents. A situation arose where a parent meeting concerning possible suspension of three squad members needed to be organized and attended. As I observed the Activities Director facilitate this meeting, I learned a lot about the importance of keeping cool and using self-restraint. Establishing a policy of following rules consistently eliminates problems in the long run as people know, from the start, what to expect.

Experience during this practicum in working on curriculum committees has helped me to realize the importance for leaders to establish an agenda including research, pre-established criteria and guidelines. It is valuable to have and make contacts so as to include experts in a curriculum area, as well as new people who will have to rely on the teacher's manual and pre-designed curriculum. This

allows different perspectives that will cover the abilities and expertise of all teachers. Careful planning and organization, on the part of an administrator, will help to assure the success of such committees.

Administrators need to be receptive to the recommendations of teacher committees, even if these recommendations conflict with their personal opinion. I have also learned that if a district truly wants teacher input, then it needs to be ready to accept teacher input. We were in a situation where the committee recommended keeping the same curriculum and provide teacher training, since the old curriculum could be taught in the new way, but because we were *on cycle* for buying books, the money had to be spent in that way. That, however, left no money for training teachers in the new curriculum. So the new books were purchased and teachers are teaching the new material the way they always had.

I am lucky to be working with a principal whose leadership style is very much like my own. I have learned a lot by observing her with parents, students, group meetings, and community involvement Not only does she plan meetings where team building is always included, staff meetings start and end on time. Active participation is always involved so teachers have an active voice in decisions being considered for the building which makes staying focused at the end of a long day much easier. We usually discuss one major topic and receive teacher memos for daily routine items. "Each staff meeting becomes a lesson - well planned and organized very much like lessons that are expected from teachers in the classrooms" (Hunter 1988).

There are various committees of teachers - Faculty Improvement, Building Improvement, Progress Committee, etc. who strategically plan before meetings to

address particular concerns or results. Discussion provides the opportunity to anticipate any major problems. Many concerns are resolved before they ever reach the staff. These committee meetings meet as needed, and are conducted in the same productive, timely manner as staff meetings.

Looking toward the future in education as a prospective administrator, there are definitely concerns and areas which, I feel, need to be addressed. I strongly believe that part of staying knowledgeable and credible is to maintain classroom contacts, which includes actual time in the classroom on a routine basis. I have worked with too many administrators who all-too-soon forget what it's like in the trenches. Students are much different now than ten years ago. The only way to really understand the changes in student culture is to be in the classroom. I had the opportunity to work on an inclusion project with Judy Jeffrey, our assistant superintendent at the time. The model required her to spend time actually teaching in my classroom. Following a lesson, Judy told me, "I've definitely been out of the classroom for too long. I need to get back into practice and sharpen my skills." This is possibly true of most administrators after a certain period of time. It is something worth considering especially when dealing with teacher evaluations. Administrators need to make sure their classroom skills are as effective, if not more effective, than the teachers they are observing. What worked with students five years ago, could very possibly be ineffective with the kids of today.

Something else to be considered is training focusing on dealing with adult learners. Going directly from a classroom into an administrative role is not always an easy transition. Treating adults with respect, not talking down,

accepting all ideas and opinions are crucial in the success of in-services and meetings. Appearing to be well-organized and being able to prioritize information so as to eliminate the possibility of too much information in too little time helps to make leading adults more beneficial for participants. It is important to know how to get attention from the start of a meeting, maintain that attention, adjust pacing, provide examples that are relevant for everyone, and make people feel that what is being said is worthwhile. It is important to read body language and make changes as needed to avoid problems. Ideas are needed for active participation that are not demeaning or too difficult for an entire group of adults. There are some simple training techniques to help assure that adult gathering are productive.

Another area of concern facing administrators is continuing to provide equity among all students in schools. This is demonstrated with the controversy over the present ESL programs. All children, all people, for that matter, have the right to know and understand the contributions made by their ancestors. It's those contributions that have made our world what it is today. The encouragement of active multi-cultural committees will help to keep this a focus. A knowledgeable and informed principal can only enhance this process.

Since school law class, many concerns have also been raised. Many teachers leave a classroom of students to get a cup of coffee, run off papers, or stand in the hall and talk to colleagues. As an administrator, I would make sure my staff knew and understood the importance of being in the classroom with students. I would also make sure they knew the importance of not touching kids and leaving their doors open when working one-on-one or with a small group of

children. Teachers need to know how to protect themselves while helping students.

Another area of concern regarding the law falls under special education. As an elementary teacher, I was involved in writing IEP's, attending staff meetings and re-evaluations, working with parents, modifying curriculum to assure success, and understanding my obligation and responsibility to the student in my classroom. I always was kept informed as to my legal options if and when a student(s) was unsuccessful in my classroom, for whatever reason.

I have had several run-ins with special education teachers in my present building because I am one of the few regular education teachers who is familiar with many of the laws. If special ed. teachers don't want to do additional paper work to change a child's program, they often tell the regular ed. teacher that nothing can be done. Many teachers don't know the possible options. If a child is failing, rather than helping a classroom teacher modify the curriculum, the regular education teachers are just told they can't fail a special ed. student. Teachers are not always informed that if the present program is not working, a more suitable one needs to be found. As the parent of a learning disabled child, I made it my business to know both his rights and mine. In elementary, when a child was being staffed into a program, I would sit with a parent and explain the entire process, who would be in attendance and their role, and some possible outcomes for their child. They were far more comfortable going into this situation armed with this background information. Staffings were less threatening and more productive when everyone understood the process and purpose. This may be something administrators should consider, however, some principals

aren't any better informed than the parents. This can be easily remedied with some training because it is their responsibility to be familiar with the laws and to keep parents informed, so as to assure proper placement for all children.

> In sum, the school administrator - long considered a barrier to rather than facilitator of involvement - can help safeguard the public interest and serve professionalization. Administrators who balance interests, even serving a bit as ombudsmen, leave the schools with conditional and negotiated loyalties and commitments (Crowson, 1992, p.52).

Just as the role of the school is changing to fit the needs of our students and society, the role of the school administrator is changing to meet the needs of the school. The school administrator should be viewed as important liaison between the school and the community. More and more, their role is proactive as opposed to reactive, as it appears to have been years ago. If an administrator takes the time to make contacts and build relationships, the loyalty and commitment by students, parents, staff and community will help to assure success and prosperity for all.

In a speech by Dr. William Lepley, he describes a building administrator as "an advocate for her staff, a facilitator, a cheerleader for high expectations with excellent skills in monitoring and reporting student progress on clearly identified learning outcomes." Based on coursework, practicum experiences, and the influence of some very effective administrators, I now feel more comfortable assuming the responsibilities involved in educational administration. In fact, within the roles I am presently assuming for the Council Bluffs School district, I have already started.

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