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Education must change : a reflective essay

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Education must change : a reflective essay

Abstract

This paper outlines five important areas to be an effective administrator and facilitator of educational change. The first area is my belief about education and educational leadership and why I chose to enter the educational leadership field. The second focus area involves the use of reflective practices to improve myself as an educator and administrator as well as discussing the use of reflective practices for educational change. The third area discusses the role of a leader in school reform. The fourth area talks about an administrator's role as an instructional leader to both the students in their school as well as to their staff. The final area of discussion focuses on the need for and value of service learning.

Reflecting for Action

A Reflective Essay

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Education Must Change

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

University of Northern Iowa

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In partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Ryan K. Riewerts

February 2006

Dr. Vicky Robinson

This Research paper by: Ryan K. Riewerts

Entitled: Education Must Change

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements of Master of Arts

in Education

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Education

Education Must Change

"If I was bad when I was in school, I got it twice as bad at home as I did at

school!" "Readin' and Writin' and 'Rithmatic", Sing to the Tune of a Hickory

Stick." Now-a-days, teachers can't even touch a student. What do you mean

they're teaching evolution to my kid, next thing you know, they'll want to teach

sex education! Iowa, top 6 percent nationally for school success and only 42nd in

teacher pay. My, how times have changed in education, and therefore, my thesis,

Education MUST change.

This paper outlines five important areas where I will need to be strong in

order to be an effective administrator and facilitator of educational change. The

first area I will discuss is my belief about education and educational leadership

and why I chose to enter the educational leadership field. The second focus area

involves the use of reflective practices to improve myself as an educator and

administrator as well as discussing the use of reflective practices for educational

change. The third area discusses the role of a leader in school reform. The

fourth area talks about an administrator's role as an instructional leader to both

the students in their school as well as to their staff. The final area of discussion

focuses on the need for and value of service learning.

Education is a learning process. In education we are continually looking

to our past to find those practices that will make us a better educator. My

philosophy of education comes from being surrounded by men and women who were passionate about education. These individuals have shaped my philosophy and inspired my desire for excellence.

Education today is changing. I am a part of a new era in education and educational leadership. I grew up with two parents who cared for me and who were also teachers. My grandparents were also teachers, so I have grown up in education. Because of these role models I chose education as a career. I know the frustration they dealt with, but have seen their joy when their students succeeded. I saw how many extra hours it took for students to succeed. I knew I simply had to be a part of this honorable profession.

My mother was a high school vocal music teacher who pushed her kids to higher performance levels than they ever dreamed possible. My father has taught college classes and was a curriculum facilitator who has been assisting teachers in reaching their highest potential, and was a science teacher, publications advisor, media teacher, and coach. I have attempted to follow in their enormous footsteps. Watching them work through difficult situations has helped me work through challenges of my own. Whether it was a conflict with administration, an angry parent or an apathetic student, I have had the support to work for positive outcomes.

Educational Vision

My personal vision of education comes from my own classroom. I have found that students respond best to being challenged and that parents want to be active in their child's education.

I believe that all students can learn and work toward excellence. I believe that it is not a teacher's job to be a babysitter. It is a teacher's mission to inspire kids to want to learn. It is a teacher's job to teach the definition of true excellence and push their students toward it, and to not accept mediocrity. I believe that educators will fail if they do not have support form the student's home and that garnering home support is part of my job. I work everyday to help my students toward that vision of excellence.

Education is like a jigsaw puzzle. The students are all of the inside pieces, and the learning community that supports them are the edge pieces that frame the picture and provide a starting place and secure interlocking holdfast points. Without every piece, the educational puzzle is never complete

Philosophical Foundations

Again, all children must learn. That is the major premise of my philosophy of education. With those four words, I place the responsibility for education squarely on the backs of my school and myself. I believe that children learn when someone cares that they are learning. I feel very strongly that an

administrator needs to encourage parents/guardians to take an active role in their student's education.

I believe that education needs to be relevant to a child's future success and happiness. The "basics" are most important as they enable students to problem solve and succeed in life. The "arts" make lives whole. Students also need skills that will enable them be successful in dealing with diversity of culture and of thinking. We must teach students that helping others is good. And finally students need to learn how to work hard and not quit when it gets difficult because perseverance creates excellence.

A leader must be passionate about his job and must communicate that passion to all stakeholders, teachers, students, parents and community. We must find ways of creating an excitement about learning and a focus in our schools that learning is job #1. All stakeholders must buy in to the focus of student learning and excellence.

Finding all ways to help students learn is my number one priority. Creating a safe environment for students to learn in is priority two. Ensuring staff resources for student learning is priority three. And the final priority includes, evaluating my school's effectiveness and being able to facilitate changes to reach our goals is my job in order to achieve my philosophical goal – "All children must learn."

Educational Leadership Philosophy

An educational leader in today's high-stakes learning arena is responsible for the success and/or failure of a school. To fulfill this responsibility, a leader must first clearly define what a successful school is and then create a circle of shared-vision to achieve that success.

Defining a successful school requires knowledge of federal, state and district requirements and guidelines, along with the understanding that real learning has measures beyond standardized testing. Creating the shared-vision circle to reach this success must be a collaborative effort that includes the input from all stakeholders around the community of learning. The leader must be the facilitator that brings everyone together and focuses this input on success in student learning.

An effective leader must also enable open communication with all stakeholders. Open lines of communications between administration, parents, students, staff and community members are critical to preventing misunderstandings and reaching the shared vision. This is also important to parent involvement and is key to building a network in to the community with those who can assist the school.

Instructional leadership is also important and meaningful professional development for staff must be a part of leadership. Facilitating a framework for teachers as instructional leaders maximizes resources.

When the learning community has collaboratively developed the vision for the school, it becomes the job of the principal to champion this vision and then measure progress toward that vision.

Communication of this progress is the final piece of the leadership circle. The leader's use of data and input from all stakeholders provides the information necessary to evaluate progress and to continue the leadership circle with revisions or update the vision as necessary.

My Beliefs About Educational Leadership

Because of the complexity and responsibilities a principal has, it is challenging for one person can manage an entire school. A learning community must work together to ensure the success of today's school. The learning community includes, teachers, staff members, students, parents, business partners, community members and administrators. Care must be taken to define the duties of leadership and roles among staff to avoid misunderstandings. An example of this might be when input for decisions is sought by the principal, vs. shared decision-making, which might or might not concur with the principal's philosophy. The creation, implementation and facilitation of the learning community are the responsibilities of the school administrator.

An administrator must be a person who can see the big picture. With my experience in the arts, I have directed many productions. Directing to me is seeing

the vision of the show and making it happen by putting together a team to implement the director's vision. You have a director, a scenic designer, a technical director, actors, back stage people, and a producer. When everyone does there job the show comes together and the story is told. Education is very similar. The principal of the school is in charge of the vision. The principal must use their fellow administrators, teachers, para educators, students, and community to ensure that the vision of the school is implemented. It is the principal's job to make sure that all parties are working toward this goal.

Just as my educational vision has been refined over the past two years, my way of improving my teaching has changed as well. Rather than waiting for someone to tell me to "fix" my teaching, I now have become more proactive in my approach and by using reflective practice, and can anticipate, deal with and resolve problems. As I finish a lesson or concert I reflect on how I taught certain things within the music. I find ways to evaluate the problems and find ways to fix them the next time we rehearse. Reflective practices are a valuable tool that can be used in many facets of the educational process. Whether with a building, a staff, a teacher or a student this solution-seeking process can be applied to many areas of education.

What is a Reflective Practitioner?

Reflection is what allows us to learn from our experiences: it is an assessment of

where we have been and where we want to go next. ~ Kenneth Wolf

A reflective practitioner is a person, group, or organization who uses

observation and knowledge to analyze a task, interpret how it relates to their

vision, predict what will happen if they continue on the same course, experiment

with new ideas on how to change the task it if necessary, and finally engage in

doing the task in a different way to reach their goals.

This process has definite advantages for an educational leader, including

utilizing the staff's knowledge. All stakeholders collectively observe and reflect

on tasks and use their knowledge and ideas to reach their goals, thus validating

their experience and expertise, which gives the stakeholders ownership in the

process. In an article from the web, (Miller, 2004) it says; Reflective practice is a

process with which increasing numbers of professionals are engaging in order to

understand better, take full ownership of, and enhance the work that they do. It

expresses the thoughts and reflections from a personal point of view.

A potential disadvantage in this process is the amount of time it takes to become a

reflective practitioner and the amount of time it takes to use reflective practice. For

this process to be effective an entire school's staff's must be trained. The process

itself is not easy and is not always successful. Unless a school is able to find time

consistently, reflective practice will not accomplish what is needed or expected.

The reflective practices I now use will assist me when I become a principal.

The process will give me the ability to critically reflect on my decisions and make

the difficult decisions that allow me to improve as an educational leader. I also

would use reflective practice with my administrative team to look critically at our

school and district goals in order to identify areas that need to be addressed.

Dealing with unexpected problems is a large part of an administrator's job. When

you are confronted with a problem that needs an immediate resolution, (Smith,

2001) Schon's idea of "Reflection-in-Action" and "Reflection-on-Action" can be

used; The notions of reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action were central to

Donald Schon's efforts in this area. The former is sometimes described as

'thinking on our feet'. It involves looking to our experiences, connecting with our

feelings, and attending to our theories in use. It entails building new

understandings to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding. The

practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a

situation, which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon

before him, and on the prior understandings, which have been implicit in his

behavior. He carries out an experiment, which serves to generate both a new

understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation.

Reflective practice enables principals to find new solutions to old

problems. Using this tool, a principal is not destined to repeat the problems of the

past. A principal must be willing to look at their decisions and honestly admit

when they are wrong and then move forward and not make the same mistakes

again. Becoming a reflective practitioner is a way of empowering stakeholders to succeed.

All stakeholders can use reflection as a positive tool in education. Students can use it during their learning, teachers can use it to improve student performance, and administrators can use it to evaluate personal progress and the progress their school is making toward their goals. In order for an educational leader to use reflective practice effectively, everyone using it must have the same operational definition. Therein lies some potential for problems with this tool, as it was difficult to find complete agreement as to what defines this process in the literature.

The operational definition of education includes not just continuing education, but it is a never-ending learning process and therefore I contend that education must change. However, at the institutional level, this change must be a carefully chosen and orchestrated. Before change can happen in any given school, all stakeholders must have a unified vision. Everyone must know the goal(s). The principal's job then is first to facilitate the process to create this shard-vision and only then to find a fitting model for any changes needed to reach these goals. In moderating the progress toward this change, the principal serves in the instructional leader role.

The Leader's Role in Educational Change

Once again, the thesis that education must change is important in the leader's role in educational change. However, without positive leadership facilitating educational change, it may not happen at all. Lack of leadership, or leaders without vision or competence may even cause harm to their schools. In talking with my colleagues and listening to professionals, I have learned, there are many traits a leader must have in order to precipitate change. I will discuss these traits as well as the reform policy adopted by my current school. I will talk about how I would use the current reform model and research as a principal and how it correlates with the Iowa State Standards of Leadership (ISSL).

I am currently participating in a school wide educational reform model called, High Schools That Work (HSTW). Our goal, using HSTW is to raise our school achievement by raising school wide expectations. Much of my experience comes from going through this process and I will be discussing and analyzing the ways our school leadership has implemented this school wide change.

High Schools That Work

Reform models seem to come and go in cycles. With so many reform models and teaching initiatives currently being used, it seems as if many initiatives are being used at the same time. Last year we were selected to receive a Federal Grant to implement a pilot program called High Schools That Work, by

the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB). The reform model is a school

wide initiative for raising student achievement and preparing them for careers.

This initiative is teacher driven. Every teacher is placed on a focus team that the

SREB believes is necessary for higher student achievement. Each team analyzes

a specific aspect of our school and makes changes that will assist student learning.

There are many good things about HSTW, and I have learned many

strategies from the program to use as an administrator. The first thing is the use

of cross-curricular teams. I have learned a great deal from the teachers that I

don't have contact with everyday. We have been able to share openly about

problems we face and have been able to share experienced feedback with each

other in order to solve those problems. In these teams we have implemented

standard meeting roles. We have a facilitator, note-taker, and timekeeper, as well

as a team leader. We run our meetings with an agenda and minimize sidebars.

There is an open discussion about all topics, and all opinions are valued. These

self-agreed-to guidelines are integral for our teams success in creating change.

Another positive that I have taken from HSTW is how it allows the

teachers to become personally vested in the change process. This is not an

administrative led process; it is a chance to empower teachers to make the

changes that will help their students. The process gives decision-making power to

the teachers and leaves the follow-up enforcement to the administration. The

administrators are to support the decisions of the staff. I will admit that this isn't

working perfectly, but our staff is implementing changes and facing difficult decisions.

The leadership needed for the HSTW model is a difficult blend of letting go of the reigns and supporting the decisions made by your staff. Leaders must also act as the spokesperson to all stakeholders to ensure the success of the program. They are there to answer questions the teams come up with, and also to take our decisions to higher administration for approval. This type of leader must have an undaunted passion for this program, and an undaunted way of following through on that passion.

Leaders in Change and the ISSL Standards

How does being a leader in educational change relate to the Iowa Standards for School Leaders? A correlation can be made for every Standard and subgroup on the list.

Standard 1 – Visionary Leadership –Visionary leadership is needed for refocusing the vision you are trying to attain. As a principal I feel that involving all stakeholders to create the school's vision is imperative. Identifying this common vision that everyone agrees with will allow you to make the necessary changes for your students and school.

Standard 2 – Instructional Leader – School reform and change are difficult at best. First and most importantly, the need for change must be proven. Only then can a principal work to find a model consistent with the school's vision

and work toward consensus of staff and stakeholders to adopt and implement this model/change.

Standard 3 – Organizational Leader – In his book about Good to Great companies, Jim Collins talks about needing to have the employees in place before embarking on a direction. As a schools leader a principal must hire those individuals who are best equipped at making change happen. He calls it, "First Who...Then What?" (2001). Finding those people who you know will work hard to educate students and getting rid of those who won't, "get on the bus ", is a difficult but necessary part of being an organizational leader.

Within this standard a leader must be sure that the environment in the school is conducive to change and that their staff has everything they need to be successful. Some of these items include, appropriate training, access to technology, access to experts, and the time to reflect on the process. A leader is there to ensure the success of the reform while implementing it.

Standard 4 – Collaborative Leader –Involving stakeholders can increase the likelihood of success. As a way of targeting our No Child Left Behind – Student Sub Groups, we have partnered with a local business that takes the kids through a Mini Test-Taking Academy. We feed them, and give them tips on how to do better on the tests. The students who have attended the academy shared that the process made them feel important and the actual test results improved for

those students. This is a demonstration of community collaboration in which I have participated.

Standard 5 – Ethical Leader – School reform is not always pleasant. In a way, you are admitting to failure. But for change to occur you have to face facts, and not just some of the facts all of the facts. Schools have been known to not report data in order to stay off the NCLB Watch List. I believe that every educator has an ethical duty to report the progress of his or her students. If a student doesn't learn then we have to do something different until they do.

Standard 6 – Political Leadership – When a school is working on educational reform it is imperative that everyone knows about it. An educational leader should always be supportive of their school and the positive changes that are occurring. Finding influential friends of education who will tout your successes allows you to build support for change.

What do others say?

Jim Collins book, Good to Great, which deals with leadership levels, identifies a leader who wants change as a Level 5, or highest level leader. To understand Level 5 we first know the descriptors for the five levels; Level 1 – Highly Capable Individual, Level 2 – Contributing Team Member, Level 3 – Competent Manager, Level 4 – Effective Leader, Level 5 – Executive (2001). While the first four categories are self-explanatory, the Level 5 needs a definitive

explanation. The Level 5 leader builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. The principle of downplaying your own achievements, and eluding the spotlight, and yet having that uncompromising passion and commitment to excellence is a look at what an ideal principal should be.

In a website titled "Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change", Sylvia Mendez-Morse describes effective leadership as having two dimensions; "initiating structure, which is primarily a concern for organizational tasks, and consideration, which is the concern for individuals and the interpersonal relations between them"(Summary). Her opinions are very much aligned with my ideals for leaders. There is a great need for a principal to make the tough decisions needed for the reform and to have the humanistic characteristics to work with a staff and support them so the environment for change can exist.

The final resource I have chosen is form the North Central Regional Education Laboratory, in a publication entitled, "Viewpoints: School Leadership in the 21st Century: Why and How it Is Important". The author addresses four areas that administrators must have skills; 1. Instructional Leadership, 2. Management, 3. Communication, Collaboration, and Community Building, and 4. Vision Development, Risk Taking, and Change Management. While all of these areas are important, I will focus on the 3rd area, communication, collaboration,

and community building. "Rather than telling people what to do, effective leaders rally people around a meaningful vision and clear goals and motivate them to work hard to achieve them."(See Web Site). This need to collaborate with a staff is imperative for change to occur.

In order for educational change to occur a principal must feel passionately that change is necessary and consistent with the school's vision. The right people must be in place to facilitate the change. They must choose which reform model best suits the needs of the school and its students. Finally, they need to be good listeners. The principal is there to guide and direct the school toward the vision. There are times when a principal must be the final word. However, in educational change, he must be a motivator and supporter within the framework of the change to ensure its success.

In the instructional leader role, the principal must always use the unified vision to guide her/his decisions. The past, present and future also have an important bearing on a principal as an instructional leader. In considering both curriculum choices and teaching strategies and tools, a vision toward students' success is important, while current trends in educational research supported by the latest data should be considered. Finally, it is incumbent on not only the principal and staff, but on the entire educational system to honor our history, tradition and pride in our past as an important part of what we pass on to the next generation.

Leader of Learners' Role for the Learning Improvement for Students and Adults

Throughout my masters coursework, I have been searching for what it is most important in an administrators job. The answer, as many in my cohort will tell you, is student learning. All students must learn and the responsibility falls to the principal and teachers in that school. Pre-School through High School, student learning is the most important part of an administrator's job. It is our responsibility as administrators to help students learn so they can become successful in life. It is our responsibility as instructional leaders to make sure that all students get the chance to become successful. It is our responsibility as educators to push our students to excellence. And it is also our responsibility to push ourselves to the same excellence we demand of our students.

In his article, Lashway explains that, "Since the 1980s, instructional leadership has dominated discussions of the principal's role, creating almost unanimous agreement that student learning should be at the center of what principals do." (2003). He goes on to say that instructional leadership is, "anything that leaders do to improve teaching and learning" (Deborah King 2002).

An administrator must focus on many areas within their school, but as an Instructional Leader, I believe they can narrow the focus to three key areas; educational climate, evaluation and assessment and data driven decision-making.

These areas when combined create a comprehensive vision for improving student learning, the ultimate goal of an instructional leader.

Educational Climate

In his article Lounsbury recognizes the importance of climate in our schools, "A positive school climate recognizes that the school itself is a teacher. The nature of its environment, both in physical facilities and human relationships, is an important educational condition and establishes the context in which learning takes place." (1996)

It is the responsibility of an administrator to create this positive climate for the staff, students and all stakeholders. The most important part of this quote is the end- "establishes the context in which learning takes place." By saying this, the school inherently focuses its mission on learning. It isn't on lunch, recess or pep rallies, but rather it is on learning. Students will have a good time meeting one another and all of the other activities they will be given the chance to participate in, but the focus is on learning. This focus is a message that we must share with all of our stakeholders as we work to improve student achievement.

This focus on learning must be for our staff as well as our students. This can be a challenging topic for administrators. The professional development opportunities must be relevant, rigorous and appropriate.

Creating a culture and climate of excellence is a goal that I use in my

classrooms, and that is the same goal that I will have for my as an administrator.

Excellence in Education -- the only goal you need.

Evaluation and Assessment

The search for best practices is getting easier. Finding those practices that

work for all of the teachers in the building is another story. As a principal, I will

continue to develop my knowledge and understanding of different teaching

methods and best practices. In talking with my mentors about the evaluation

process I have found that most teachers will work with you to make sure they are

the best that they can be. By using their expertise in the classroom, the evaluation

process becomes a strategy for improvement, rather than an administrator

checking up on their staff. If there is a problem, we can then work together to

find a solution.

Evaluations can be a time-consuming task and can be swept aside in the

hustle and bustle of an administrator's demanding schedule. This can be said for

a classroom teacher, or an administrator. Assessing the progress of your students

or your staff has become a critical job for teachers, administrators and school

districts across the United States.

As an administrator it is imperative that you know and understand how

well your teachers are teaching, your students are learning and how your school is

progressing. Finding ways to accurately assess these areas is imperative. Using the assessments that effectively show this data is a necessity. Teachers and administrators need to be better trained in using assessments to measure learning. Assessments must be used to show us where students are deficient and then show us where and how as educators we can improve our teaching to enhance our students learning. The question that must be continually asked of students is, "What do you know and how can you show me that you know it?" Likewise, an administrator must ask the same of his teachers, "What do your students know, and how can you prove it?" It is in the proof that we must collect the measurable data to prove learning and to improve our teaching.

Data Driven Decision Making

No Child Left Behind has raised the bar for schools across our country. We are now even more accountable for the education of our youth. This accountability forces schools to make decisions based on more than a feeling or hunch. We must be able to show data that proves that our students are learning. We must be able to show the data that backs up our curriculum and instructional strategies. We must be able to use the data that shows us where we still have to improve. This mandate for data-driven decision-making has refocused many administrators on the skills and tools to collect, analyze and interpret this data.

In her book, Zepeda stress the need for data by stating, "Data should drive the development of the school improvement plan, (2003)". She also talks about the need for the principal to take the lead on developing the school improvement plan. Finding the problem areas in schools whether they are, low-test scores, attendance, suspensions, etc., is how data can assist an administrator. Collaborating with those individuals in your building and/or at the district office is essential in making decisions with the appropriate data.

So, instead of Dr. Phil's question, "How's that working for you? The question that an instructional leader should be asking everyday is, "What have you learned and how can you prove it?" The importance of an Educational Climate that focuses on academic excellence, the need for continual assessment and evaluation, and the ability to make appropriate data-driven decision are what will make an instructional leader successful.

The inclusion of Service Learning into an integrated curriculum is consistent with my personal beliefs and philosophy of education. Rigor, relevance and relationships are three words that I like to relate to all aspects of learning, but especially service learning. Rigor, setting high goals for successful community involvement, brings the importance of education into reality for many stakeholders. The relevance of service learning is obvious, especially if we measure our students' success in terms of lifetime achievement and satisfaction. Students who learn to measure success in terms of helping others and doing good

have much more latitude in self worth than if they measure success only in monetary terms. Finally, relationships tie directly to service learning in many ways. Life and learning constantly deal with relationships and our success and/or failure in dealing with these is key to lifetime success.

The Role of the Leader of Service

I grew up knowing that it was my responsibility to help others who needed help. Whether it was a church activity, or a friend whose basement had flooded, I was going to help if I could. My parents instilled this sense of duty and social obligation within me. Teaching our students that helping others is a good thing and hard work is a valuable trait are as important as learning our ABC's. Finding ways to incorporate service learning into our curriculum is the key.

There are two facets of service learning. The first is finding ways to implement it within the school, and the second is service learning throughout the community. Having Service Learning as an integral part of your school connects your school with the community and with more stakeholders. Whether it is singing at a nursing home, helping with voter registration, or collecting food and money for the Hunger Drive, having the students in the public eye will have people singing the praises for the school. One challenge that faces teachers is to integrate service leaning into already-crowded curriculum. Rigorous and relevant learning should always take priority over tradition, if that choice becomes

necessary. Showing students how they can make a positive change in the perception of their school will help improve the students' self-images, as well as the image of your school.

In his article, Service Learning: Building a Bridge to the Community, Moon talks about the benefits of a well-structured Service Learning Curriculum, "If service learning is structured correctly, it is academically demanding and provides opportunities to learn about social development and citizenship. It also prepares students for the work world by teaching them teamwork, problem solving, diversity, and interpersonal skills. The service learning experience becomes a source of knowledge. (1999)". These traits are what help us prepare our students for the next level. Whether it is elementary, middle, or high school, Service Learning can be adapted and implemented into our curriculums.

Hinck and Brandell (1999), have found research that tout the effectiveness of Service Learning in character development, "Service learning has been offered as a method of educational reform that will not only increase academic learning but will have a positive impact on students' personal and interpersonal development. Supporters of service learning believe students involved in service learning experiences are more tolerant of others different from themselves; have a greater appreciation for other cultures; find rewards in helping others; feel more connected with their communities; and have fewer discipline problems". This

ability to enhance the character of our students is a part of our curriculum that we do not always include in our lesson plans.

I have talked about the benefits for Service Learning, but we need to make sure that we define what Service Learning really is, in her article Billig (2000), shares a very concise definition of service learning, "Most also believe that high quality service learning includes:

* thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet authentic community needs;

* structured time that allows students to talk, think and/or write or otherwise reflect about the service experience; and

* activities that enable students to engage in planning service in collaboration with community members, specifically giving students an opportunity to make decisions and solve problems." This definition shows that service learning is a tool that promotes higher thinking skills and a positive outreach into the community. These outcomes are critical to students' future success and to our society.

It is important to remember that to be a leader of service an administrator must be active in their community. Being a member of a church, or a service organization, or the director of a fundraising event where you can talk about you school or show-off some of your students to anyone who will listen is a powerful

tool in making connections in your community. The key component is to lead by example.

The importance of service learning is not measured in No Child Left Behind, but this does not diminish the importance of what is learned by the students and gained by the school and its impact on our culture and society.

At an even more basic level in education and according to the Constructivist Model of Learning, all new learning is predicated on making connections to previous experiences or learning. These connections or relationships are the building blocks for learning. And this concept takes us back to the presumption that learning must change. Change is inherent in learning and must continue forever. Therefore, I repeat, Education must change.

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