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What I believe about leadership education : a reflective essay

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What I believe about leadership education : a reflective essay

Abstract

In a time where the stakes are high and pressures from the federal and . state government are mandating that all students are to achieve and no child is to be left behind, school improvement needs to be at the forefront of education in the state of Iowa. "Student achievement is the cornerstone of the success of principals, and teachers are a key factor in the area of student performance" (Zepeda, 2004, p.12). Unfortunately, there is not one catchall solution to school improvement; the solution is unique to the school setting and the students it serves. As a result, it takes good administrators to seek out areas in need of improvement, communicate these needs, collaborate with staff and community, and implement strategies to make effective changes in the school environment.

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP EDUCATION:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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by

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Dr. Nick Pace

In a time where the stakes are high and pressures from the federal and state government are mandating that all students are to achieve and no child is to be left behind, school improvement needs to be at the forefront of education in the state of Iowa. “Student achievement is the cornerstone of the success of principals, and teachers are a key factor in the area of student performance” (Zepeda, 2004, p.12). Unfortunately, there is not one catchall solution to school improvement; the solution is unique to the school setting and the students it serves. As a result, it takes good administrators to seek out areas in need of improvement, communicate these needs, collaborate with staff and community, and implement strategies to make effective changes in the school environment.

When I think about education and the role of teachers and administrators in student’s lives, I have realized that it is not just the educator’s role to educate students about different subject matter, but it is their duty to produce educated citizens with character. Therefore, if it is the desire to produce these citizens through our educational system, we need leaders that provide an environment and atmosphere conducive to learning, that encourages character, and that provides students an opportunity to grow as individuals.

These leaders are not government officials, although they play a big role in the educational system, but they are the ones who see these individuals on a day to day basis. It is the teachers, administrators, and parents that influence and mold these children into becoming respected and responsible citizens in today’s

society. It is leaders that continually reflect upon their own practice, so they can become better leaders of learning, leaders of educational change, leaders of school improvement, and leaders of service. I will be reflecting on how to become this leader-a leader that has a vision. This vision includes one who uses assessments based on the learner's needs, is an instructional leader, promotes school improvement, and collaborates with all stakeholders through good communication. Through this process it is also important that the leader is reflective of his//her practices. This leader also has good character, is open to change, and is a servant leader.

An Administrator as a Leader with a Vision

“There are no shortcuts to ‘being the best;’ it always involves big dreams and the unwavering commitment to pay the price through discipline and hard work” (Author Unknown). When I ask middle school age children what they want to be when they grow up, inevitably I have about five boys every year who say they want to be collegiate and professional athletes. I think this is a great dream, but in reality, they seem to not understand the commitment it takes to make this dream come true. I understand these are just teenagers, but their lack of understanding concerns me.

As I ponder the challenges of school administration, I realize even educational administrators have this problem. They have a vision but are unwilling to put the time and effort into it to achieve it. “Commitment is a line

you must cross...it's the difference between dreaming and doing" (Author Unknown). I understand the time commitment and the demands that come along with being in a leadership position. I want to be a leader that is enthusiastic and passionate but creates an atmosphere where students are held accountable. I also want to be viewed as a leader that is flexible but maintains the vision of the school and community. A good effective leader sets high expectations and inspires others to value the vision they embrace. Once everyone embraces the same vision, it is amazing what one can achieve. Les Brown, a motivational speaker, sums up this vision of excellence, commitment, and high expectations by encouraging people to reach for the moon. "That way if you miss it, you will land among the stars" (Wilmore, 2002, p.14).

Jane Lindaman, Bunger Middle School principal in Waterloo, Iowa (personal communication, November 9, 2005), has this commitment. One could see enthusiasm in her face and in the way she talked about her students in her interview. She is a dedicated administrator that places high expectations of both students and staff. I can still remember her telling us that, as a leader, we need to make sure that "students come first" in the decision-making process. She claims that if we are putting the students first and basing decisions on what is best for them and not for teachers, administrators, or community members, student learning will take place. As an administrator, I will set high expectations for my staff and students, provide a challenging curriculum that encourages growth

academically and socially, and make decisions that are in the best interest of the students.

An Administrator Who Uses Assessments to Guide Decision Making

One way administrators can encourage growth academically and socially for all students is through the assessment process. Assessment should not only be used as a means to see what the students know and do not know but also as a reflective tool that guides instruction. In the classroom, educators should be assessing their students through observation and through their daily work as a means to identify students who are grasping the assignment and those who are not. This identification allows the teacher to differentiate instruction within the classroom, so the higher level students and the lower level students' needs are being met at the same time. This helps teachers evaluate what students need more individual instruction and where misconceptions may lie in a particular unit. The sooner these misconceptions are found, the easier it is to fix the problem.

The emphasis of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the Waukee Community School District, where I currently teach sixth grade, has prompted a shift in focus further towards Rick Stiggins's "assessment *for* learning" strategy. This strategy uses assessment as a means to guide instruction as opposed to justifying the means. Our administrators continually encourage educators to become more data-driven instructors who use data from assessments to guide

further instruction, so educators can focus on what concepts need more emphasis and reinforcement.

Stiggins claims the student's role is to strive to understand what success looks like, to use feedback from each assessment to discover where they are now in relation to where they want to be, and to determine how to do better the next time. As students become increasingly proficient, they learn to generate their own descriptive feedback to set goals for what comes next on their journey. If educators can provide opportunities for students to learn to be more reflective and see the value an education plays in their daily lives, the more they can tap into the wellspring of confidence, motivation, and learning potential that resides within every student (Stiggins, 2007, p.1).

One way the district leaders are modeling this strategy is by involving its teachers in targeting and identifying those students who are at and below the 41% mark on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading, math, and science. This helps teachers so that they can monitor these students throughout the year and differentiate instruction to help meet their individual needs. With this attention to these identified students, we are hoping to give these students strategies in either reading or math to help increase student achievement.

I like Stiggins's philosophy of "assessment *for* learning" and agree that this philosophy will increase student achievement. Educators must address concepts and issues students have not grasped instead of letting them slip through

the cracks. As an administrator, I would encourage teachers to use more formative assessments in their lessons to know what concepts the students have grasped and concepts that need to be re-taught before using summative assessments like tests and papers. Simple activities like journaling, classroom observations, and class discussions are quick and easy ways to assess students on concepts learned. Although I believe most teachers are already implementing formal assessments into their classrooms to some extent, this would be a great professional development activity to reemphasize and model it to all teachers. The more we can use formal assessments to guide instruction, the better we will serve our students.

Assessment of Curriculum

Administrators and teachers must also actively assess the curriculum. This allows the district to see if there are any gaps in the curriculum that need to be addressed. For example, if middle school students are continually doing poorly in geometry on the ITBS, it is essential to see if those concepts are being taught or how they are taught. Many times simply reorganizing the curriculum or spending more time on important concepts will close those gaps.

When I taught middle school math in the Pekin Community School District, we used data-driven analysis to find gaps in our curriculum. There, I was involved in Every Student Counts, a state-wide math program to help students increase their math scores. In this program, we gave our middle school students a

pre-test at the beginning of the year and used the results to find gaps in our curriculum and decide which areas we were going to focus on during the year. Then in the spring, we reassessed using the same test to see if we made any improvements in those areas. This evaluation allowed us to reflect on our curriculum and instruction.

At Waukee, teachers and administrators are continually assessing the curriculum. In the elementary grades, the district has shifted its focus to “Everyday Math,” a curriculum designed to teach students that there are a multitude of ways to solve a problem rather than just one. It also stresses the importance of students understanding the process of solving a problem instead of memorizing the formula and/or steps to solve it.

Charlotte Danielson, author of *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, and developer of a rubric to evaluate teachers and staff members, suggests that teaching and learning is the idea of a community of learners. Danielson claims that in this community of learners, a teacher is not the sole source of knowledge, and that students should also participate in generating and sharing understanding. As a result, the teachers and students become a community in which everyone’s contributions are valued (Danielson, 1996, p.26). The intent of implementing the “Everyday Math” program is to build this community between students and teachers and to encourage the students to use, understand, and be able to communicate multiple ways of solving a math

problem. So far, most teachers, students, and parents are supportive of this change in the math curriculum and are excited to see how it impacts the students understanding of the math concepts.

This year, our focus is on revamping the science curriculum. During this process, the district's science curriculum team, made up of administrators and teachers, have come together to discuss changes needed. This is a great way for teachers to voice their opinions and concerns to the administration about what is best for the students. This communication between the administration and teachers shows the value a teacher's voice has in helping raise student achievement.

Assessment of Teachers

A second key in effective assessment is that administrators continuously assess his/her teachers and reflect upon what areas work well and what areas need improvement. Evaluation is an important element in the improvement of the school environment. Leaders see the value of data-driven decision making, to empower their learning community and to improve their schools. Using data from classroom observations, classroom assessments, and standardized tests provides a comprehensive picture of the needs of the teacher and school (Zepeda, 2004, p.91).

An Administrator Who Is an Instructional Leader

Quality feedback from an instructional leader is also an essential ingredient for teacher success. Eric J. Feeney, a high school assistant principal overseeing curriculum, testing, and staff development in Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada, claims the evaluation process plays a powerful role in developing and nurturing a teacher's instructional capacity, which, in turn, contributes to students' academic successes. He believes that through mutual collaboration, administrators and teachers should work together to establish professional goals that address student-learning outcomes. He believes that teacher capacity is enhanced when teachers are given the opportunity to individually and collectively participate in analyzing data and drawing conclusions that link instruction and student learning. Feeney also says constructive and meaningful feedback is needed to promote reflection and allow teachers to plan and achieve new goals, which will ultimately lead to an increased sense of efficacy in their teaching (Feeney, 2007, p.191 & 193).

As a teacher, I have had the opportunity to be evaluated this year in many different ways. Through these formal observations, walk-throughs, parent and student feedback, I have been able to reflect on my teaching and see what areas need improvement. Over the years, I have realized that these are great opportunities for me to grow as an instructional leader.

As a future administrator, I want to make it an emphasis to evaluate my staff and give them quality feedback, so they can improve as educators. The more I can fill my building with great educators and other supporting staff that sets high standards for their students, that reflects on their current teaching to improve their quality of instruction, and that strives to meet the needs of all students, the more we can increase student achievement.

Highly effective principals understand that for a school culture to be successful, they need to strive to meet the needs of all students, families, and staff, including themselves. These leaders understand how important it is to get into the classroom and focus on improving teacher instruction. Principals realize the more they can build the skills of their teachers in the classroom, especially those of mediocre teachers, the less time they have to spend reacting to and managing the results of ineffective practices, and the more opportunities they have to lead the school (Whitaker, 2003, p.38). Robert Marzano, author of *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*, emphasizes Whitaker's statement about the importance for improving teacher instruction in quoting researcher William Sanders and his colleagues about their findings that,

...the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. In addition, the results show wide variation in effectiveness among teachers. The immediate and clear implication of this finding is that seemingly more

can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor. Effective teachers appear to be effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in their classrooms. If the teacher is ineffective, students under the teacher's tutelage will show inadequate progress academically regardless of how similar or different they are regarding their academic achievement (Marzano, 2001, p.3).

As instructional leaders, principals need to reflect on their staff's teaching styles to make sure there are varying methods to presenting curriculum, instruction, and assessment that embrace all types of learning needs and styles. James Keefe and John Jenkins, authors of *Instruction and the Learning Environment*, support this idea of reflecting on teaching styles by claiming that it is essential that teachers develop a student-centered classroom that teach students how to generate and validate their own ideas and then be able to use these ideas to explain aspects of the real world that they would otherwise not perceive or understand (Keefe & Jenkins, 1997, p.12). This allows students to become more engaged and actively take part in an education that is meaningful to their lives.

Teachers and principals also need to take part in professional development to create a successful school culture. They need to have a personal mission statement that represents the values, beliefs, and purposes of being an educator and pursue this mission whole-heartedly. "The best way to carry the momentum

of the organization forward is to fill it with the best people available, then empower them to do what needs to be done to reach the community's goals" (Wilmore, 2002, p.39). Principals need to encourage teachers and staff to set high expectations and goals for themselves, and help them achieve it. One way to help teachers achieve their goals is to teach them to be reflective practitioners who are continually researching and learning different teaching strategies and reflecting on their instructional strategies to improve classroom instruction.

Elaine L. Wilmore, author of *Principal Leadership*, stresses the importance of following the seven standards that the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) has created as criteria for principal expectations, for leadership preparation programs, and for the professional development of current administrators. Standard two of the ELCC emphasizes the responsibility of the principal to be an instructional leader who "promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth" (Wilmore, 2002, p.32).

It is through this culture I believe the vision is achieved. The principal is "the shepherd of the flock" (Wilmore, 2002, p.34). Principals promote an environment where all students learn despite their socioeconomic background and educational needs. They create a culture where expectations are high and goals are set as a means to increase student learning and professional development that

ultimately achieves the vision. An administrator has to reflect daily on the reason they are in this profession and make a conscience effort to get out into the classrooms and be the instructional leader and role model teachers so desperately need. It also conveys to the students their importance to the administration. This is, in fact, one of the most important jobs of an administrator.

My previous mentor and Pekin High School principal, Art Sathoff (personal communication, October 26, 2005), sees a need for principals to become better instructional leaders. Because of all of the management and behavioral issues he has had to deal with during his administration, he has not been able to get into the classrooms as much as he would like and be the instructional leader he feels his staff deserves. He enjoys being able to help the classroom teachers by giving them any instructional, organizational, or assessment strategies that might help them become a more effective and efficient teacher.

I believe being an instructional leader will be the most challenging standard for me as well. As a classroom teacher, I feel I have a good grasp on being a visionary and an organizational, collaborative, ethical, and political leader, but I struggle with developing my instructional effectiveness. I understand the content I am teaching, and I believe I do a good job of teaching it. However, I do not feel I do a good job of assessment. This is where the principal, being “the shepherd of the flock” (Wilmore, 2002, p.34) could help me by providing me with strategies to improve in the assessment process and by creating a culture where

expectations are high and goals are set as a means to increase student learning to accomplish the vision.

As an administrator, I will block out time every week so that I can get into my teachers' classrooms. Whether I am in there for only five minutes doing formal evaluations or summative evaluations, I believe the more I can get into their classrooms, the more I can help them with any instructional, organization, or assessment strategies that will help them become a more effective teacher.

I also believe I can be a more effective instructional leader by keeping up on current research and getting involved in book studies that allow for great collaboration and communication between the administration and staff. For example, I am currently in a book study with a group of teachers and administrators discussing the importance of differentiating instruction and grading. Collaborating and discussing with other teachers and studying new methodologies are a great way for me to reflect on my current practices and explore new ways I can implement new strategies to improve my teaching practices. Therefore, keeping up on current research and reflecting with other staff will allow me to become a more effective instructional leader.

An Administrator Who Promotes School Improvement

The outcome of becoming a more effective instructional leader will result in overall school improvement. "School improvement is a multifaceted process that never really ends. The process of school improvement is a collaborative

effort dependent on a culture and climate that support growth and learning for teachers and the organization” (Zepeda, 2004, p.2). Although it takes the principal to organize, plan, make decisions, and accept the final responsibility for school improvement, it also takes the teachers to implement it into the classroom. The principal’s approach as an instructional leader is crucial to promote student achievement. Therefore, as instructional leaders, principals need to have great character, positive relations, collaboration, communication, and support from its teachers, parents, students, and community in order to increase student achievement.

One way a principal can promote school improvement is by building positive relationships with its students, staff, parents, and community members. “The principal who sets a positive tone can influence the interactions of everyone in the school. Focusing on all of the positive things in our schools-and there are many-gives us more drive and energy to get through the less positive times” (Whitaker, 2003, p.25).

At Waukee, our administrative staff has been actively involved in the implementation of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). PBS is a research-based philosophy used to reinforce positive behaviors students are exhibiting throughout the school day. Through this system, students can earn “money” for displaying behaviors that are both positive and create an atmosphere conducive to learning. With the money they earn, students can purchase rewards such as having pop in

class, cutting their homework in half, and listening to their iPods during study hall time. Our hope is that students will see the value of displaying positive behaviors and that these behaviors will continue to be exhibited as they continue through school. PBS has been widely accepted both by the students and staff members, and I believe this has positively contributed to the school culture.

Also, if a principal can form positive relationships with the staff, students, parents, and community members, the more trust and respect he will gain, and the more willing the staff will accept the decisions and changes he makes, thus promoting school improvement. When a principal is willing to give respect and stick his neck out for his staff members in a time of need, the willingness for that staff member to reciprocate the action in the future is high.

I have been fortunate to have had administrators that were willing to work with their staff members in a time of need. If I ever needed to leave work a little early or take time off, my administrators have been willing to let me do this. They understood that I put more than my share of time in and rewarded me for my hard work. Not only did they gain my respect as a leader, but as a person as well. Once they gained my respect, I was willing to do anything they asked me to do. When I am an administrator, I hope to gain this respect from staff and students. If I can do this, the school culture will dramatically increase, thus improving the school as a whole.

An Administrator Who Is a Collaborative Leader

Being a collaborative leader who puts the needs of the students first also promotes school improvement. One of the first things administrators must do is to learn to “seek first to understand” other people’s interests, needs, and perspectives (Wilmore, 2002, p.67). Because school communities consist of many people with differing opinions, building leaders need to develop effective communication and relationships with the staff, families, and other community members, groups, and agencies. Since these are all stakeholders in the educational process, they should have a say in the decisions that will affect their children. It is important that a principal listens and takes into consideration all parties’ points of view, but, in the end, it is important to make decisions with the best interest of the students in mind.

When I become an administrator, I hope to become a collaborative leader that is “high on both assertion and cooperation and actively seeks to find win-win solutions that will be mutually benefiting to both parties” (Patti & Tobin, 2003, p.44). I want to be a principal that has an understanding of the different needs and interests of the community and makes sure that the decisions made represent the majority of those involved.

Former UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden, says it best in his book *Coach Wooden’s Pyramid of Success*. “With all levels of your coworkers. Listen if you want to be heard. Be interested in finding the best way, not in having your

own way” (Wooden, 2005, p.46). This quote speaks to the value of being a collaborative leader. An inspiration to many players and coaches, Wooden believes that people can achieve more by working with others than what we could ever do alone. That cooperation is working with others for the benefit of all. This is, in fact, what education is about-working with all stakeholders involved in the educational process to help all students achieve and be successful.

An Administrator that Communicates with All Stakeholders Involved

Communicating with those involved in the school environment is critical to being a collaborative leader. It is essential to keep all stakeholders informed on issues affecting the school environment. It is also important to get feedback from those stakeholders as a means of reflecting and improving. Good communication is crucial in improving the school culture, resulting in a sense of what strategies are working and what needs improving. Communication is also essential because it gives teachers, staff, parents, and community members a voice in their school and a sense of community and ownership when promoting an environment conducive to learning.

An effective principal especially confides in her best teachers for advice before making any major decisions. These teachers have a school-wide vision and base decisions on what is best for the students both academically and socially (Whitaker, 2003, p.68-69). These leaders will give an honest answer, even if the answer is contrary to popular beliefs. They are the backbones in the school, and

their advice is critical in major decisions because they work with the students and are always thinking about what is best for all. Great leaders confide in these teachers because they are the ones who have a direct influence on the students in the classroom.

At Waukee, we have such a group called Building Council that meets with the administrators in the school to discuss issues affecting the school environment. The group consists of teachers representing the different teams and curricular areas within the building. Our goal is to communicate ideas that will help improve student learning. This has been a valuable committee for our district, and when I am an administrator, I hope to implement such a group in my building.

Communication with parents is also essential to improve student learning. We are encouraged to communicate with parents through email or by telephone when their son/daughter is getting a C- or below. We are also encouraged to update our grades weekly and import them into a computer software program, allowing parents to keep an eye on their child's grade at home. Finally, at parent-teacher conferences, parents are able to meet with the teacher to discuss issues concerning the academics of their child. This is a great opportunity for the teachers, parents, and children to reflect and work together to improve the child's learning, so they feel successful in the classroom.

Working together with all stakeholders involved in the educational process, effective school leaders can help ensure that we come up with a plan that is in the best interest of the student. Without this collaboration, the student suffers. Failure of parents, teachers, and administrators to effectively communicate and collaborate negatively impacts students. Therefore, as an administrator, I will do my best to collaborate with the parties that are involved in the conflict to come up with a helpful reasonable solution, so the conflict can be solved in a fair and ethical manner.

Unfortunately, not all conflicts are going to be easy to solve. There will be situations that will arise where a party does not agree with the decisions an administrator makes. There will also be times where an administrator may not agree with decisions made by the board, district, and/or state. In every situation, however, an administrator needs to accept the decisions that are made and make the best of them.

An Administrator as a Reflective Leader

I agree with the quote by an unknown author that it is essential that any leader or future administrator, “Regard setbacks as opportunities to grow. Learn from them. Research them. Use them to propel you forward.” As a leader, there are many times when obstacles lie in the way of a vision or goal we have set for ourselves. These are the times when most people give up and say they have had

enough, but an influential leader uses these setbacks as a time to reflect on the experience and grow to become an even better leader.

Martin Luther King, Jr., explained this best when he said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” (King Jr., 1963).

Think about the most influential people in today’s society; it is how they lead in times of adversity, challenge, and controversy that makes them great leaders. To be an effective leader, a principal has to be a reflective practitioner who continually reflects on his/her vision and goals for his/her school and effectively collaborates and communicates with all stakeholders involved in the educational process to promote an environment conducive to learning.

An Administrator Who Is an Ethical Leader with Character

Another ingredient to being a great administrator is being a leader with character. Administrators need to be the ones that set the example in schools and show students, parents, staff, and community members what we want the school atmosphere to be like. They need to handle all situations with care and make sure they handle all decisions with integrity, fairness, ethics, and with the best interests of the school in mind.

Wilmore (2002, p.67) cites Covey’s oft-repeated advice to, “...seek first to understand” all aspects of the issue before making any decisions as to eliminate any bias toward a student, program, or project and make decisions based on the

facts rather than their own feelings. Having a consistent approach and reflecting as a leader with the best interests of the school in mind will ensure equity and fairness in the decision-making process. Being an administrator is not an easy job, as necessary decisions will not always be embraced by those that are involved. As long as the decisions support the school vision and meet the needs of the students in a fair and ethical manner, educational leaders can be confident that they have done the right thing.

Stakeholders need to know that you are a principal with character, that you value honor, and that you are driven by an unending passion to do everything you can to promote the success of all students, faculty and staff members, families-of the entire learning community-to reach a vision of excellence (Wilmore, 2002, p.81).

They want and need to put their trust in a leader that is honest, respects himself and others around him, and has the best interests of the school and the community in mind. If this trust is lost, respect is lost, and, as a result, the vision is not attained.

There will be times when bias will come out in the decision-making process. That is when leaders need to humble themselves and admit they were wrong and try and learn from their mistakes. People will respect leaders willing to humble themselves and admit mistakes. They like to see a leader who recognizes that he/she is just as human as the rest of them.

Included in my daily instruction, I try to incorporate and model values such as responsibility, respect, and integrity. I believe those values are just as important as, or even more important than, math, English, social studies, and science. Learning to respect others and their property, building character, having a caring attitude, and being honest are just a few character traits that I try to instill in my students. I try to motivate them to become not only good students but good students who reflect these values in their everyday lives and who can lift and challenge those around them to become something of themselves. A person who can be a positive influence on others has character and is a great leader.

As a principal, I want to be known as an ethical leader with morals. I believe an administrator will gain the respect of everyone involved in the school culture when they make decisions based on good judgment and moral and ethical standards. As an administrator, I want the staff, students, and parents to see how my beliefs and values affect the decisions I make, and I want them to be able to trust that they will be made in a fair and ethical manner. Once a leader gains this trust and respect, they can lead and motivate the students and staff to believe in them and embrace their vision.

Standard five of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) states that a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. As a future administrator in today's society, I see the value and importance this standard

plays in the lives of my students. In a leadership position, the principal is continually being looked upon to make hard decisions. They are also being watched in times of adversity. I believe a leader that promotes ISSL five, in both times of success and adversity, is a great leader and will motivate others to strive to become the role models students so desperately need in a society where people with good morals are hard to come by.

As I move into administration, I also recognize that I will increase my sphere of influence as a role model. Teaching at the middle school level has taught me many things about the teaching profession, including my passion of being a mentor and an influential person in these students' lives. Many times my students let frustrations with school, friends, and family, get in the way of obtaining an education and believing that they are someone special. Therefore, I am in a position to not only promote success in the classroom but to be there for my students in times of need.

After reading *The Greatest Miracle in the World*, I have realized that I can apply Og Mandino's four laws for happiness and success as an administrator into my students' lives. Mandino is an inspirational self-help author that inspires his readers to regain the self-esteem one has previously lost. He claims one needs to, "Count your blessings. Proclaim your rarity. Go another mile. Use wisely your power of choice. Doing all things with love" (Mandino, 1975, p.104). I believe if we can instill these qualities into our students' lives and help them realize the

blessings they do have, help them to love themselves for who they are, and help them to never give up, then they will understand that they have the opportunity to embrace who they are, make something of themselves, and become respectful citizens in society. That is all part of being “the shepherd of the flock.” Having the opportunity to be a role model and being in a position to make an impact in student’s lives is a big reason why I want to be an administrator.

I continually strive to become a better instructional and ethical leader, whether it is in the classroom or at home. For me, it is not about students getting “A’s,” but it is about displaying values and seeing what kind of people my students and staff around me become which is the ultimate success story. I want to have a positive influence as a principal and leader and have that image filter down to all who are involved in the learning environment. It is only through reflection of past experiences and the willingness to change to better practices that one can improve and become a better leader.

An Administrator Who Is Open to Change

Another important quality of an educational leader is that they need to be open to change. Administrators need to have an understanding of the issues that are going on in the world around us and be able to adapt to those changes, so we can better prepare our students to become respectful and responsible citizens. This truth is emphasized in the book *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson (Johnson, 1998), a parable about the truths of change and how we react to the

change when it occurs. Johnson writes that there are times when we need to embrace change and seek for “new cheese” and not be set in our old ways.

When I am an administrator I am going to make sure that I am informed on the issues that affect the school culture and be prepared to embrace change, whether it is in curriculum, in instruction, or in assessment strategies as needed for my staff and students. The more informed we are about issues outside of the school, the more we can make a difference inside the classroom.

When I taught in the Pekin Community School District, we adopted literacy strategies to be implemented into the curriculum in all subject matter in order to improve our students’ reading scores. At first, I was hesitant to incorporate these strategies into the math curriculum for fear of disrupting the flow of my lessons, but as I learned to embrace this change and incorporate these strategies into my curriculum, I learned the value these strategies played in the understanding of the lesson. The more knowledgeable we are about researched strategies to help students achieve and the more open we are to adopt these strategies, the better prepared we will be to implement these strategies into the curriculum.

Change is a process, not an event. It is a process through which people and organizations move as they gradually come to understand and become skilled and competent in ways to implement the change. Successful change starts and ends at the individual level, and an organization does not change as a whole until

each member has changed. The rate of change and development of skill and competence in using it will vary individually. It takes a great administrator to communicate this change and get the staff to step up to the challenge and embrace it as well (Hall and Hord, 2006, p.4-7).

Hall and Hord (2006, p. 2) attribute the statement, "Learning means you are adjusting to change" to Art Linkletter during an interview on the Larry King Show in July 2002. I think Linkletter's statement sums up the process of change. Most teachers would agree that the process of teaching a new concept takes time and effort on the part of the students. They would agree that there might be some frustration from the students because it is something new. Over time and with some practice, eventually the new concept will become a routine. Teachers need to approach change as an opportunity to learn and grow as a teacher. It might be frustrating at the beginning, but over time and with some practice, it could become part of the teaching routine.

In order to catalyze change, a leader has to be an expert at inspiring and influencing others" (Patti & Tobin, 2003, p.106). Leadership is the ability to articulate and arouse enthusiasm for a shared vision and mission. The leader is the key source of the organization's emotional tone by managing, inspiring, influencing, and developing staff to embrace the same vision and mission.

An Administrator as a Servant Leader

A great leader is a servant leader who has a passion and commitment for their beliefs and accomplishes this vision not by dictating or commanding but by living out that belief and respecting human dignity and individual worth. The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead (Greenleaf, 1977).

Martin Luther King, Jr., is a great example of a servant leader. He was a servant by standing up for equal rights of all people regardless of their race. It was through his actions and determination that created the desire for others to stand for equality, thus making Martin Luther King, Jr., a leader in the cause for equal rights. It was through his service that ultimately made him an influential leader in our society.

Observations of Servant Leaders

Servant leaders, through their actions, create the desire to serve in others. In the education field, this desire to serve is based on the love of children. In conversations with teachers and administrators, their reasoning for going into the educational field is because of their love of children and the passion and desire to guide them in becoming productive citizens in today's society. Dr. Rene Townsend, a former superintendent, sums up this passion for educating our youth when she says, "It's the desire to serve, to give all kids a chance-I mean all. I have a particular passion for those who start with fewer opportunities and want to

give them access to a better life. When things get tough, I think about those kids, and it keeps me going” (Patti & Tobin, 2003, p.172). This desire to give all students access to becoming productive citizens in today’s society is what makes a servant leader a great leader.

When I think of great leaders, whether it be in the classroom or in society, the ones I respect and trust are those that are servant leaders. They respect and take into consideration other’s opinions and make decisions based on what is best for all parties involved. Pekin Middle School principal, Dan Maeder, is a great example of a servant leader. He has a passion for developing higher academics and building character with the students. The respect he gives his teacher and students, his willingness to seek out advice and serve those involved in the educational process, and his ability to make research-based decisions makes him the leader that he is. As a teacher under his leadership, I saw this passion and willingness to serve others, and it has inspired me to embrace his vision and to trust the decisions he makes.

My Goals as a Servant Leader

When I am an administrator, I not only want of set up opportunities for my students to become servant leaders, but I want to be known as a servant leader who has a desire to serve teachers and students in a way that promotes success in the classroom. I want to be a leader that does not just promote change but one that models it in my daily activities. One way that I believe I could be a servant

leader is by being an instructional leader. An instructional leader is a leader that gets into the teachers' classrooms to see what they are teaching and how they are teaching it. It is an opportunity for the leader to learn what the teacher's strengths and weaknesses are, so they are able to help them become even better teachers.

Another way I will be a servant leader is by allowing teachers to visit other classrooms and attend professional development opportunities. These opportunities allow teachers to see other instructional strategies that are being used and working in other classrooms. They can then incorporate and apply these strategies along with the ones that they are currently using to improve their teaching. This collaboration among classroom teachers is one of the most basic and effective ways to improve instruction. When we use our most effective teachers as positive role models, we multiply their productivity and help others maximize their talents (Whitaker, 2003, p.41). This is a service administrators can easily provide to improve the quality of the teaching staff.

Finally, I could be a servant leader by being visible to the teachers and students and being available to help them in any situation. Whether it is giving them advice, listening to their concerns, or telling them how much they are appreciated, by having open communication between the teacher and administrator allows for a more comfortable environment where respect and trust can be easily earned.

I also want to be a leader that is known for my service to the community. This includes providing students with a challenging curriculum and producing students with the knowledge and character that is valued in the community. In my opinion, this is a service to the community-one where the students are now able to give back to their community by sharing and using their talents and knowledge to benefit those around them.

Another way I can become of service to the community is to become actively involved and visible in community activities and organizations. "Schools are a microsystem of society. The diversity, culture, and values of a community are reflected in its schools. You must seek collaborative partnerships with all entities to help all stakeholders improve society and to enhance teaching and learning as something of vital importance for our future" (Wilmore, 2002, p.71). It is essential for administrators to become actively engaged in the community and bring them into the school as valued assets. Through this collaboration with the community they can help support the school and its programs while the school can solicit support, input, and resources for them. In this partnership, each group gives, receives, and benefits from each other.

Finally, another way I can be of service to my community is by empowering our youth through volunteer experiences. At Waukee, service learning is valued and a part of our curriculum. Throughout the school year, students are given opportunities to participate in service learning activities. These

are opportunities for students to give back to the community and/or help families who are in need.

One of the activities that my students had the opportunity to serve others was a penny drive to help families in the district with financial needs. Another opportunity they took part in was Toys for Tots, a nation-wide military initiative to collect Christmas gifts for needy children. In the future, I would like to extend these service learning opportunities to include activities where my students can volunteer at organizations around the community. Research has suggested that these voluntary experiences help students learn valuable character traits such as respect and responsibility, especially in those students considered at-risk or who have learning disabilities.

This is a realization that Alison Mueller, a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist at Uhlich Children's Home in Chicago, experienced as she saw first-hand the powerful effects volunteering had on students considered to be at-risk. "I learned that it is not so much what we can do for our youth, but what they can do for themselves." Since many troubled youth have been deprived of positive interpersonal relationships, projects involving people-to-people services are preferable to depersonalized or more abstract helping because as they become involved in the projects, they become a valuable resource exhibiting more responsibility, pride, and ownership, and are less likely to be a liability and involved in at-risk behavior. Other benefits from volunteering that the youth cited

were that they learned to respect others, gained satisfaction from helping others, and learned to be helpful and kind. The role of service learning, to build a youth's self-esteem and social skills, cannot be underestimated as a core part of enhancing feelings of self-worth.

My vision as an administrator is to set up opportunities for my students to share their time and resources with people who are not as fortunate as they are. I want them to learn how to become more compassionate for one another and apply this compassion towards other students in the classroom during school hours. By putting them in a position to volunteer, they can tap into their own talents and skills. This, in turn, gives the students confidence in themselves which will motivate them to do and give their best. It helps them to learn new skills or discover they have a knack for a certain type of work, gives them practical experiences in the career they are thinking about pursuing, and helps them develop leadership skills with realistic perceptions. Also, by participating, problematic behaviors can be overcome and confidence and self-worth can increase.

The principal is in a position to support the teachers, staff, students, and community by being a servant leader. From shared decision making to implementing a challenging curriculum, peer-coaching programs, opportunities for professional development, empowering our youth through volunteering, and involving the community as stakeholders in the educational process, the principal

can inspire and influence others to serve. This is what leadership is all about—the ability to articulate and arouse enthusiasm to have passion and commitment for a shared vision and mission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when we take on the role of an administrator, we are taking on more than just the head position in a school. We assume the role of leader, protector, servant, confidant, advisor, caretaker, disciplinarian, teacher, coach, and role model. We have more responsibilities than just being a principal. In reality, we play a significant role in the lives of our students. We influence them by the words we say and the actions we do. I do not know if we can save society, but we can try. We can be there for our students and help meet the needs the students may require. We can do our part in leading the students to become respectful and responsible citizens who will have a positive impact on our society.

If a district wants to improve student achievement, they need to hire leaders that have a vision, use assessments based on the learner's needs, is an instructional leader, promotes school improvement, can effectively collaborate and communicate with its stakeholders in order to create a positive environment conducive to learning, has good character and can create positive relations, is open to change, and is a servant leader. The more effective a leader is, the more effective those around him will be. All it takes is a leader with a vision and a passion to create an atmosphere where all stakeholders feel valued and respected.

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