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A vision for leading and learning : a reflective essay

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A vision for leading and learning : a reflective essay

Abstract

It was my junior year of high school when I first started thinking about becoming a teacher. That year Williamsburg High School had hired a new Government teacher who was also the assistant boy's basketball coach. He was a first year teacher but he came out and really tried to make a difference from the start. I vividly remember how he tried to consistently challenge us in the classroom and in the gym. He worked hard at what he did and he expected the same in return. Even when he was pushing and challenging, he treated everyone with respect and motivated me to give my best.

A VISION FOR LEADING AND LEARNING

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

Todd M. Werner

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Dr. Nick Pace, Advisor

This Research Paper by: Todd Werner

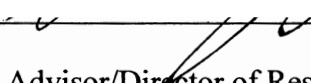
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Nicholas Pace

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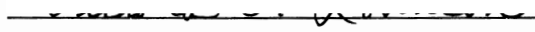


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


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It was my junior year of high school when I first started thinking about becoming a teacher. That year Williamsburg High School had hired a new Government teacher who was also the assistant boy's basketball coach. He was a first year teacher but he came out and really tried to make a difference from the start. I vividly remember how he tried to consistently challenge us in the classroom and in the gym. He worked hard at what he did and he expected the same in return. Even when he was pushing and challenging, he treated everyone with respect and motivated me to give my best.

Lastly, and most importantly, I remember how much he enjoyed teaching and coaching. This passion for teaching and coaching was unmistakable. As a result we enjoyed being taught and coached by him. I enjoyed sports, had a good experience in school, enjoyed kids, and felt I could experience all these aspects as a teacher. Years later, I became an educator because I thought I had the skills to be a successful educator and wanted to make a difference in kids' lives. Being a teacher, I knew that I wasn't going to get rich, but my parents taught me that many riches to be gained in life have nothing to do with money.

Midway through my 14th year in education, it is interesting to look back and reflect on how I have grown and evolved as an educator. Since being a coach has been a large part of my experience in education, coaching has influenced my personal and professional development. When I first started teaching, I don't

think I really had a clear idea of my educational philosophy. During those first couple years I was just trying to keep my head above water.

I was hired for my first two jobs because of my coaching ability. I was even told this at the interview for one of the positions because they assumed if they hired someone who they felt was a good coach they were probably a good teacher as well. This isn't the type of hiring philosophy I agree with, however at the time, I was happy to get the opportunity to use my skills to teach and coach.

Right away, I felt I had a large responsibility as a coach to help student's value work ethic, teamwork, commitment, and experience success. From the very beginning I was able to motivate, challenge, and help kids reach for their best on a daily basis as a coach. In a matter of time, I learned to carry that style and philosophy into my teaching. I began to better understand my role as an educator and how I could have greater impact-preparing students for the many opportunities and challenges they would face in the future.

This guided my instruction and established what I expected from my students on a daily basis. Whether they chose to continue into college or into the work force, I believed that each student should get the most of the education they were receiving. I hoped my efforts would guide them towards a path in life that would make them happy and lead them to become productive members of society. I believed education was the foundation students would build the rest of their

lives upon. With a solid foundation the student could build up many stories as they went through life and always rely on the foundation for support.

Since I decided to start this program, I've been told numerous times that I would make a good principal. I'm encouraged to hear this, especially from people I respect. But the real question is "Why would I be a good Principal?" I can identify several reasons why I will make a good principal and why I entered the program. First, I reflect back to my experiences as a head coach at the high school level and as an assistant at the college level. My first coaching job right out of college put me directly into a leadership role. The responsibilities immediately brought out the best in me, and that, in turn, helped me bring out the best in those around me. That continued into my second position as a head coach that also carried with it the role of a leader in the community. As a coach, I was able to get my players to buy into the plan and do whatever it took to best prepare them to succeed and feel confident about the path I was leading them down. I'm confident this experience has prepared me to build a vision for a learning community and create a plan members of the community are eager to join and share in its success.

One of the keys to this I would say was most important, and that I feel has leaded me to this program: is the ability to build relationships. Every one of my players knew I had their best interests in mind and as a result a feeling of mutual trust, caring, and respect opened the door for us to work towards achieving and

experiencing great things at any moment. Not only did we have memorable experiences during competitions, but they also occurred during practices, on bus rides, in school, or in the community. Several of these experiences continue to this day as I attend weddings of former players and birthday parties for the kids of former players. This continued as I worked as an assistant at the college level, as well. Even working with older, more mature individuals, they still looked to me as a leader.

The common factor in all this is that I feel I made a difference in their lives by being their coach. If I can do this as a coach and teacher, I am confident I can have the same results as a principal. As a coach and teacher who cares, many of my students and athletes have experienced a great deal of success. I am confident I can carry that caring attitude into a learning community. According to Protheroe (2007), “simply knowing that a respected adult cares about his or her interests and concerns may provide students with the emotional support they need to focus on learning” (p. 53). Serving as a principal, I can influence more kids on a, much, *much* broader scale. As a teacher and coach I have experienced a great deal of success motivating students and athletes to succeed. I have successfully shared with those I have taught and coached the value of work ethic, commitment, perseverance, respect, and trustworthiness. As a principal I can influence students, parents, teachers, and the entire community. The opportunity to have this type of influence on the entire learning community is what motivates me to

become a principal. The culmination of all my past experiences has led me to this point and I am ready to accept the challenge of being an educational leader.

One of the most important components of being a successful principal is the ability to lead. My beliefs about leadership could take an entire research paper in itself, but I will try to identify the key components. I believe we all have the ability to lead within us. The difference is how each individual chooses to use their leadership abilities. While leadership has many components, the definition of leadership I've heard several times in this program is, leadership is the ability to influence people. I agree.

The ability to influence people also has many components as well. Some of the first things a leader does are listen, observe, and analyze. Leadership is then defined by what the person in the leadership position does with this information. How do they communicate? What plan do they design? How do they prioritize and decide what to change? How do they motivate? What is their body language? How well do they self reflect and admit fault, when necessary? Who do they include in the process and how are they at relationship building?

I could go on and on, but the point is, the strong leaders have the instincts and skills to do all these things and often appear to do them with little or no effort. A strong work ethic may make it appear that they do them with ease. But the key is, leadership is about "getting it." I believe a person with good leadership skills "gets it" and has the ability to share what they know and has established the trust

and respect of those around them to influence change and motivate everyone to succeed. According to Alderman (2004) school leaders and classroom teachers can establish high expectations and motivate students by, communicating that making mistakes is a part of learning and that practice and concentration promote improvement. Also, by creating an environment of mutual trust and cooperation among students and between students and the teacher (p. 181). If these skills are used correctly, school leaders and teachers can have a tremendous impact on education and student achievement. I have felt for some time that I possess these skills to lead and look forward to the opportunities to use them as the leader of a learning community.

REFLECTION AND THE LEADER OF LEARNING

According to Webster (1998), reflection is defined as, a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation. Reflection can also be a consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose (p. 947). As a teacher, I reflect on a daily basis about planning activities, lessons, assessments, and many other things that influence my class and student learning. Individually, I reflect about decisions that will affect my family and matters that influence me personally. The big difference between reflecting about whether I should remodel my kitchen, and hiring a new fifth grade teacher is the number of lives the teacher will impact over the length of their career. As a principal, decisions I make on a

daily basis will affect the lives of hundreds of students and parents every day and potentially for the rest of their lives.

Reflection is a practice I will need to use effectively to make decisions that will affect all aspects of the learning community I lead. Wilmore (2002) stresses, “the importance of each person reflecting seriously to identify their own mission and then subsequently developing a personal mission statement.” (p. 6). To develop a mission I will have to gather pieces of information from all the stakeholders in order to create a vision that has a purpose and will engage all students within the learning community. Wilmore states, “the vision is global and relates to every aspect of the school life.” (p. 35). Once the vision is created and implemented, reflection is just one of the many tools I will use to monitor it and determine what changes may be needed for it to encourage positive growth and development within the school.

Research into reflection impacts me as a leader in several different ways. As the leader of the school, I must use reflection to monitor my own practices and decisions. At the same time, I also must facilitate reflection among the teachers, students, and parents. Teachers in my building will be encouraged to try new teaching strategies and techniques. I will always try to encourage teachers to step outside the box in their teaching and not be afraid to take risks at times. To accurately assess the effectiveness of these varying teaching styles we will need to reflect on the results and gather all the information we can to measure the results.

When leaders are choosing methods to encourage reflection they should; be creative and include a variety of activities. We should choose activities in which participants will be comfortable expressing themselves and will feel safe doing so. Effective leaders identify other resources pertaining to reflection that can provide information and support. This may include relevant materials such as literature, research, and activity guides. As a leader, I will evaluate reflection periodically throughout its duration, demonstrate the importance of reflection, and make it a regularly scheduled part of the service experience. According to Egan (1999), our emotions, simply, are most effective at sustaining, and helping in the recall of, memories of events. This should not be a surprise if we reflect on the events of our lives that are most memorable. Almost invariably we find they are accompanied by vivid emotional associations (p. 16-17). When used effectively, reflection can be one of the most powerful learning tools available to educational leaders.

Each of these points can enhance the use of reflection throughout the entire learning community. Getting everyone to share their thoughts, experiences, and opinions should lead to sound decisions that have been investigated and examined from many different angles. If strong relationships and open lines of communication have been established this process can happen quite openly and frequently. Encouraging the use of reflection by everyone within the learning

community should lead to productive planning, implementation, and assessment that will facilitate success at all levels.

As the leader of learning, I must develop specific and detailed curricular and instructional plans that facilitate student learning and success. To successfully accomplish this task I must gather input from many different aspects of the educational process and create a plan. Creating and implementing the educational plan are the main components of the first Iowa Standard for School Leaders (ISSL). From this point the remaining standards help me build our school around this plan, implement the plan, and get everyone involved in making the plan successful.

Reflection becomes a valuable tool in creating this plan that will create the foundation upon which the school will build on. However, reflection does not end at Standard One. The process of reflection is extremely valuable when school leaders are working to successfully meet the expectations described in each of the six standards. Reflection is one of the ways I will check to make sure the processes and functions of the school are moving in the right direction. Patti and Tobin (2003) state, "Personal competence includes two key cluster areas: self-awareness and self-management. The "star" or outstanding leader is the person who is self-aware and who consciously works at improving his or her competencies. They know their strengths and limitations, seek out feedback, and learn from their mistakes." (p. 3).

As the leader of the school I may not always have someone to review my performances and provide specific and immediate feedback. This is the time when I will need to use my skills of self-awareness or reflection to make sound decisions based on my assessment of past experiences. This may include admitting that I don't know the answer to a question or problem and must seek assistance from someone else to accomplish the task or solve the problem. As I work through the six standards I will be facilitating, developing, articulating, implementing, advocating, nurturing, sustaining, managing, collaborating, responding, mobilizing, acting, understanding, influencing, and most importantly leading. Using reflection will no doubt assist me in successfully meeting the challenges associated with each of these skills I will be using as a principal.

THE LEADERS' ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

There are many opinions and guidelines a leader can use as a format for creating change. Research from a variety of educational leaders claim to have the answer for ways to implement change in schools. Each has many good points and effective strategies school leaders can use to implement positive change in our educational systems. Marzano (2005) simply states that a school leader exhibits the responsibility of change agent when they ask the faculty, "perhaps we are becoming too comfortable with ourselves. What could we be doing that we are not?" (p. 45).

However, from the experience I have gained as a leader in a variety of situations, each individual must find the process best suited for them and the situation they are in. A process of implementing change that fits the personality of one individual or school may not fit the characteristics or style of another. Things such as the culture of the school, socio-economic status, ethnicity of the community, experience of the staff, and the type of change can all affect the strategies a leader might use to implement change. An effective leader will first weigh all factors prior to beginning the transformation process so they have a well thought out plan before the process is started.

Research provides many ideas and strategies leaders can use when designing a plan for change. Although a variety of techniques and recommendations for change exist, there are common themes among most. One of the most common words that appear in much of research I've read is "vision." School leaders must first establish a vision of what is to be accomplished. A vision can provide schools guidance by defining what it wishes to attain. Mendez-Morse (1993) stated:

Vision is a force that provides meaning and purpose to the work of an organization. Vision is a compelling picture of the future that inspires commitment. It answers the questions: Who is involved? What do they plan to accomplish? Why are they doing this? Vision therefore does more

than provide a picture of a desired future; it encourages people to work, to strive for its attainment.

Without first having a vision, a leader really doesn't know what the outcome they desire will look like. Williams (2005), refers to Thomas M. Hesburgh, president emeritus of Notre Dame University, who stated:

Vision is the essence of leadership, knowing where you want to go requires three things: having a clear vision, articulating it well, and getting your team enthusiastic about sharing it. Above all any leader must be consistent. As the bible says, no one follows an uncertain trumpet. (2005, p. 87).

Once the vision of change has been created, the leader must create a sense of community surrounding the vision. Whether it was created entirely by the leader or by gathering information from the learning community, the leader must continue to promote the vision and create the sense of a shared vision that everyone will be a part of. Mendez-Morse (1993), identify five additional characteristics of leaders of educational change are:

- Believing that schools are for learning;
- Valuing human resources;
- Being a skilled communicator and listener;
- Acting proactively; and
- Taking risks;

Leaders who are implementing change believe meeting the instructional needs of the students is the primary focus. When teachers also share the belief that student learning is of primary importance, this shared ideal seems to facilitate the development of a shared vision.

The leader who values human resources appreciates the contributions, talent, and effort of others in the learning community. Those who feel their skills are valued will feel motivated to contribute and collaborate with others to achieve the shared vision. As a school leader, I will seek to build active relationships with individuals, groups, or clubs that will ultimately contribute to learning. This associates directly with the leader who is an effective communicator and listener.

The communicating and listening skills of the leader are in a sense the basis for the whole process. The listening and communicating skills are vital to acting proactively and taking risks. It is important for the leader to recognize when to take action, anticipate and recognize changes that may affect the vision, and determine what changes should take place to maintain the organizations vision. The leader who communicates and listens guides change and takes risks but not carelessly or without input or forethought from a variety of valued sources. The teachers in the school are also free to take risks because an environment of respect and trust has been created that makes them feel safe and comfortable to try new strategies. Creating leadership groups, a mentoring program, and holding sharing sessions during the school year would provide

regular support and feedback that could be used to guide decision-making and planning.

This research is very important to me as leader because change is constant within the educational system. Making a positive change cannot be done alone or without a plan for how to implement the change. Change won't happen just by identifying something that needs changing and saying we're going to change it. As a leader, I need to take bits and pieces from my research to find the strategies and practices that will work best and ultimately allow the change to take hold and benefit students and the learning community. I have also learned that anything can be changed. Sacred cows and traditional strategies are not untouchable or unchangeable. Gladwell (2002) suggests, "Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push in just the right place, it can be tipped" (p. 259).

Research also helps identify what changes in schools will have the greatest impact on student achievement. Researchers have sought to determine what school factors have the greatest affect on student achievement. Marzano (2003), condenses many of the factors from the findings of others into five key factors:

1. Guaranteed and viable curriculum
2. Challenging goals and effective feedback
3. Parent and community involvement
4. Safe and orderly environment

5. Collegiality and professionalism (p.15)

As the leader of the school, I will address issues that are directly related to student learning. If the leader isn't identifying changes that may be needed in the areas listed by Marzano, that leader may be wasting their time dealing with issues that aren't as vital to student achievement. For example, delegating some time consuming duties such as discipline matters, supervision, and managing support staff to associate principals, counselors, or other staff members can free large amounts of time for the principal to focus on instruction and learning. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals, (NAESP), (2001) by dividing duties and tasks, and delegating realms of responsibility, principals demonstrate true leadership by maximizing all of the resources available to them. (p. 12). This doesn't mean the leader shouldn't ever be involved in these issues, but this strategy can be more effective in helping everyone move forward towards achieving the vision.

One of the ways I would incorporate my research into practice as a principal would be in the development of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). Good research has identified five factors that have the greatest impact on schools and student learning; I can use for building a plan for my school. Even before students arrive the first day of school, I will assess the status of each of these factors and how they influence learning. For example, data

from the previous years standardized testing can provide some information regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction.

Hall and Hord (2006) have identified three types of change facilitator styles: initiators, managers, and responders (p. 212-213). As a leader I associate my philosophies of change most closely with the initiator and manager styles of change. Hall and Hord describe initiators as having clear, decisive long-range policies and goals that include but transcend implementation of the current innovation. Initiators also convey and monitor expectations through frequent contacts with teachers and voicing clear expectations of how the school is to operate and how teachers are to teach (p. 213).

Hall and Hord define managers of change as leaders who focus on resources and organization of activities. They work hard to provide resources and basic support to facilitate teachers' use of an innovation, keep teachers informed and are sensitive to teachers needs (p. 213). When I have been a facilitator of change either as a teacher or coach, these philosophies have been effective for me because they fit my personality and coincide with my beliefs about how to successfully implement change.

The research discussed thus far aligns with each of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. Research in regard to a shared vision aligns directly with Standard One in which an educational leader facilitates the development, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and

supported by the school community. Creating the vision is the first standard because the vision is the foundation upon which the rest of the standards support and build upon. Wilmore (2002) supports this by asking, “How can we talk about curriculum, instruction, student learning, school organization, operations, or resources if we have no idea what direction or with what specific plan we are to apply them” (p. 20).

Additional research conducted aligns very well with standards two through six as well. Research shows characteristics of leaders of educational change relate very well with the ISSL standards. The findings of my research align so well with the standards that when the research is applied into practice they will directly guide my efforts to meet the expectations established by the ISSL.

Change is ongoing and a continual process within schools. Change is needed to keep parents, teachers, and students moving forward seeking to learn and prepare for what lies ahead. NAESP (2001) concludes, that if we keep doing things the way we always have, we’ll keep getting the same results. Thus, schools themselves require continual learning (p. 9). Establishing a vision can be the first step in facilitating change. When the vision is determined, goals can be built that can guide the school towards attaining the vision. Along the way the goals and the process may have to be modified and adapted to keep the school moving forward. If the school is not continually building upon learning change

will be difficult or ineffective. In order to have the best opportunity to implement effective change, understanding the processes of change and effectively getting everyone to support the change will lead to the best chance for positive change.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER OF LEARNERS

Research identifies numerous ways in which the leader of learners can directly or indirectly improve learning for both students and adults. In the No Child Left Behind era of education, it is even more important for school leaders to focus greater amounts of time and effort to improve the learning of the students as well as adults within the schools. A recent article by Carolyn Bunting (2007) identifies five steps school leaders can take to help teachers grow.

Step one is to encourage teachers to select areas for informal study and specialization. The area could be based on content or even a particular teaching technique. Teachers could also focus on special challenges such as learning or attention disorders, classroom organization, or management techniques. This step allows teachers to become specialists within the chosen area and can then serve as consultants to fellow teachers when questions or problems arise in the area. At some point teachers may even choose to present during professional development days thus sharing their expertise with the entire staff.

A second step is to provide opportunities for teachers to present case studies of students with special needs. Teachers first gather data about a

particular student's classroom performance, behavior patterns, and any types of strategies or interventions tried or in process. The teacher then is allowed to present the case study to colleagues where questions can be raised and suggestions given for addressing the needs of the student. This step enhances teacher collaboration and allows all teachers the opportunity to gather ideas from an entire staff of educational experts.

A third way a school leader can help teachers grow is by building a diverse intellectual climate within the school. Forming groups that share interests in cooking, exercise, or books allow teachers to be involved in intellectual discussions with co-workers not directly related to teaching can actually carry over into the classroom. These activities teachers share with one another can energize teachers, make them happier, more relaxed, and potentially more productive in the classroom. Students can also see firsthand an example of lifelong learning and personal growth modeled by their teacher.

Step four encourages principals to institute an idea exchange. A free exchange of ideas that originate from daily practice can stimulate a continuous flow of fresh ideas into the classroom. Besides the obvious benefits of the idea exchange, it also encourages teachers to think more creatively about teaching and to seek out colleagues for regular assistance. These ideas can be shared with the staff through the principal or presented at faculty meetings. Principals can stimulate the exchange of ideas by posting a "problem of the week" in the lounge.

Encouraging teachers to talk about these problems broadens their perspectives and strengthens their intellectual and personal relationships with each other (Bunting, 2007, p. 41).

Giving teachers time to talk is the final step principals can take to encourage learning among the staff. A specific time and place should be set aside for discussion with teachers leading the way. Topics can be wide ranging, but the results are best when the meetings are informal and rules are kept at a minimum. Teachers should be advised to prepare somewhat prior to the session and be ready to actively participate in the session. Bunting (2007) concludes, "Teachers want principals to be at home in their classrooms and to identify closely with their efforts to change and grow. Through carefully structured activities, principals can meet these expectations and become part of the developmental process essential to the success and well-being of teachers" (p. 41).

Current research is important to me as an educational leader because it is my primary duty to raise the level of learning for everyone associated with the school. As the leader I must continue to challenge both the students and staff to strive for more and continue see positive growth within the school. If the school is not moving in a positive direction it is most likely moving backwards. Status quo within the school setting is unacceptable. Staying current with the latest strategies for enhancing learning allows me as the leader to provide the people around me with the necessary skills to succeed. Current research provides me

with the skills to recognize potential problems, analyze them, and create plans to make the appropriate changes. Using the latest research allows me to challenge the students and staff with a variety of strategies that keeps the learning fresh and exciting.

Once research is conducted, incorporating the findings into practice determines whether the leader is willing and able to improve learning. The ideas presented earlier can each be put into practice quite easily, but still require a leader who has an understanding of the school climate and how to use the steps effectively. When any of the steps are shared with the staff, the way in which they are presented is almost as important as what is being presented. Some staffs will only hear the parts within the steps that require more time and effort, beyond what they already do.

One way I would try to avoid this problem, would be to have a member of the staff present the idea at a staff meeting or professional development day. This way, the idea is presented by a fellow teacher and the buy in factor may be much higher than if it were to come from the principal where it may be perceived as more work being heaped upon the staff. Members of the certified staff could also be involved in leading some of the initiatives as well.

Step three could easily be lead by anyone within the building who has an interest in creating a group with common interest such as books, cooking, exercise or anything else a group of staff members may enjoy sharing with one another.

As the leader, the research and the implementation are important steps in the right direction for the school. But it is also important that these steps continue to receive the attention needed to help them continue to be positive influences for the entire school. Being personally involved, asking questions and making any needed changes are important to continuing to raise the level of learning throughout the building. “The most important leadership insight is that we are not called to influence beliefs, but to influence behavior. If behavior is successful, belief follows” (Reeves, 2002, p. 71).

Research conducted regarding the leader of learner’s role for improving learning for students and adults align very well with Iowa Standards for School Leaders. Step one of Bunting’s (2007) five-step process can directly target areas associated with the school vision. The areas of specialization and informal study selected by the staff should align with the vision. Staff members who share this information with the entire staff directly support the implementation and stewardship of the vision that is shared and supported by the learning community.

Standard two, sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff development can be aligned with each of the five steps presented by Bunting. Each step either directly or indirectly, connects with building a positive culture while enhancing learning among the staff at the same time.

Creating a safe and effective learning environment can be associated with the research as well. Sharing areas of specialization in step one, and idea exchange in step four, and providing teachers specific time to talk can all enhance the learning environment for everyone at the school. Teachers often have time to talk and share; however, when Bunting's steps are implemented this time can be more valuable and meaningful for everyone.

Standard four has some association with the research conducted. Forming interest groups that takes advantage of cultural aspects of the community would be an easy way to take advantage of the resources in the area. Parents with unique skills or clubs within the community could be connected with interest groups formed at school to share ideas and information that could also be used in the classroom to enhance learning. Working with the community in these ways would strengthen the relationship between the school and community and create opportunities for each to work together in a positive way.

ISSL #five, acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner can be aligned with all research. Throughout the implementation of each of Bunting's five steps, the school leader should always lead with strong ethics and values that will enhance the opportunity for all involved to improve learning. The five steps presented from research may not directly align with standard six, but they can associate with them indirectly. I interpret ISSL standard six as the principal having a pulse of the building they lead. Knowing what buttons to push at what

time that can keep the school moving forward is very important for the success of the school. Injecting one of the steps can be one small decision that can have long lasting effects on the adults and students within the school. By understanding, responding to, and influencing the context of the school the principal can use these steps to increase the learning of students and adults while following the guidelines established by ISSL.

Research on the role of the leader of learners showed five easy ways a school leader can directly or indirectly improve learning for students and adults. The five steps designed by Bunting can be implemented very easily by the principal or other leaders within the school and can have very positive long-term effects. These steps can provide learning opportunities for new and veteran teachers, and build a sense of unity among the entire staff. As the staff grows the students will also gain and experience improved learning from a stronger more cohesive group of educators who are committed to seeing every student succeed.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER OF SERVICE

A great deal of research information is available regarding the role of the leader of service. Conducting a Google search of “Servant Leadership” will result in about 1.44 million hits on the subject. Whether in education or the corporate world, the principles of being a leader of service can be effectively applied to facilitate positive results in both. Leaders who demonstrate the skills

related to successful leaders of service are described as, generous, sharing, giving, unselfish, and charitable. These characteristics demonstrate the philosophy of putting the needs of others above all when a leader aspires to be a leader of service.

When it comes to Servant-Leadership, Robert K. Greenleaf, former leader of AT & T, is one of the pioneering promoters of the leader of service philosophy. According to Greenleaf (1970), “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. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”

Using Greenleaf’s writings, Larry Spears (2004), CEO of the Greenleaf Center shares a set of 10 characteristics in his article, Practicing Servant Leadership, he views as being critical to the development of servant-leaders. The 10 Principles of Servant-Leadership are:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Listening | 6. Conceptualization |
| 2. Empathy | 7. Foresight |
| 3. Healing | 8. Stewardship |
| 4. Awareness | 9. Commitment |
| 5. Persuasion | 10. Community (p. 3-4). |

These 10 characteristics of servant-leadership and the servant leadership philosophy have effectively been implemented in many corporations throughout the country. The philosophy has also been included as a part of leadership and

management courses in colleges and universities. One thing I like about the 10 principles laid out by Spears is how they coincide with the seven qualities of an effective leader identified by Pat Williams in his book *Coaching Your Kids to be Leaders*. According to Williams (2005), the seven qualities of effective leaders are:

1. Vision
2. Communication
3. People Skills
4. Character
5. Competence
6. Boldness
7. Servanthood (p. 8-9).

The relevance of this research is important to educational leaders because education itself is a service industry. We are responsible for building the foundation for individuals who will be future leaders of our communities and world. As a principal, it is my duty to serve the school I have been asked to lead. The 10 Principles of Servant Leadership along with the seven qualities of effective leaders provide a valuable set of characteristics and qualities I can use to serve effectively as a school leader.

While researching servant leadership, I have found that a leader of service puts serving others, including employees (staff), customers (students/parents), and the community as the number one priority. As a leader, these principles can provide a constant reminder of what my primary purpose is as the leader of the

school. These principles and qualities would also be very valuable for the staff to use as they work to serve the students and parents throughout the year as well. Teachers and administrators can sometimes lose focus on the primary purpose of educating children and forget we are there to serve.

As a principal, I will incorporate these qualities and characteristics into the mission of our school and create a common language that is used by staff, students, and parents. With this philosophy of service, I plan to bring out the best in every person who is a part of the learning community. According to Ron Clark (2003), author of *The Essential 55*, be the best person you can be (Rule # 55). Always make sure there are seven things in your life at all times: laughter, family, adventure, good food, challenge, change, and the quest for knowledge. With all those things, you will grow, enjoy life, and become the type of person you can be proud of. You will also be in a better position to help others, give advice, and learn from your mistakes, because you will be a stronger, healthier, and happier person (p. 158-159).

If everyone can strive to be the best person they can be, the entire community will benefit. In a school setting, these ideas can be implemented through staff development activities, one-on-one interaction, school functions, and within the climate and culture of the school.

Although some distinct differences in the terminology exist when the two lists are compared, the overall concepts are the same. Each list also contains most

of the key characteristics a leader of a learning community should possess and exhibit on a regular basis. Some similarities do exist between the two lists and each can easily be combined to form a single list that can be used as a format for servant leadership. I would share this new list with everyone at school to create a climate based on the qualities and characteristics established by combining the two lists. After time the behaviors and qualities that make-up the list would be easily identifiable through the actions and behaviors of everyone in school.

Listening and Communication can be combined to create a single characteristic key to the development of servant leaders. According to Williams (2005), every leader must be able to communicate the vision to the entire team- and must do so effectively and persuasively so that all the team members will buy into it (p. 8). Spears (2004) states, “the servant leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps clarify that will”. Along with the listening and communication, people skills can also be included with these skills. Williams (2005), asserts that, “leaders must know how to motivate people, resolve conflicts, listen, acknowledge, affirm, praise, and build community. In other words, leaders need people skills-the ability to work effectively with people in order to inspire them to achieve a goal” (p. 8).

From the 10 Principles of Servanthood, Empathy, Healing, and Awareness could be combined to form one characteristic that encompasses each of those traits that a servant leader possesses. According to Spears (2004), “awareness

lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position.” (p. 3). This ability leads a servant leader directly towards empathy which according to Spears (2004), “people need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits.” (p. 3). The skill of Healing is the final piece of this combination of principles. Robert Greenleaf (2004) writes: “There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.” Each of these three principles could easily fall under the characteristic of Awareness.

Persuasion and Boldness could also be combined from each to form a single characteristic that leads the servant leader. A leader of service strives to convince others rather than coerce or persuade compliance. In regard to boldness, according to Williams (2005), “young people must learn how to overcome shyness, timidity, and a tendency to play it safe. Without risk, there is no adventure. You can’t be a leader without boldness” (p. 9). Each of these qualities involves getting others to jump on board and follow the path you would like them to take. Having the confidence to choose the right path and the ability to convince others it is the path they should follow are important steps in being a leader of service. Boldness is the quality that is most identifiable through behavior and actions and is the characteristic I would like to see displayed by staff, students, and members of the community I serve.

The next two qualities that I would combine are stewardship and servanthood. According to Williams (2005), true leadership is not about being “the boss” but about being a servant. Young people need to be mentored, inspired, and challenged to see their leadership roles not as opportunities to expand their egos, but as opportunities to serve others (p. 9). In Greenleaf’s 10 Principles, Peter Block (2004) defines stewardship as, holding something in trust for another. As educators we are entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing and fostering the minds of the children in the schools we serve. Under the title of servanthood, school leaders, teachers, and parents will understand and demonstrate the importance of meeting the needs of all students.

The commitment to the growth of people and competence are the next two qualities I would combine under the title commitment. As a servant leader, I must be committed to the growth and development of every person within the learning institution. It is vitally important that the school leaders, staff, and parents all recognize the services our students need to compete and survive as they grow.

The next quality of my newly formed list focuses on community. According to Greenleaf (2004), “all that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.” Schools are called learning communities because they form an identity all to themselves

that often epitomizes the community as a whole. As a principal I want everyone in the community to feel positive about the school and know that our main focus is to serve the children of the community. When a school truly serves, school pride among everyone associated with the school can inspire a community to work together to meet the needs of the entire group before the needs of individuals.

From Greenleaf's 10 principles, conceptualization and foresight can be combined with Williams's first quality of an effective leader to create a vision. In Williams (2005), a vision defines what success looks like. The leader and the entire team compete for, struggle for, and sacrifice for a vision (p. 8). According to Greenleaf, foresight enables the servant-leader to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future.

A conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day to day realities. Students, parents, teachers, and school leaders need to make daily decisions that will ultimately lead to achieving the vision. The vision may not be a single identifiable goal, but rather an ongoing sense of improvement and growth in many different areas. The vision isn't a specific number or score, but rather a sense that everyone is succeeding and growing individually and together as a community.

The final, and probably most important quality of my combined list of servant leadership is character. Without character the rest of the characteristics and qualities are really unimportant and meaningless. Williams (2005) contends that, leaders need to build good character traits into their lives, including a strong work ethic, humility, honesty, integrity, personal responsibility, social responsibility, self-discipline, courage, kindness, fairness, tolerance, and respect for others. Character is the combination of qualities that used effectively will allow everyone to achieve the greatest amount of success. Without good character individuals will face more challenges and obstacles to making progress and succeeding on a regular basis.

This new list of qualities and characteristics of servant leadership includes:

- Communication
- Empathy
- Boldness
- Servanthood
- Commitment
- Vision
- Character

I would incorporate this new list into the mission statement of my school because it includes qualities that are visible and can be observed through the actions and behavior of everyone in the community. Much like Character Counts and Olweus have been integrated into the Linn-Mar system of beliefs, these same qualities can be applied to other schools the same way. These qualities can lead

to a great deal of individual success, but when everyone works together serving one another we all will succeed.

Research conducted on the role of the leader of service aligns very well with the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. In researching Robert Greenleaf's 10 Principles of Servant-Leadership, I have discovered these 10 principles relate very closely to each of the each one of the ISSL Standards. The language used in Greenleaf's 10 Principles relates so closely I would almost think the ISSL were based somewhat on Greenleaf's ideas for servant leadership.

This close relation of the research and the ISSL only reinforces the importance of the role of the principal serving the learning community. ISSL Standard One focuses on a vision of learning, which directly connects with awareness, conceptualization, and foresight on Greenleaf's list of qualities.

Standard Two, advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff development relates well with Greenleaf's qualities of persuasion, stewardship, and commitment to the growth of people.

Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, Standard Three connects with listening, awareness, and community building from the 10 Principles of Servant Leadership.

ISSL Standard Four, collaborating with families and community members aligns with listening, healing, foresight, and community building.

All of Greenleaf's 10 qualities of servant leadership connect with Standard Five, which asks school leaders to act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard Six, understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context can be easily connected with many of the 10 qualities of servant leadership designed by Greenleaf. Additional research such as Williams seven qualities of effective leaders also align well with the ISSL and serve only to reinforce the importance of being a leader of service.

As the two lists are combined to one, the strong relationship to the ISSL standards becomes even clearer. The ISSL provide a guide for administrators to follow as they lead the learning community. Connecting the new list provides support for the standards and a means in which the ideas can be implemented within the school through modeling, and within the daily functions of the school. Things such as class rules, conflict resolution, recess expectations, learning goals, professional development goals, parent involvement, and the overall climate of the school can be associated with the ISSL through the use of the new list of characteristics of servant leadership. Together the ISSL and the new ideas presented here can serve as a framework towards achieving the vision.

In conclusion, I have found that the role of the leader of service influences every aspect of the educational community. The similarities between research regarding the servant leadership and the ISSL standards support the importance of serving rather than leading, controlling or directing the school. The key lies in convincing others to join you in working together towards a common vision. To work towards the vision we must all learn to communicate, listen, persuade, heal, commit, and serve with character and integrity throughout the whole process. I have concluded that I will have greater success as a leader of service rather than just being a leader.

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