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What I believe about leadership and education: a reflective essay

Mary Yamoah
University of Northern Iowa

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What I believe about leadership and education: a reflective essay

Abstract

Reflection, change, linking curriculum to instruction, and service are a four of the most important criterion for educational leaders to understand in order to become strong leaders. Throughout the course of this paper, I will evaluate each component and through the process gain better knowledge on each. Through evaluation of these four topics along with the seven standards will facilitate learning that is life-long.

My Philosophy of Educational Leadership

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A Research Paper

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in Education

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by

Mary Yamoah

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Date Approved

Victoria L. Robinson

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

10-16-07

Date Approved

Robert H. Decker

Second Reader of Research Paper

10/16/07

Date Received

Michael D. Waggoner

Head, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

Reflection, change, linking curriculum to instruction, and service are a four of the most important criterion for educational leaders to understand in order to become strong leaders. Throughout the course of this paper, I will evaluate each component and through the process gain better knowledge on each. Through evaluation of these four topics along with the seven standards will facilitate learning that is life-long.

Everyone has a favorite teacher they remember from grade school. A teacher that stood out because they were caring, compassionate and loved what they did every day. Unfortunately, I had many teachers that failed as educators because they lacked the compassion that is essential for the job and did not motivate me to learn. Luckily, there is one teacher in my mind that stood out above all the rest; she was a teacher who opened all of the doors to my future and motivated me to become a better learner and eventually an educator. I was fortunate to have a teacher that taught me that hard work and confidence are the keys to life. I became an educator because of my love for children, my love of learning, and my desire to educate others to lead. I became a teacher, at least in part, because of the interest she took in me.

Education is the preparation for life. Hard work and confidence are two problem areas in today's schools. My concern is focused on the many children who are becoming lazy in school and want everything handed to them with only minimal effort. To address this, I am focused on teaching my students the value of hard work, so they can become more independent. First, I am providing opportunities of growth that children did not even know exist. Second, I am teaching students to become strong, confident individuals, so when they get into the real world they are able to make good choices. Thirdly, I am

teaching students to love learning. Without a love for learning, students will not appreciate the opportunities I am giving them. Without a love for learning students will not teach others how to work hard and therefore will lose confidence in themselves. And lastly, I am teaching children that they can be leaders to those around them.

All of the concepts taught to my students in the classroom relate to my views on educational leadership. Educational leaders need to provide numerous opportunities for a staff to grow. Allowing room for growth will help teachers build confidence in their own abilities to teach. Focusing on the love of teaching and learning will be the mission of the school. Finally, my strength as a leader will help those around me strive to become a leader themselves. My career as a classroom teacher has set forth the foundation of becoming a great leader.

To be a good leader one needs to inspire and be actively involved. Leadership can be demonstrated in the work place, at home and in the community. Every opportunity to lead invokes a sense of accomplishment and confidence. In elementary school when we were being taught to become strong, confident individuals, we did not know we were really being taught to be future leaders. In every aspect of my life, I have been taught to become a leader. When in the classroom, leading students in activities and guiding them to learn and explore new things on their own is teaching them about leadership. Through presenting new ideas, being adventurous and sharing experiences to peers, I am showing leadership. When in the community it is important to stay involved with my surroundings and support local businesses. Leadership is a learned trait that we were taught at an early age from our teachers and parents. My experience with leadership has

allowed me to take on a new role as a leader. This will help me to work with a new group of people and guide them on how to love their job of teaching.

Many people go through life disliking their job because it is not challenging and rewarding. They go to work, finish tasks that were assigned, and go home. Confidence starts to falter and in turn makes many people unhappy. Teaching should never fall into this category, but unfortunately it does. Teachers sometimes get burned out and stressed from all of the paper work, assessments and other demands made from the local and state laws. More often than not, teachers get to school early, stay late and yet feel that they did not accomplish anything during the day except paper work. This should not be a growing trend for teachers and as an educational leader my goal is to help ease work loads, provide quality education and instill the love of learning to students and teachers.

Helping teachers understand local and state requirements and how they help us to become better educators is important in any school system. My passion is to make teaching in the classroom the main focus for teachers, not paper work. Allowing teachers to teach will provide a better morale in the work place provide an opportunity for educational leaders to lead.

Educational leadership is a job that requires knowledge, positive dispositions and adequate performances. Through the course of this principalship program there is much to learn. In order to become an inspirational leader to others, becoming educated on how to become a visionary, instructional, organizational, collaborative and ethical leader must come first. These are the keys to educational leadership success. Opening new doors and exploring every ISSL standard will enhance

my knowledge and skills in each area. Determination, hard work, confidence and knowledge will also teach me how to become an effective principal.

There are so many doors to open up in this life. We never know what is going to be behind each door, but it is empowering to take risks to better ourselves. When we continue to educate ourselves, no door will ever be closed in our face. Every person has the capabilities to become life long learners. Learning is the key that we all need; it just takes a little motivation to get us started.

A successful school leader is a continual learner who strives to become a reflective practitioner. Reflective practitioners are educators who are active learners, who know their values and beliefs, and who regularly set learning goals for themselves (Kelleher, 2002). Principals have a duty to encourage reflection for both students and adults, so they can all become leaders of learning.

<div align="center">Reflective Practice</div>

Reflective practice, at its core, is about self-awareness. Self-awareness is the process of understanding our values and beliefs. When trying to create a true learning community that excels in academic, social and emotional learning, we cannot do so if we do not know what we stand for (Patti & Tobin, 2003). For these reasons, school leaders must not only reflect on their own values, but must lead others to do the same. In addition to deepening your own understanding of yourself and being a principal, you show by example how important reflection is to learning as a life long pursuit (Kelleher, 2002).

When people have different values and beliefs, reflection is a tool that can be used to maintain a peaceful learning environment as long as emotions are kept under control. For example, when a school leader and a teacher disagree about the way a lesson should be taught, self-reflection can be used to evaluate the system that works best for the student. We have to remember that the most important people in the school are the students (Whitaker, 2003), and it is essential to show them that reflection will help them reach goals.

Six standards guide school leaders to create a culture of continuous learning. Each standard focuses on "matters of learning and teaching and the creation of powerful learning environments" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards (ELCC) provide the framework necessary to build dreams, to reach for the moon, and to create schools that are better, more nurturing, and more successful environments where teachers teach and students learn (Wilmore, 2002). When we use these six standards as the framework of our schools combined with reflection, school leaders can be sure to reach goals and promote a life of continuous learning to students and adults.

As a future school leader, reflection will be my tool to better myself and those around me. One of the most important jobs of a school leader is to provide opportunities of growth socially, emotionally, and academically. When schools are able to reach whole individuals, creating and maintain a vision are easier to uphold. Reflection is a tool that everyone should be able to develop, implement and assess. With the guidance and support of a school leader, rekindling the passion of teaching and learning can be

ultimately done through reflection.

All of the current research on becoming a reflective practitioner is very positive. Developing self-awareness and learning how to control our emotions is very crucial when becoming a leader at any job. Many articles use reflection as a tool of measuring growth. Educational leaders are not the only ones to understand the importance of reflection. Reflecting is a way for individuals to look at their own thoughts, evaluate their thoughts and strive to become better. Reflecting will help us become better leaders.

Self-confidence enables us to be strong individuals. Becoming a principal is no easy task. Becoming a principal requires hard work, organization and a positive attitude. I am enthusiastic that reflection will help me identify my strengths and weaknesses and allow my self-confidence to flourish.

Putting theory into practice is what educational leadership programs are all about. The more research I do on how to become a better leader, the more I look forward to putting that knowledge to good use. The main objective of becoming a reflective practitioner is to always want more; more knowledge, more awareness and more gratification.

Change

Change is a beginning, which, in turn, means that what was happening before must now come to an end. Current research shows that the leaders' role in educational change is the driving force behind the change. Educational leaders need to be able to understand change as a process, the forces of change, and how to reframe their leadership skills to bridge theory and practice.

Change is a process, not an event. Part of a leader's role throughout change is to know that it is a process and that it can affect every person differently. Hall and Hord suggest that an administrator should understand the Stages of Concern to aide in the implementation of change. Hall and Hord (2000) state that the Stages of Concern profiles are a very informative way to illustrate movement and non-movement during a change process. The seven stages of concerns are Refocusing, Collaboration, Consequence, Management, Personal, Informational, and Awareness. These seven stages allow the leader to know how each person feels at the current time about change so that, with time (three to five years), impact concerns (Refocusing, Collaboration, Consequence) can increase in intensity as the self (Personal and Informational) and task (Management) concerns decrease (Hall & Hord, 2000).

There are eight forces that will create effective and lasting change. These eight forces are: Engaging people's moral purposes, building capacity, understanding the change process, developing cultures for learning, developing cultures of evaluation, focusing on leadership for change, fostering coherence making, and cultivating tri-level development are the eight forces that drive change (Cuttress, Fullan and Kilcher, 2005). If a principal does not know these eight guiding principles of change, even the best ideas will not take hold. The leader must be knowledgeable in the area of change and encourage others to do the same.

To move forward with change, an educational leader needs to have the will and capacity to sustain change and continually frame and reframe leadership styles to meet the needs of the group (Israel & Kasper, 2004). The reframing theory provides a solid

research design for examining positive leadership practices in schools. Using this theory provides a bridge between theory and practice. School leaders can refine their craft, understand their schools, and enhance their role as change agents. When leaders can enhance their role as change agents, the whole change process will transition easier.

After identifying some of the current research being done on leaders' role in educational change, I cannot help but to feel overwhelmed. Before any change can happen, I need to understand that it is a process that will not happen over night and that somehow change can be seen in a negative way. As a future leader, I need to be able to portray change as a positive means to an end. Not all change is good, but some change is necessary. I believe the end result of change can all be altered by the way it is presented and followed through. I know that I will be well researched on change and how it will affect my school before choosing to do any implementation of change.

In the future I know that I will have to implement change. I plan to incorporate my research by allowing my staff the time needed to adjust to change, the educational resources needed to educate them on change, and by keeping them well informed on the reframing process needed for the change. Change is a beginning, and keeping them up to speed will help satisfy the end.

As a teacher, I go through change. I will take all experiences as a teacher and apply them to practice. I know how scary change can be, and so as a future leader, I need to be considerate of everyone's feelings and use them to my advantage. Well-informed decisions will be made for the betterment of my future position as an educational leader.

The Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) suggest that an educational leader should be someone who is visionary, instructional, organized, collaborative, ethical and political. Throughout this research on the leaders' role in educational change, I have found that in order for change to occur, I need to pull characteristics from each of these leadership qualities for change to be successful. Without having a bigger picture (vision), why would there be any change? Without knowing how to present it to staff (instructional and organized), how can changes occur? Without working together with staff and community (collaborative and political), how can a leader feel that a change is in the best interest for the school (ethical)? As I look at all of these questions, I must focus on what the change is for and how over time, change can benefit us all.

Improvement of student and adult learning is an important issue facing educational leaders today. Research suggests that in order to improve learning for students, we need to know how to link curriculum, instruction and assessment. Educational leaders also need to understand the differences between assessment of learning and assessment for learning. Knowing the differences between these two is not the end because leader's then need to educate their staff on the differences as well. Educated staff members will help improve student learning. To do this, an educational leaders need to be aware of the multiple strategies involved when educating adults and students. Presenting information in a variety of ways will help adults learn, which in turn will help students learn. With the educational leader as a guide, a cycle of learning will occur.

Linking Curriculum and Assessment

Linking curriculum, instruction and assessment is one way to improve student learning. Curriculum in education may be defined as the set of courses and their contents offered by an institution such as a school or university. In some cases, a curriculum may be partially or entirely determined by an external body such as a school district. A crucial part of the curriculum is the definition of the course objectives that are often expressed in terms of learning outcomes and normally includes the assessment strategy for the program. Without a clear understanding of assessment strategies, or why they are important, a teacher will have a difficult time increasing student learning. Teachers must construct their own assessment instruments, use assessment instruments constructed by others and plan instruction based on instructionally illuminating assessments (Popham, 2005). Educational assessment should be used as tools to improve the quality of educational decision-making.

Knowing the differences between assessment of learning and assessment for learning will increase student learning. Research conducted by Rick Stiggens suggests that since the 1950's (or before) our society has been improving the quality of education. After viewing Stiggen's DVD entitled: New mission, new beliefs: Assessment FOR learning, it is apparent that even though we have tried new assessments every decade, we have been using them incorrectly. For sixty years, we have been focusing on tests, numbers, and where students rank according to other students district wide, state wide, nation wide and internationally. But, we never went beyond the numbers, in an essence we were teaching to the test. Finally, in this decade we are putting forth the effort with

NCLB to see that students are learning a reachable target. We are taking accountability to a new level and are really focusing on Assessment FOR learning.

To use a variety of strategies for assessment is what brings this full circle. We know the importance of understanding that assessment is more than just testing, we know that assessment for learning promotes accountability, but now we need to understand how to do it. Marcia Tate suggests twenty strategies in her book, Sit and Get Won't Grow Dendrites: 20 Professional Learning Strategies That Engage the Adult Brain, that work to engage the adult brain. By having the adult brain more engaged, better teaching strategies arise that will lead to better student learning.

As a future leader, I know that I am going to remember all of the research on linking curriculum, instruction and assessment, understanding assessment for learning and using multiple strategies to engage the adult brain and use it multiple times. Educational leaders must provide many opportunities for adults to grow professionally and educationally. By doing this, I will be relying on them to take that knowledge and use it in their classroom. Follow up and reflection become important keys for this research to actually improve student learning.

To incorporate my research into practice, I would make sure to have a professional development day (or multiple days) discussing these important issues. Like I stated before, having a variety of strategies to engage the adult brain would be important. I would provide visuals along with activities that would get staff members collaborating. Promoting teamwork to increase student learning is important to me as a future leader.

One of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) suggests that a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community. One of the most important visions of a school is for student learning to be occurring. If I keep the bigger picture in mind at all time, I know that my research will aid in reaching the goal.

Servant Leadership

While the world is changing around us at a rapid pace, so are the roles of an educational leader. There is becoming more of a focus on being a servant leader. The servant leader is one who serves others as a first priority and emphasizes increased service to others, a sense of community, a holistic approach to work, and shared decision-making (Taylor, 1997). Research shows that the focus on community education and community development requires a broader vision of the role of the school. The principal's role is being transformed to a more collaborative one.

Visionary leaders make the success of the learner, service to others, and collaboration integral to their personal mission. To achieve success for service to others, certain characteristics must be evident in the ever-changing role of the principal. Kuck (1997) defines a servant leader as demonstrating these ten characteristics: displays foresight, is committed to the growth of people, has an ability to conceptualize and to communicate concepts, has highly developed powers of persuasion, listens receptively to what others have to say, demonstrates acceptance of others and has empathy for them, shows awareness and perception, builds community in the schoolhouse, practices

stewardship, and has the ability to exert healing influence upon individuals institutions. These characteristics definitely make a leader successful when trying to make a difference in the lives of others.

The mission and success of a school should be community-wide. Johnston and Armistead (2007) state that how a district communicates with various key groups shows how it feels about partnerships, connections with the business and community, and its mission in the community. The increase in number of special needs and at-risk students has placed tremendous pressure on principals. To maximize the learning potential of all children and youth, school personnel are increasingly making concerted efforts to expand the reciprocal relationships of sharing and support and more fully engage the community (Mitchell & Sackney, 2007).

When reviewing research on the role of the leader of service, I feel very fortunate that this is an area that I hold dear to my heart. Being a strong individual and showing compassion and sensitivity to those around me are values that have been instilled since a young age. My ability and willingness to go the extra mile and challenge the process will aid in my effort to become a leader of service. Inspiring a vision, enabling others, modeling values and encouraging others to be servants will create a culture of life long learning.

To incorporate this research into practice as a principal, I need to create a system where young people are supported in and out of school in their learning. While researching a way to do this, I came upon an article by Rothman (2007) that helps

provide differential supports to different young people and families, depending on their needs. It attracts new partners to augment its capacity when needed and it collects and uses data and makes adjustments depending on what is working and what needs to be changed. Reading that others are trying to make a difference in the lives of multiple children is invigorating. This collaborative effort between schools and communities is something I will work hard to incorporate in my future position as a principal.

I want to help remove some barriers to learning that many young people face. I want to provide after-school activities that will enhance cultural learning, and provide opportunities for students to get involved in community and business goals. When learning is taking place, as a community-wide effort there can be many positive outcomes. Crime rates could go down, teen pregnancy could decrease. Schools and communities could help give children a future worth working hard for. My compassion and willingness to work hard will help make this ever-changing world a positive place for learning to take place.

Standard four of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders defines a school administrator as an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (Wilmore, 2002). This standard is of great importance to me and symbolizes the success that will take place when using the power of collaboration and when serving others.

Conclusion

Through my research on reflection, change, linking curriculum to instruction, and service I have gained much knowledge. Learning is a life-long process and even though I am at the conclusion of this principalship program, there is much more to be learned. Entering into a leadership role in the future will contribute to what I have already learned and allow me to put theory to practice. Entering into a leadership role will also fill in any missing pieces to the puzzle that I have not learned through research and evaluation of reflection, change, curriculum and instruction and service. Mentors, feedback and self-reflection will help me to become the educational leader I strive to be. In the future, I hope a student or a teacher can look back and say that I inspired them to become a leader.

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