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What I Believe about Educational Leadership: A Reflective Essay

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What I Believe about Educational Leadership: A Reflective Essay

Abstract

Education, in my opinion, is one of the most honorable professions a person can experience. Each teacher or principal involved with educating children is someone that makes a difference in the lives of children and influences them as they become adults. It is amazing to think about the profound impact each educator has on others. No other occupation has such a responsibility. I believe that all children can learn, and I have had a passion for making that a reality since my childhood. I know that I can help children reach their potential. Parents must know that we cherish their children as much as they do. My positive outlook on life helps me to challenge others to reach higher goals. The greatest gift we can give children is the ability to be life long learners.

What I Believe about Educational Leadership

A Reflective Essay

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

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by

Janet Young

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Dr. Robert Decker

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Education, in my opinion, is one of the most honorable professions a person can experience. Each teacher or principal involved with educating children is someone that makes a difference in the lives of children and influences them as they become adults. It is amazing to think about the profound impact each educator has on others. No other occupation has such a responsibility. I believe that all children can learn, and I have had a passion for making that a reality since my childhood. I know that I can help children reach their potential. Parents must know that we cherish their children as much as they do. My positive outlook on life helps me to challenge others to reach higher goals. The greatest gift we can give children is the ability to be life long learners.

Becoming an Educator

I became an educator because I loved working with children. My first love was the students that needed extra help to succeed. Throughout my career, I have focused on the students that others had given up on and did not believe were worth helping. I was able to identify the positive qualities in each and every student, even though at times you needed to look hard to find those qualities. As a teacher, I worked with students to help them reach their potential. I also had the responsibility to help each student in my classroom recognize what they had to offer the community as our future adults. The most important thing I could do to teach children is to first establish a strong relationship of trust and caring. From there, I was able to inspire my students to reach their goals. Most people have

both good and bad memories of their teachers. We remember the teachers that influenced us to do things that we thought we could not accomplish.

Unfortunately, we also think of teachers that made us feel less than perfect. It was my goal that each of my students remembered me as the teacher that genuinely cared about them and knew I would support them in following their dreams.

My Beliefs about Education

Education and teaching is so much more than just reading and mathematics. Schools have become a place where children also practice social skills, appropriate behaviors, cooperation and getting along with others. Relationships are the key to making all of these other things possible. Educators celebrate the progress of students, even though it should be what is expected. We should set the same high standards for all students, no matter what their background. If we are always developing plans that are in the best interests of students and families, then we are doing the right thing. It is my belief that all children can and will learn.

Entering a Leadership Program

Being a principal was never a position I thought that I was interested in pursuing. In recent years, many of my co-workers and supervisors have encouraged me to think about becoming an elementary principal. I have chosen to challenge myself by accepting that suggestion and model what I teach students.

I tell students that in everything they do, they should strive to make themselves better. Based on the results of the *LSI1* and *LSI2* (1989), my humanistic and affiliative attributes are strengths that are advantageous for principals. People with these qualities are relationship oriented. They channel their energies into the growth of others and motivate them to continue to progress. As a principal, I can have an impact on the lives of many more people than I could as a teacher. During the interview with our superintendent, Dr. Witherspoon, he told us that if the thought of changing lives in a positive direction excited us, then we were doing the right thing. Since beginning this program, I have been involved with situations in which I have seen principals handle problems in many different ways and seen how different stakeholders react to those decisions. I have asked myself how I would have handled the situation. It is easy to second guess a decision, but I do think that if I had developed positive and caring relationships with the people involved, it would be easier for them to see my rationale for the decisions. I also am not naive enough to think everyone will agree with my decisions. My goal as a principal is to empower my teachers to do what it takes to maximize student growth so children are able to realize their potential.

My Beliefs about Leadership

Being a leader is a role that I currently have as a lead consultant for elementary, middle and high schools. I work directly with the supervisor to manage situations involving our support staff, principals, teachers, students and

families. I have learned from my supervisor that you must set the stage for others to think of all of the possible solutions and then step out of the way. The other advice that I received from my mentor was the importance of the relationships you build with all of the people involved in helping a building run smoothly such as the secretary, building engineer and maintenance people. All of these individuals are important and no more or less valuable to the success of students. The principal must model respect for all cultures and socioeconomic status. This person is also the visionary who keeps everyone focused on the goals. All initiatives must help to meet that ultimate goal. Leaders set high expectations and accept no excuses. I feel that I have the qualities that will make me a good leader and principal in an elementary building. Just thinking about the opportunities that are ahead of me, causes me to smile and be excited about making it a reality.

Reflection

Pursuing this new challenge inspires me to take every opportunity to learn from others so that I can be the best principal for the students, families and teachers that will be in my care. I believe that parents want the best for their children even if they may go about it in a different way than we would like. They trust us to prepare their children to be self-sufficient adults. I will provide integrity to the school's vision and the plans developed to achieve goals set to improve student performance. Being a principal is a position that I did not think I

would aspire to and now I can not see myself pursuing anything except becoming a principal.

Visionary Leadership is a Critical Element Essential
for Exemplary Educational Leadership

Visionary leadership is a critical component for successful principals.

Before beginning the process of becoming an elementary principal, I did not realize the importance of having a strong vision. During our interview with the Superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools, I learned that he exemplified the idea of a visionary leader. Dr. Witherspoon stated that your vision is your legacy. Without that view of the future, planning for it is almost impossible. My mentor shared information with me about the many initiatives in place before she became the principal of her current building. She said that it seemed like everyone was running around doing things without a central purpose and without the desired results. She developed a picture of a school building with arrows going toward the building and an inscription saying "Success for All Students". This became the focus for all of their activities. She always reminds staff, parents and community members of this vision and frequently asks if what they are proposing helps to make the vision a reality. To me, this is an excellent example of what is necessary to keep an elementary building focused on the vision of success for all students.

Beliefs about Visionary Leadership

As a visionary leader in an elementary school in the current era of emphasis on student achievement, success for all students is critical. We can provide all of the staff development and training needed, but without the belief that students in urban areas can meet and exceed these expectations, the goals will not be achieved. The Positive Behavioral Support process as described by Sugia (2003), stresses the importance of having 3 to 5 universal behavioral expectations for a building. Academic teaming, staff development opportunities and needed instructional materials are also integral parts of the process that needs to be discussed so that it will fit with the overall vision. All of these goals must support the building vision of success for all students. My mentor, Dr. Gettys, believes that all students can reach academic and behavioral success. It is her belief that this notion should be the expectation for students and not newsworthy. If you truly believe this, your building will be able to meet the challenge.

The humanistic and affiliative attributes are important for leaders and are qualities that are strengths for me based on the *Life Styles Inventories* (1989) that we completed earlier. I believe that these characteristics allow me to develop the relationships necessary to build the visionary ideas in all members of an elementary building. With the assistance of teachers, support personnel, parents and the community, we can build a school in which we are all working for the academic and behavioral success of our children. As a part of my practicum

experiences I have been interviewing some principals. When asked about the vision for their buildings, the overwhelming response revolved around academic and behavioral success for all of their students. I was surprised by one principal, in particular, who had a slightly more difficult time answering that question. Successful principals must have a strong vision that is evident in everything they do and say. Leadership means that you are taking responsibility for changing what is currently being done to what should be done. Asante (2003) also says that effective leaders figure out what needs to be done to address the concerns and how to go about resolving those concerns. In that way, without visionary leadership a school will not have a focused plan for the future.

Incorporating Visionary Leadership

A visionary leader is responsible for setting the stage for academic and behavioral success for all students. Leadership “involves offering people excuses and permission to do things that they want to do but cannot initiate themselves” (Palmer, 1998, p. 156). The principal clearly supports the expectations, but then gives each individual teacher the liberty to determine how to actually implement the plan. This empowers teachers to adapt the idea to fit their particular classroom environment and the individual student’s needs. “We must create a learning culture that provides a forum for risk, novelty, experimentation, and challenge and that redirects and personalizes learning” (Cunningham and Cordeiro, 2003, p. 55). Principals also foster and support the relationships between teachers and the

parents of the students they serve. It is this partnership that is crucial to a student's success.

Alignment with the Iowa Standards

Visionary leadership is the first and in my opinion the most important quality needed to be a good principal. This vision establishes the goals to work toward and upon which a plan can be developed to make it a reality. This vision guides the instructional aspects of educating our students and teaching them to be self-sufficient adults. It establishes the management and organizational framework, which allows teachers to focus on their students and the learning environments. This vision is evident in community involvement activities of the school and with the political aspects the district is encountering. Each school is a small piece of the bigger district picture. As a visionary principal, a strong belief system which supports equal opportunities for all students is key to success in all aspects of the school.

Visionary Reflection

Becoming an elementary principal is a lofty profession. It involves such a wide range of responsibilities. In my role as a principal, I must ensure that all students are welcome in school, no matter what their background or previous experiences. My hope is that my students can not wait to come to school each and every day. I want students to feel that there are great opportunities at school for fun and learning. Parents must feel that we care for their children as much as

they do and that we will always have their best interests in mind. A strong visionary principal is necessary before any of these other goals can become a reality.

Instructional Leadership is a Critical Element Essential for Exemplary Educational Leadership

Instructional leadership is the foundation for our schools in this current era of emphasis on accountability for student achievement. Dr. G. Reed (personal communication, March 12, 2003) has said on numerous occasions that a principal's most significant role is to be an instructional leader. It is important to be knowledgeable of the district curriculum, but also to be a teacher of teachers. As principals, we must model good teaching by example and by being learners as well. It was also stated that principals should become Human Resources specialists so that they are able to hire the very best teachers for their school (G. Reed, personal communication, March 12, 2003). Setting high expectations for student achievement is a part of all vision statements in schools today. Although I do not necessarily agree with the political climate and the current legislation, I do recognize the need for accountability to both parents and our society to equip students with the skills necessary to be self-sufficient adults.

Beliefs about Instructional Leadership

As an instructional leader of a school, the principal must stay abreast of research-based strategies to enhance its use in the school environment.

Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) discussed the need for principals to know instructional practices. "They would have to understand the purpose, role, and value of assessment and data-gathering techniques; use wisdom, commitment, and professional expertise to set results-based goals; and use the data to inform continuous practice improvement"(p. 4-5). During one of the interviews I had with a principal, we discussed that it used to be the thought that being a good building manager was a principal's most important role (T. Schott, personal communication, February 14, 2003). He said that being an instructional leader is far more important in this current era. I have thought a great deal about being an instructional leader because of some conversations I have had with a principal who is an extremely strong instructional leader (J. Drees, personal communication, March 19, 2003). Her school bases its instruction on current brain research, information on multiple intelligences and a thematic, project-based curriculum. This principal has been given the additional assignment of an urban school with many problems. The building is in need of a very strong instructional leader. She has already begun the process of transforming this school into a building with an emphasis on early literacy, problem solving and appropriate behavior. Her theory is that if they focus first on the primary students, the rest will gradually improve as student's progress and advance in grades. This principal is beginning to discuss her vision with the staff so that they will begin to embrace the potential for student success. Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003)

stated that “a shared vision provides the focus and energy for learning and creates commitment (not compliance). Commitment to the vision fosters risk taking and experimentation”(p. 160). I have no doubts that by next year at this time, we will see major changes in the instructional atmosphere of the school. Until this point I did not realize the importance of this role. This principal epitomizes what it means to be an instructional leader and will continue to be a role model for me to follow.

Incorporating Instructional Leadership

It is the responsibility of the principal to stress the importance of good, sound instructional practices in everything that is said and done. I would feel comfortable taking over for a teacher in any classroom, because I am a teacher first. As principal, it is up to me to provide the materials and resources to support instruction and accomplish the professional goals of my teachers and staff. “An important finding of school-change research is that the principal plays an absolutely key role. ... But more important than these skills, she knows curriculum, understands the research on best educational practice, and trusts teachers and kids” (Zemelman, 1998, p. 291). I also feel it is necessary to guide teachers and then have the confidence in them to step back and allow them to make instructional decisions that are in the best interests of their students. Whether we like it or not, schools are judged by academic achievement. Parents and communities entrust their children to us to teach them the basic skills and the

skills needed to continue to learn throughout their lives. Finally, it is imperative that we assess their progress in meaningful ways and use this information to continue to guide our instruction. The best instructional principals require their teachers to review the reading and math scores at regular intervals. Teachers are expected to use this information to regroup students, adjust instruction, share strategies with their peers and not settle for anything less than success for all of their students.

Alignment with the Iowa Standards

Principals should develop an instructional plan for their building to ensure that all people involved are knowledgeable about the expectations and are able to do their part to reach the goal of academic achievement. "It means that in meeting the needs of different learners with various cultural backgrounds, experiences, and learning modalities, we will need to find the appropriate strategies that work for this learner (Wilmore, 2002, p. 37). To be evaluators of teachers, principals must know what good teaching looks like and sounds like. When observing in classrooms, as a part of the new evaluation process, principals are able to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of each teacher and are able to give suggestions and praise. If principals do not have the credibility and respect of their staff, this type of coaching becomes difficult, if not impossible. I think that the strength of the new evaluation process is that it can truly be a

positive and growing experience for teachers instead of punitive or purely routine.

Instruction continues to be the most important job principals have in schools.

Instructional Reflection

Wilmore (2002) stated “The instructional program is the primary focus of all this energy, passion, and commitment” (p.35). To me, this is what a principal must spend the majority of her time doing, which is to focus on instruction.

Education today is more important than ever before. We must prepare our students to be life long learners. Our goal includes assisting students in growing up to be adults who are able to acquire skills that make them capable of holding jobs that support themselves and their future families. We also have a responsibility to parents to help them improve their skills so that they too can be models for their children and be teachers for them in their homes and community. Through transformational leadership, we realize the importance of a principal’s ability to empower teachers to reach for the highest standards (Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi, 2001). This type of leadership allows all people involved to take ownership of the successes. It is important to value each individual and to empower the staff to settle for nothing less than the best for all students. As a principal, I will support and continually strive for academic excellence.

Organizational Leadership is a Critical Element Essential for Exemplary Educational Leadership

An organizational leader is a principal who is able to manage the day to day operations. This person is a problem solver, a decision-maker, a legal expert, a goal setter, an accountant, a technology expert and a person to empower others to reach their goals. The management of the office staff, the building engineer, and other non-teaching staff are important to the functioning of a building. This is a difficult combination of attributes. As a building leader, we should continually be asking ourselves, and challenging others, to work smarter not necessarily harder. It is important to establish a balance between asking for input, validating those ideas and then making a decision that is in the best interests of the entire school and community. The principal has to give a bottom line answer, even when that may be difficult and may not please everyone all of the time.

Planning for the future is something an organizational leader is always thinking about. "How can we do it better?" (Wilmore, 2002, p. 54) is a question that principals should ask to begin assessing everything we do in schools. Anticipating when to intervene and when it is time to help teachers brainstorm ideas to solve potential problems is an important distinction. This leader must be thinking of the ramifications to all stakeholders when making decisions and then being prepared for what happens. There is no detail too small to consider for an organizational leader.

Beliefs about Organizational Leadership

The organizational structure is the foundation for which a school is based. Without it, it will not function efficiently for anyone in the building. If people have to spend too much time on the daily operations of the school, it will not allow enough time and energy to plan for the more important visionary goals nor can you develop proactive plans to move forward. Organizational projects are strengths for me. I believe this attribute allows you to accomplish the most during the course of a day. On any given day, there are numerous people that request something, talk to you and ask for advice. It is very important to follow through and do what was asked. This develops the trusting relationships necessary for an effective principal. Kouzes and Posner (as cited in Mussig, 1993) state that credibility is important to the development of trust which in turn influences values-oriented leadership. If that follow through is not honored, the person may not come back to discuss issues in the future. Organization is something that if done well goes unnoticed, but it causes a great deal of difficulty when it is not present.

Incorporating Organizational Leadership

A principal is the one person that knows the most about a school with all of its strengths and weaknesses. She is aware of the academic, behavioral and community needs. Organizational skills are needed to move from just knowledge about the ideas to the development of a plan for improvement. A principal must

be able to distinguish between situations that require a decision and when to just set up the structure, frame the issues and allow the building personnel to develop a plan to address the needs. Hall and Hord (2001) describe facilitator styles and I feel that I display the characteristics of both the manager and initiator styles. A manager builds relationships with all people and will defend the teachers from excessive demands. As a new principal, it will be important to spend the necessary time managing the building while still leaving time to be proactive in solving problems. My initiator characteristics are demonstrated by my strong beliefs about teaching and students. I hold very high expectations for everyone and my goal is to always have the best interests of students and families.

Empowering people from the building engineers and office support to district maintenance and department heads is critical in the operation of a school building. It is not necessary that the principal be an expert on every issue that may come up. What is important is for the leader to have the relationships built with those that are able to assist.

Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) discuss visible and invisible aspects of organizations. The visible aspects include the more formal structures that help people to understand the operation of a building. These are the constants in all buildings across the district, which include the rules and expectations for everyone. The invisible aspects are the factors that are unique to that particular

school. It includes the human factors that must be taken into account as an organizational leader.

Levels of Change is a concept that Patterson (1997) explains. In the outer circle is what he calls events change. This involves isolated activities that do not relate to any other school initiatives. This type of change is not sustainable because principals do not provide the needed staff development and implementation planning necessary for the idea to produce long lasting change. The next concept is program change. It occurs when a few people in a school take an interest in a particular topic and move forward with it. Without commitment from all stakeholders, a few will make changes, but again it will not translate into long term change. Finally, is the concept of systemic change. This is the idea that people change their thinking and beliefs regarding a particular topic. Only then will long term positive changes occur. An organizational leader is a person that sets the stage for systemic change. All of the pieces must be present for organizational change to impact the lives of the students, teachers and families.

Alignment with the Iowa Standards

An exemplary principal is a leader who “must be able to combine the vision, passion and implementation” (Wilmore, 2002, p. 53) of a plan to be successful. A balanced leader demonstrates all of these attributes. Managing all of the research and data to make appropriate decision is critical. Evaluating

programs being implemented is also an important component that organizational leaders use when making appropriate decisions according to Wilmore (2002).

Organization is the foundation for that goal.

Organizational Reflection

Organizational leadership encompasses a variety of activities.

Communication within the school and community is critical. Marketing the school and its programs is another part of that job. Building relationships with all stakeholders and personnel involved with the functioning of a school is an organizational skill. "Image starts at the top" (Wilmore, 2002, p. 56). An effective principal is a person that thinks ahead and tries to anticipate potential needs so that a plan can be developed and implemented. This is the job of an organizational leader.

Collaborative Leadership is a Critical Element Essential for Exemplary Educational Leadership

A collaborative leader is a person who takes the lead in developing the relationships between the community, parents and school staff. All members of this community must work together for the good of the children. This principal needs to understand the population that makes up their school community. For inner city schools, I think it is important for all staff to be familiar with the framework of poverty. This information helps people understand the realities of life for this community, which may be different than their own. It would also be

important to educate the staff in the customs and beliefs of the ethnic and racial groups that make up the neighborhood. By valuing diversity, it demonstrates an open door policy and welcomes everyone into the building. Volunteers are encouraged to assist in classrooms. Parents are invited into the building for parenting classes and to attend classes for their own personal growth. They are also encouraged to be a part of the teacher-parent team to promote their child's academic and social growth. By asking for opinions from the community, it develops ownership in the success of the children that attend. All people involved are proud of what they have produced and will continue to work for the good of the school and its students.

Beliefs about Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership is an underrated aspect of the educational leadership of a school. In small towns, the school and its activities are the same as the community's activities. It becomes hard to determine where the school stops and the community begins. In larger cities, this is not the case. It is the school community that must make every effort to become embedded in the neighborhood. School personnel can not presume to understand other people's needs and beliefs without actively seeking out these community members and beginning that dialogue. As long as people see issues from only their own perspective and how it effects them, it will be difficult to resolve conflicts and develop common goals. A principal must model building trusting relationships

with families and set the expectations that her staff will do the same. Without building relationships with the families that live there, we will not be able to develop a collaborative relationship. Schools must be inviting to all. It should be both safe and comfortable. For some parents and community members, school might not have been a positive place with pleasurable memories. We need to work to change those feelings for the sake of the children. The principal should solicit community support to build a team of adults that have the children's best interests in mind. It is the collaborative principal's responsibility to find something that everyone can agree upon and it usually is that we all want to best for our children.

Incorporating Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership increases the chances of success by bring all of the families and community members into the process of developing a plan. These people then become invested in the outcomes. All stakeholders are working for a common goal. A principal encourages even the smallest steps toward cooperation and then builds on that. It is important to brag about the good things that are happening. When it is appropriate, inviting parents and community members to be on committees is one way to solicit involvement. These people may have insights that the staff does not have. Parents will also be more supportive of the process when they are involved and when they can communicate it with others. Businesses are another source that good collaborative leaders can use. They may

be able to provide services that are not available through other methods. A collaborative principal takes every opportunity to be the key public relations person for their school.

Alignment with the Iowa Standards

One way a principal can become involved in the community is by being involved in neighborhood organizations and activities. As a principal you must always be above reproach because the community is watching you handle yourself in a variety of situations. The principal is an extension of the school. All initiatives focus on the school's vision, which is success for all students. The families and community will hopefully adopt that vision also if they feel like they are involved in the process. Collaboration is no different than the other standards. The only difference is that you can bring in many people to help achieve your goal. A principal new to a building must begin developing a commitment to the families and students in the school. This process moves through predictable steps that are described by Jewell and Reitz (1981). It would be helpful for a principal to be aware of these stages so that she can support the groups as they move from being individual members to feeling they are all in it together and working for a common good. This is not something that happens over night; the collaborative principal must actively plan for its success.

Collaborative Reflection

A school building is a community meeting place. It is important to see the school as a socially acceptable place to be. People should feel respected because they support the school and its students. "In a partnership, each group gives, receives, and benefits" (Wilmore, 2002, p. 71). Collaboration supports the idea of thinking about what your school can give to the community and what benefits the community members will receive in return. We, as educators, provide a service. The community is the consumer. We should act in ways that support and benefit the families and students that we serve. Some schools see their families as clients, which implies very different expectations and relationships. I think it is better to think that we need the support of our families as much as they need us. That makes this truly a partnership.

Ethical Leadership is a Critical Element Essential for Exemplary Educational Leadership

Ethical leadership, to me, is the most important standard for principals. A principal must always remember to act with integrity, fairness, and ethics in all aspects of your life. Teachers, students, and parents must be able to believe that as principal, I have their best interests in mind when dealing with a particular situation. All people involved must know that my decisions are made based on specific facts and that I have considered what is in the best interests of everyone. When making decisions, I will try to put myself in the position of each

stakeholder and ask what would be the best for them. Fairness is another consideration. My definition of fairness is that students are given what they need, which does not always mean that each student receives the same thing. We develop plans that are based on the specific needs of the student not on whether their parents are lawyers or unemployed. Finally, decisions are made using good judgement that align with the district policies and are legally based. Questions are answered based on collecting the necessary data, reviewing all of the details, keeping an open mind and reaching a conclusion based on all of the information available (Wilmore, 2002).

Beliefs about Ethical Leadership

My goal for being an effective principal is that above all other thoughts, people view me as an ethical leader. I want to be seen as above board and trustworthy. I want others to know that I have the students' best interests in mind when I make decisions, even though it may not be the most popular decision. Everyone will not always agree, but I will try to help them see that I have based my decisions on all of the facts and have taken many points of view into account. A motto that I believe I will try to follow is to do as I say and as I do. The methods that I go about using to make decisions and managing a school building are as important as the outcomes themselves. It is important to praise others publicly when they make ethical decisions. Pritchett (1996) wrote that, "The ethics of excellence requires a sense of perspective. You must look at the big

picture” (p. 15). As I watch my mentor in her building, I see that keeping this big picture idea is difficult at times, but very necessary. Pritchett (1996) also stresses that it is important to allow for mistakes. From there you can plan to make changes to avoid the same problems in the future. If you do not accept that people will make mistakes, then they will spend their time trying to cover it up with dishonest practices rather than spending the time in positive actions. I have been told by leaders I respect and it is discussed in the book by Pritchett (1996) that you should ask yourself how you would feel if what you were planning to do was reported in the newspaper. Would that make you happy? Could you defend your decision? These are questions that must go through my head to help guide me in making my future school the best one possible that I would be proud to have my own children attend.

Incorporating Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is an idea that must be on my mind at all times. Maintaining high ethical standard is a goal for others and myself. Nothing less should be excepted (Pritchett, 1996). Decisions that are made are not going to please everyone. Pritchett suggests that you should discuss issues with people of varied points of view (Pritchett, 1996). This gives you different perspectives to consider. It also challenges your thinking so that you are able to defend your decision in your own mind. Be careful whose opinions you ask for. You do not want to talk only to people that believe as you do. Instead you should ask those

who will tell you what you need to hear. It is also suggested that you should, “Consider yourself on display....you will serve as a role model for subordinates. Let your attitude and actions serve as a constant point of reference for employees struggling to make the right changes in their job behavior” (Pritchett and Pound, 1993, p.30). Exhibiting ethical behaviors is not something specific you can put your finger on, it is an attitude. It is the feelings of right or wrong. High ethical values are the underlining factors when making decisions. My supervisor always asks if we are doing things that are in the best interests of students and families. If we are doing this, we are on the right track to help students.

Alignment with the Iowa Standards

Standard 5 states that a school administrator must act in an ethical manner. Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) refer to the idea that administrators must demonstrate exemplary professional conduct. That seems strange that you would have to consider this idea. I do not see how you could ever consider acting in any other way. Educators are in the profession of helping others. Our goal is to teach children life skills to prepare them to become productive adults. That goes far beyond reading and mathematics skills. It is also helping those children learn how to become good citizens. Ethical leadership is a requirement for all people regardless of their profession. The world would be a better place if everyone would strive to meet that expectation every day.

Ethical Reflection

Ethically, a principal is the heart and soul of the building. The principal holds every person involved with our students accountable for interacting in a respectful manner with all families and students. Even when working with families from different socioeconomic, ethnic and racial backgrounds, we respond in a professional, respectful manner. We will treat others as we would want them to treat us. Before making any decision, I will ask myself if it will benefit all people concerned and support the district goal of continued student growth. If I can answer yes, then I will feel confident in my decision.

Political Leadership is a Critical Element Essential for Exemplary Educational Leadership

Political leadership, in the current political atmosphere, is a critical role all principals experience. In the past, this is an area that has been neither a strength nor an interest of mine. I thought that if I did what was needed in my classroom or school, it was unnecessary to be concerned with others. As I continue to work closely with my special education supervisor and my mentor on issues that arise, I am becoming more aware of the importance of looking at district policies from a much broader point of view. As the educational leader of a building, it is extremely important to advocate for the diverse population of children we serve. It is important to be aware of policies that may impact programs in schools and the community. Educators become a proactive voice of reason and it is our

responsibility to help others understand the proposals and their implications. A principal is responsible for informing the community and answering their questions so that they too can make informed decisions based on the facts. Open discussions are needed to challenge us to think of all aspects of a proposal and its effect on others. If the principal is already a trusted member of the community, then all stakeholders will listen to her opinion. When looking at the big picture, other tasks a principal is responsible for seem secondary to the all encompassing role of a political leader.

Beliefs about Political Leadership

Political leadership is one aspect about being a principal that I believe I have learned the most about. As a teacher, you know only about your building. You become familiar with the issues that impact your classroom and the families in which you interact. My teaching career has taken me to many districts around the country and in the Department of Defense Schools in England and Louisiana. These experiences have helped me learn about a variety of matters. I have watched schools and districts deal with these issues in different ways. My next job involved being a special education consultant in Des Moines. These experiences have helped me look at how buildings in the same district interpret the initiatives. It is fascinating to watch different principals inform their staff about a particular message that is to be disseminated and more importantly, how the principal and staff interpreted that information. In my current role as the lead

consultant, I am able to see an even broader perspective of the district's policies. For five years I have worked directly with my supervisor to support our buildings and our support staff members. Being a member of several district committees that are involved with planning on a larger basis has helped me look at issues from many points of view. These experiences have provided me with valuable learning opportunities that are critical. Principals play a critical role when communicating and implementing the district initiatives to their staff.

Incorporating Political Leadership

A principal that demonstrates political leadership is someone who is an advocate for the district. It is important to have background knowledge of the issues and to understand the goals, vision and initiatives that are being promoted. From this information, a principal has to be able to articulate it to the staff and the community. She must also be able to describe how it might look in a particular building with a specific population of students. In many cases, an action plan will be needed to determine how to implement the plan so that the expected outcomes are achieved. "Organizations typically get what they earnestly and specifically set out to get" (Wilmore, 2003, p. 2). A principal leads the discussions to provide correct information regarding the topics. When there are true conversations about topics and people are allowed to express their opinion, there will likely be some conflict. This open exchange is important and necessary to truly analyze the critical issues. Principals who are able to facilitate these discussions in a positive

way can lead stakeholders to consensus. Discussions with stakeholders help everyone look at the issues from differing points of view than they may have previously considered. Without these discussions, there can be misinformation, hard feelings and distrust which does not lead to a supportive community. Everyone wins when the results are in the best interests of the students in the school.

Alignment with the Iowa Standards

A principal has a huge responsibility with regards to political leadership. It encompasses a variety of topics such as cultural sensitivity, budget issues, and legal requirements. These issues must be looked at from both the building and district levels. Being proactive when communicating with teachers, parents and community members is a good first steps in helping people fully understand the goals proposed. Principals must have knowledge and awareness of district policies, their ramifications and how they relate to the subgroups that will be impacted in their building. Political leaders “advocate for any factors that could improve educational and social opportunities and engage others to do likewise” (Wilmore, 2002, p. 93). The bottom line is that principals take actions that benefit students and their families. It is the principal’s job to be cognizant of the current events and be able to answer questions about the various topics as it relates to their building.

Political Reflection

Currently, principals must be the spokesperson and advocate for the policies and programs that support academic achievement for all students regardless of any individual characteristics. With all of the discussions regarding the No Child Left Behind legislation, I would think no one could argue against the goal of increasing reading and mathematics skills. How we go about reaching these goals and reporting them to the public is what seems to be in question. I have watched Dr. Gettys lead her school through the process of developing a plan to improve student math achievement after being identified as a school in need of assistance. She has taken this political reality which is perceived negatively in the community and is approaching it in a positive, proactive manner. Her staff has embraced the process as a way to do the best they can for their students. This process is important for any district initiative. "Standard 6 says that you should be knowledgeable about anything that affects teaching, learning and families" (Wilmore, 2002, p. 94). Understanding these issues is the first step in political leadership followed by the ability to be able to respond to and influence the direction it takes. An effective principal must never lose sight of these political issues and their importance to teachers, students and families.

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