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A reflection on the roles of the elementary school principal: A reflective essay

Abstract

Principal Opal Mistie begins the working day at 6:00 a.m. with four calls from teachers needing substitutes. After 30 minutes on the phone, all classrooms have substitutes with Ms. Mistie covering the first hour of sixth grade. While getting dressed and gulping coffee, she jogs her memory on sixth grade classroom procedures and contemplates an interesting way to introduce a math review lesson on the importance of the decimal point.

A REFLECTION ON THE ROLES OF THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling

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Master of Arts in Education

by

Connie M. Toenjjes

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Principal Opal Mystic begins the working day at 6:00 a.m. with four calls from teachers needing substitutes. After 30 minutes on the phone, all classrooms have substitutes with Ms. Mystic covering the first hour of sixth grade. While getting dressed and gulping coffee, she jogs her memory on sixth grade classroom procedures and contemplates an interesting way to introduce a math review lesson on the importance of the decimal point.

The drive to the Shared Vision Elementary School takes 20 minutes. Ms. Mystic uses this time to go over her agenda, set goals for the day, and plan the best way to accomplish them. (Perhaps this is not the safest driving practice, but she has learned to use every available minute.) In the 2 years Ms. Mystic has been at the Shared Vision School she has struggled to gain the trust and respect of the staff. Progress has been made but there are still staff members who see her leadership as a threat to their own control. She is still pondering this situation as she pulls into the parking lot and notices that the light dusting of snow has not been removed from the walks or the handicapped entrance. She makes a mental note to tactfully remind the custodian this should be a priority on snowy mornings.

By 7:30 a.m. she has made the coffee and is reviewing the list of calls in her Franklin Planner that must be made that morning. Three of the calls are soliciting community volunteers to be on school committees; one is to the school-business partner to schedule a planning session; two calls to parents regarding

inappropriate student behaviors; and three calls to parents commending their child's recent progress or outstanding work at school. She rushes out of the office into the conference room where the Principal's Advisory Committee is meeting to discuss the playground problems before school and possible solutions. Already a teacher's associate and a second grade teacher are having a heated discussion over the merits of the outdoor playground time before school. Opal smooths the rough edges of the conversation and redirects the focus of the meeting to looking for solutions that are in the best interest of the students.

It is now 8:00 a.m. and Ms. Mystic moves on to the curriculum meeting taking place in the Media Center. The group is engaged in thoughtful discussion regarding the school's strengths and weaknesses in the area of math. Teachers on this committee have been gathering and comparing data and authentic assessment examples in all curricular areas in order to help the school define its school improvement goals for next year. Ms. Mystic is filled with pride as she listens to their discussion and openly and honestly praises their efforts.

At 8:35 the secretary summons Ms. Mystic from the meeting. She is greeted in her office by an irate bus driver, visibly upset over the antics of his cargo. The principal listens empathetically, seeking first to understand. Then she and the bus driver make a plan for how the matter could be handled in the future. As the bus driver marches off, summoning the courage to once again

transport children from point A to point B, Opal Mystic summons her courage to face the adolescents in room 6A.

Opal Mystic is saved by the bell when the substitute arrives just as a student asks, "Who invented the decimal, anyway?" She has just enough time to check her notes before attending a staffing with strategists, counselor, classroom teacher and disgruntled parents over placement of a student in a special reading program. Tactfully, and with as much sensitivity as possible, Ms. Mystic supports her colleagues recommendations and works to make sure the parents understand each step of the process and the benefits this program can offer their daughter.

Following the staffing, the principal grabs a quick cup of coffee and is about to pick up the phone when a first grade teacher strides purposefully into the office, with a rebellious young student in tow. There seems to be a disagreement over appropriate classroom behavior. It is obvious the teacher and the student have come to impasse. Ms. Mystic suggests that the student spend recess with her in the office to see if they can solve this problem. They are just about finished with their mutual plan for the child's improved behavior, when the playground duty teacher rushes in with the news that a third grade boy has fallen on the ice. The cut is bad and will most likely require stitches. This is the day the school nurse is at the junior high. Once the crisis is past, the parents have

been consulted, and the child transported to a nearby emergency room, Ms. Mystic realizes she is late for a teacher evaluation.

Opal Mystic spends 30 minutes observing the 25 year veteran teacher conducting a math lesson. It is obvious that the teacher has years of classroom experience and knows her subject matter well. However, it would appear she has been using the same lesson plan for the past 10 years. Opal vows to get this very capable teacher to a math workshop as soon as possible. A little encouragement may be all it takes to rekindle the excitement she once felt for her job.

On the way back to the office, a distraught kindergartner reports that somebody wrote "sumpin' bad" on the wall in the boy's bathroom. The look on his upturned face conveys his concern, complete trust, and expectation that Ms. Mystic can solve this problem. She surveys the damage and commends the child for his concern and reassures him something will be done right away. But what? This is a problem that continues to haunt the school. She makes a note to include information concerning this problem in tomorrow's school bulletin and ask the Principal's Advisory Council for suggestions. Perhaps the student council could be included by initiating activities to encourage school pride and responsibility.

It is now 11:45 a.m. and just as she is about to reach for the phone, the custodian informs her a steady stream of water is pouring out of the light fixture in the music room, probably the result of an ice dam on the roof. She resists the temptation to ask him what he would like her to do about it, and asks if there is

any immediate danger of fire or electrical damage. They decide to cut off the electricity on that circuit until it can be inspected by an electrician and she notifies the teachers effected by this situation. She looks up at the clock just as the power to her office goes out. What a morning! But now it is 12:00 noon, time for lunchroom duty.

Ms. Opal Mystic and the Shared Vision Elementary School are fictional, but the scenario presented is the reality of the principalship. As I embark on this new phase of my career as an educator, I must pause to reflect on the role of leadership. How does one prepare for the many challenges that faced Ms. Opal Mystic in the course of one routine morning? Throughout my studies I have identified six different roles I believe to be essential to effective leadership. In this paper I will discuss the principal as moral leader, communicator, instructional leader, manager, change facilitator, and visionary. It is the purpose of this paper to reflect on these roles, share my motivation and beliefs in the purpose of the principalship, and discuss the changes and challenges that face elementary school education.

Motivation

Life is an endless reflective process. Good leadership requires reflection on the events of one's life to determine how they have formed one's values and beliefs. I had to include in my reflection process the identification of the values and principles I hold as the center of my life. I think Oliver Wendell Holmes

(cited in Covey, 1989) said it best, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us" (p. 96). I had to examine what lies within me. I found that I value love, relationships with family and friends, fun, learning, and creativity. I also realized that I have an obligation to share these values with others. I am committed to a life of serving and bringing joy to others. Continued learning, growing, and striving to make myself better is my passion. These are the values that motivate me. The motivation to be a principal comes from a desire to serve and the belief that I can make a difference. I think George Bernard Shaw (cited in Covey, 1989) captured my own feelings when he wrote:

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It's a sort of splendid torch which I've got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generation. (p. 299)

You must be motivated by what lies within. Covey (1989) refers to this as being principle-centered. It is your belief in your values and principles that can sustain you through a morning like Ms. Opal Mystic endured. Those who aspire

to the principalship simply because they need a change, want to make more money, or be the boss, miss the whole point of the profession.

Purpose

Green (1987) in his chapter on the conscience of leadership challenges us to identify and grasp the point of our profession. In my opinion, the purpose of education is to see to it that all children are educated and nurtured in mind, body, and spirit. To educate is to respond to a fundamental human need to know and to learn. Although it is a bit dated, I still think this definition by Clyde (cited in Hodgkinson, 1991a) of the purpose of education has merit:

Education is not the art of training and subjugating people to serve the profit of others. It is the art of helping people to know themselves, to develop the resources of judgement and skills of learning and the senses of values needed on facing a future of unpredictable change, to understand the rights and responsibilities of adults in a democratic society and to exercise the greatest possible degree of control over their own fate . . . (p. 29)

I would only suggest that in addition to these ideas, we must, in today's schools provide for the physical health of the student and nurture his or her spirit through the building of self-esteem and personal worth.

Role of Moral Leader

Green (1987) in his article further suggests that a feature of professions is that "they are always practiced in response to some fundamental human need or

social good whose advancement is already a moral aim” (p. 108). He cites medicine, nursing, and law as examples. I offer that because the purpose of education is to respond to the fundamental human need to know and to learn, education is a moral enterprise. Educational leaders are therefore moral leaders. Being moral is knowing right from wrong based on one’s core beliefs. To be ethical is to put into practice and show concrete evidence of these values and beliefs.

Our values and beliefs speak to us through our voices of conscience and subconsciously guide our thoughts and deeds. It is important to realize that these voices of conscience are a product of one’s personal history. My life has been guided by religious beliefs, a strong work ethic, and ascribing my interactions with others to the Golden Rule. It is important for me to temper my criticism of others with the understanding that not everyone shares this background. This does not mean I change my values and beliefs, only that I am ever mindful we do not all have the same philosophical origins.

As educational leaders, we have the moral obligation to be skillful in our job and expect nothing less from our colleagues. We have the responsibility to shape the norms of our school community, even in the face of adversity. To be inept at our job or to witness this ineptness in others and fail to initiate change, is a failure to meet our moral obligation to our profession.

I agree with Hodgkinson (1991a) when he suggests that values, morals, and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrators need to know where the values are and where the power lies. We need to study the values of the community we serve as well as our own. In doing so we gain self-knowledge, a better understanding of our fellow man, and a better chance of healing the conflicts within an organization in our diverse society. Too many times educators fall into the trap of thinking that the power lies out there somewhere. We need to remember the greatest power lies within us.

Role of Communicator

It does Opal Mystic very little good to have the qualities of moral leadership if she does not have the ability to communicate her values, beliefs and purpose to others. The word communicator comes from the Latin communicare which means "to share" or "to make common." This implies a giving and taking process. In order to be an effective communicator you must also be effective at receiving information and seek to make sure you understand the intent of the communication and respond in a way that indicates the message was understood. This is what Ubben and Hughes (1987) refer to as the closed loop. It is important that the principal practice closed loop communication with both the internal and external publics of the school community. Modeling behaviors and expectations is probably the single most important form of communication to all publics. "Actions speak louder than words" is a much used saying but very

applicable to principals and how they communicate beliefs and expectations to their staff, students, parents, and community. An example of the powerful communication of modeling is cited by Blase and Kirby (1992) in their discussion of the power of praise. Teachers, whose principals used praise frequently and sincerely, found themselves emulating the principal's positiveness with their students and with each other. Perhaps it was this kind of modeling that aided the Shared Vision Elementary School Curriculum Committee to work so effectively together on the math curriculum. This effective use of praise and sensitivity could help Ms. Mystic smooth the rough edges between the teacher associate and the second grade teacher over the playground practices.

In addition to modeling good effective communication, the principal must have the ability to: (a) write messages clearly and concisely for their intended audiences; (b) utilize facts and data and determine their value in communication; (c) use current technology to communicate; and (d) demonstrate skills in nonverbal communication (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 1991). I truly believe a literal pat on the back is sometimes in order and speaks a thousand words to the recipient and the observer. In the use of printed material, whether it be a weekly bulletin to the staff, parent newsletter, parent handbook or an annual report, it is most important to keep in mind the intended audience, appropriate language and how it will be distributed (Rossow, 1990).

I feel it is of great importance that the principal have the ability to communicate high expectations to the staff, students, parents, and the community. I believe these expectations are reinforced through repetition, clarification, and consistency (Blase & Kirby, 1992). For Opal Mistic to just suggest that teachers should identify appropriate bus behaviors with their students at a 3:30 p.m. faculty meeting might meet with "yeah, sure" kind of head nodding and never get any further. Ms. Mistic needs to repeat these expectations on every occasion, formal and informal. Repetition is the key to influencing action. Ms. Mistic cannot expect the teachers to act on her message if she has not clarified exactly what she expects. Finally, the message should be consistent. Bus behavior expectations communicated by Ms. Mistic one day should be the same the next.

With regard to the external publics, Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher (1990) suggested an effective principal will identify key communicators and engage in one-on-one conversations with these people to inform the community about what is going on in school or to get the pulse of the community on important issues. It is also essential that the principal speak effectively to large groups of people and articulate beliefs, values, needs and/or concerns of the school persuasively and clearly. Effective use of the mass media is also important in communicating to external publics. Knowing who to contact and how to relate to that person helps keep the flow of information to and from the school. Small coffee clutch

meetings with parents and community members can also serve as an effective means of communication with external publics.

There are two types of communication: formal and informal. Most of the above discussion has centered on the more formal means of communication. Informal communication takes place every time someone walks into the school building. The cleanliness, noise level, decor, and welcome given by the office staff say something to the public. It is very important that the principal be aware of such messages.

In the words of sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (cited in Kindred et al., 1990), communication is "the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop" (p. 83). Schools are made up of human beings with different backgrounds, agendas, and values. The quality of the communication between these people depends largely on the ability of the leader to demonstrate these skills and foster them in others. As a principal I hope to model effective communication and always "seek first to understand, then to be understood" (Covey, 1989, p. 237).

Role of Instructional Leader

Sergiovanni (1991) proposes that the educational practices of principals are guided by what he calls "mindscapes" (p. xi). These mindscapes are road maps or paradigms which help us make sense of the world and guide our decisions.

He describes three distinct mindscapes and of those three I would categorize myself as a "scruffy."

Scruffies hold the view that educational administration resembles a craftlike science within which professional practice is characterized by interacting reflection and action episodes. Theory and research are only one source of knowledge, which is subordinate to the principal and is designed to inform but not to prescribe. (p. 4)

While I believe that there is much credence to the theory and research done on principals as instructional leaders, I also ascribe to the importance of reflective interaction and a certain amount of intuitive feel for situations. It is important to remember we are working with people, not just curriculums and strategies. It would do Opal Mystic little good to have all the knowledge about instruction but no means of motivating people to act on this knowledge. Opal does not operate in a vacuum and certainly her role as instructional leader is influenced by a number of variables both from the community and the school. The mathematics curriculum committee at Shared Vision Elementary must exhibit competence and a strong commitment to developing and improving the curriculum. Sergiovanni (1991) suggested that "to persist in the idea that the principal had to be the only provider of instructional leadership in such a situation locks in teachers as subordinates and puts a cap on the total amount of leadership available in the school to promote better teaching and learning" (p. 91). If we truly embrace

shared decision making then we must also embrace shared leadership. While I acknowledge that the principal has the ultimate responsibility for the instruction taking place in the school, he/ she also has the responsibility for building this leadership in his/her colleagues.

A synthesis of the research on effective schools (Rossow, 1990) showed at least seven variables are related to school effectiveness:

1. High expectations for student success
2. A safe and orderly environment
3. A clear and focused mission
4. Strong leadership
5. Monitoring student progress
6. Staff training
7. Site-based instructional decisions. (p. 6)

I believe as an instructional leader these variables are crucial to student success and a principal needs to work within the school climate to ensure positive student outcomes. The role of instructional leader includes four basic areas: (a) curriculum, what students are to learn and what teachers are to teach; (b) instruction, atmosphere and experiences used by the teacher to provide success for every student; (c) staff development, opportunities for participation in professional and personal growth; and (d) supervision and evaluation of teacher and student performance based on the school's mission and high expectations.

Volumes could be written on each of these areas. I will limit my reflection to those thoughts about each area that most impressed me throughout the course of my studies.

Curriculum and Instruction

I think it is important to apply the community goals and values to the area of curriculum. Working with the staff and community to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of that student population is essential for any instructional program. If there is no buy in or relevance to the curriculum on the part of the staff and community, it probably will not be successful. I would not, however, compromise my values on what I see as essential components of any curriculum. I consider these offered by the NAESP (1991) to be essential: (a) " a strong foundation in the fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics; and acquiring basic knowledge and understanding in science, social studies, fine arts, health, and physical education" (p. 10); (b) an emphasis on communication: speaking, listening, reading and writing, and being users of technology as a means of communication; and (c) development of a sense of self-worth and a respect and appreciation of the diversity of others.

I must include in this reflection my feelings on the importance of the curriculum and instruction being developmentally appropriate. The simple fact is that children learn by doing. In a 1986 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, the National Association for the Education of Young

Children (NAEYC) said, "Knowledge is not something that is given to children as though they were empty vessels to be filled. Children acquire knowledge about the physical and social worlds in which they live through playful interaction with objects and people" (p. 81). Curriculum goals should be to provide experiences that meet the needs of children in their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth areas through active exploration and interaction with other children and adults. Instruction should be provided individually or in small informal groups when possible, and involve concrete learning activities and materials relevant to their own life experiences (NAEYC, 1986). I would also like to interject that even though pre-adolescents develop a more sophisticated attitude and need more peer interaction, they are still children and require attention to their developmental levels as well.

One other reflection on curriculum and instruction is my belief in integrating as many learning experiences as possible. On Jacob's (1989) continuum of design options for curriculum, I find the most attractive and reasonable to be the periodic use of interdisciplinary units/courses. This approach is more flexible and less threatening for teachers who are not convinced of its merits. Still you can provide a variety of experiences that will hopefully be stimulating and motivating for both teachers and students.

In addition to the points already mentioned, the instructional leader should "regularly assess the teaching methods and strategies being used and make sure

they are appropriate, varied, and effective and articulate effective classroom management and planning processes” (NAESP, 1991, p. 11).

Staff Development

If we truly believe that principals are "leaders of leaders," as Dr. James Doud suggested, (personal communication, February 13, 1992) part of our responsibility must be to ensure that teachers are developed to their fullest potential. Staff development is one means to this end, although surely not the only one. Fullan (1990) described it as "any process intended to improve skills, attitudes, understandings, or performance in present or future roles" (p. 3). For staff development to have any impact on the school we must take into consideration the teacher as an individual and what his/her needs are and where they are in their career and life cycle experiences. We must also consider the school as an organization. What is the overall commitment to the development plan? What about the district as a whole? Will this staff development be seen as beneficial or superfluous? These questions imply a lot of staff ownership needs to take place before any development plans will be successful. Ms. Mystic might do well to keep this in mind in her plans to rehabilitate the veteran teacher.

Supervision and Evaluation

In their discussion on the changing perspectives on teaching and learning, Nolan and Francis (1992) offered some implications for supervision that struck me as relevant. Principals need to encourage teachers to be active participants in

the construction of their own knowledge about teaching and learning. This can be done by simply allowing them to reconstruct and refine their own lessons during the evaluation process and by providing the time and opportunity for them to work on new teaching models and make them their own. I am most comfortable with the idea of supervisors as collaborators with teachers on teaching and learning, rather than as critics. There will be content-specific areas that I cannot address with as much knowledge as the person teaching it. Here is a good opportunity for the principal as learner to model his/her values about learning and collaborating. This openness on the part of the principal may lead the teacher to be more trusting and share the heart of problems that the supervisor is often denied access to. It may be an excellent opportunity to use peer coaching or colleague consultation in content specific areas. I would only caution that the purpose of the collaboration is not to "pat each other on the back," but to grow from each other's experience and improve student learning.

We know by now that there are a great many ways to assess an individual's progress besides just factual data. Collecting a great variety of data over a long period of time (Nolan & Francis, 1992) gives a more wholistic view of the progress, successes, and weaknesses of the learner. I have combined my own ideas and modified Chittenden's (1991) three attitudes about assessment to make a formula I think I will remember to follow. First, you keep track of what students and instructors have been doing. Second, you check up to see how it is going.

Third, you find out why teaching and learning is or is not taking place and work together to find solutions.

Manager Role

In considering the roles of the principal, much emphasis and importance has been placed on the principal as instructional leader. It would seem that the role of business and building manager must be of less importance. During my practicum experience I have come to observe that without sound knowledge of the principles of business management, the principal would have neither the time nor the peace of mind to act as an instructional leader because the school would be in chaos. A well-run school is the prerequisite for instructional leadership. Running an efficient building, that stays within budget, and keeping the physical plant safe and in good repair are dictates that most central offices place on the principal. It has also come to my attention (Doud, personal communication, April 19, 1993) that failure in the management role is much more likely to get you fired as a principal, than poor instructional leadership, however unjustified this may seem.

To be an effective manager requires making good decisions about the most effective way to manage. The level of involvement of others in the management process varies. Blase and Kirby (1992) suggested involvement can vary from formal structures (committees), informal participation (principal open-door policy) to impromptu encounters, all of which can be successful in the right situation.

For example, Opal Mystic chose to use a formal structure in managing the playground supervision and handling the vandalism problem, but chose to informally consult with only the custodian on building repair problems. She employed different structures for different problems. Knowing when to involve others and who to involve in the management process is a skill that takes experience. I do know that I am committed to the principles of cooperation among teachers, empowerment of teachers, and encouraging teacher responsibility. Along with empowerment and responsibility should go accountability for decisions and achievements. I believe that you work to involve the staff in meaningful ways and that authority should be granted to those with ability (Sergiovanni, 1991).

Being an efficient manager today means having access to good information. Knowledge and usage of computer technology in the areas of student data, record keeping, and budgets is valuable not only to the principal, but to all office personnel. While I would still consider myself a computer novice, I have just enough knowledge to make me hungry for more and I am committed to encouraging the use of technology in all facets of the school. This is another example of modeling the behavior you expect in others.

I also believe a good manager should be able to plan, write, and present a budget. This is probably the area that is most foreign to me. I understand the basic principle of accounting, but have never enjoyed much success in my own

personal budget. Fortunately, I am very careful in taking responsibility for other people's money. I believe budget planning should be driven by the academic program, not the other way around. Having had the opportunity to visit several elementary schools this year, I would favor a shared decision making formal structure for budget planning. The budget should reflect the goals of the school and the community.

The statement, "clothes make the person" could also apply to the school plant. We should not underestimate the importance of first impressions. During an interview for a prospective job, I could not help but notice that even though the building was relatively new, it was dingy and dirty. This communicated an unfavorable message to me about that school. The environment for learning should be safe, orderly, and clean. As an avid student of the arts, I also believe that an aesthetic environment raises the level of expectations of the people who work there. Light colors, a few potted plants, good lighting, and colorful displays of student work do wonders for the school environment and send a positive message to the community about the importance of the school.

Most important to the role of manager is effective use of time. In reviewing literature on leadership and management, the themes of know thy time and first things first (Drucker, 1966; Covey, 1989) keep recurring. Effective managers prioritize their activities based on their personal values and the goals of their mission. I have made great strides in this area during my year as a graduate

assistant. I developed the habit of sitting down each Sunday evening, looking at my personal values statement, and writing down my goals for the week. They are divided into personal and professional goals. I put these activities into my Franklin Planner first, then as many other activities as time would reasonably allow. I included time for exercise, relaxation with friends and family, quiet times for personal reflection, and my studies. I cannot say I was always successful, but I did improve. This kind of prioritizing is essential for the school principal. Without taking the time to reflect on your principles and prioritize your goals you become a reactor to the world that is going on around you and fail to influence the lives and the learning of those you came to serve. The mere fact that Ms. Mystic mentally planned for her day and prioritized in her planner, demonstrates a commitment to putting first things first. To be an effective manager we would do well to remember the words of the great poet, Goethe: "Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least."

Role of Change Facilitator

One of the things that matters most to educational leaders is finding effective means of meeting the challenges of current trends in education. These trends can be summed up in one word, change. According to Hodgkinson (1991b) changes in the family composition have resulted in only 6% of today's families being considered the traditional nuclear family. There has been a 35% increase in the

number of single female head of households in the past 10 years. Fifteen million of these children, reared by single mothers, live within \$1,000. of the poverty line. Changes in the number of households with children (only about a quarter of American households) has reduced the support base for educational programs.

Changes in family employment have resulted in 54% of mothers with children under the age of 6 in the workforce (Schweinhart, Koshel, & Bridgman, 1987). Changes in the population, based on 1990 census, show that minorities and senior citizens are the fastest growing populations. The non-white youth population will increase from 30% in 1990 to 38% in 2010 and in at least eight states, they will become the majority youth population (Hodgkinson, 1991b).

Hodgkinson (1991b) suggested these changes have had the following results:

1. School-age children with no supervision at all after school.
2. More children in poverty.
3. More need for day-care.
4. Less money and taxpayer support for educational programs.
5. Need for more understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity.

Technology and the coming of the Information Age has changed the nature of the workforce. No longer is unskilled labor a commodity. There is less need for the agricultural or manufacturing cluster of labor. Instead there is an increased need for the information and services industries. Technology has made the world a smaller place and consequently there is increased international

competition. Our students will face competition for jobs in the world market. This forces schools to change their curriculum to better meet the needs of the future. In regards to changing the curriculum John Preston (personal communication, September 29, 1993) shared these words of Ollie Sands, "Trying to change the curriculum is like trying to move the cemetery. Until you try, you don't realize how many friends the dead have." However true this may be, as principal, I see my responsibility to ensure that the curriculum prepares our students with the ability to communicate, problem solve, think critically, and use technology.

While I do not propose to have all the answers to these challenges, I think it is imperative to have some direction in mind. I would work to do the following:

1. Offer in-service to teachers that keeps them current with technology.
2. Improve the linkage of community resources and agencies with families and students that are needing assistance.
3. Encourage and promote activities designed to enhance student self-esteem.
4. Develop programs to promote positive home/school relationships.
5. As Doud suggested, I would work to "preserve the richness of our multi-cultural society, but find ways to work together" at the same time (personal communication, January 18, 1993).

6. Encourage political leaders and community members to visit the school, form partnerships, and take part in the process of educating students.

We should not overlook the changes in the style of administrative leadership and a more decentralized approach to governing schools as yet another challenge school face. Current leadership theory encourages the leader to act as a facilitator rather than the more traditional authoritarian model. This trend intensified my interest in becoming a principal. The facilitator helps provide resources and avenues to accomplish the goals and objectives collectively determined within the school. I perceive the keys to being a successful leader of leaders are involving others and delegating responsibility. Surely Opal Mistic demonstrated this in her shared-leadership style and in her delegation of authority and involvement of others in the decision-making process.

From my readings (Barth, 1990; Blase & Kirby, 1992; Rossow, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1991) I have gleaned certain conditions that must be in place in order to facilitate the changes that can meet our current challenges. I have consolidated the list to these five conditions:

1. People need to participate in the decision to change.
2. The rewards of the change must exceed the pain.
3. The environment must be free from threat and judgement.

4. There must be persistent support and encouragement on the part of the administration.

5. People must trust those attempting to induce the change.

According to Kurt Lewin to facilitate change you must either "reduce the restraining forces or increase the driving forces" (Doud, personal communication, April 12, 1993). I would hope that I could work to do both.

In discussing the principal as change facilitator, Hall and Hord (as cited in Rossow, 1990) identified the styles of responder, initiator, and manager. Of these three, I consider myself an initiator of change. I have very strong beliefs about what schools and teachers should do and I am often prone to "lead by outrage" (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 141). I have consistently sought programs and practices I felt were best for my students and often reinterpreted the rules to meet the needs of my students. I have high expectations of everyone. I also tend to be a manager of change. This comes from my desire to be responsive to the needs of teachers as well as students.

In the role of change facilitator there are two things I must keep in mind. First, that conflict and disagreement are part of successful change and they should not be viewed as negative. This conflict is normal and should be seen as an opportunity to open the door for dialogue, creativity, growth, and positive change. Doud and Else (personal communication, October, 1992) reminded us that this requires school leaders to be adept at conflict resolution skills and

influencing others to move in a positive direction. The second, is to simply keep in mind that lasting change takes time. The Japanese word, gambare comes to mind. It means to persist with support. I think that is how we bring about change.

Role of Visionary

"A people without a vision shall perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

If our schools are going to thrive and flourish, they must be guided by a positive and inspiring vision that makes the daily tasks worth the effort. When I first began my studies, I was always a bit intimidated by the word vision, equating it to "burning bushes" or "voices that came to you in the night." I never heard any of these voices and it is just as well, or people might have really begun to doubt my sanity. After much reading and researching (Barth, 1990; Peters, 1987; Sergiovanni, 1991) I decided that vision is the daydream I have for how my school should be, my plan for making this happen, and the action of doing it. As Joel Barker (1990) says in his video, "Vision is the result of dreams in action." I suddenly realized I do this all the time. I would not be a graduate assistant today, finishing my Master's degree if I were not a visionary. I have shared my visions with students and colleagues for years, and together we have seen our visions realized.

How does one get a vision? I believe, as Barth (1990) suggested, that all educators have a personal vision about the way we would like our schools to be.

This vision is often submerged for fear of stepping on someone else's vision, by the daily stress of the job, or by the cynics in the schools who are ever ready to dash our dreams.

We acquire these personal visions based on our experiences and our set of values. We talk with people from other walks of life and get their input (Peters, 1987) and we then reflect and articulate our vision. As a leader it is not enough that I have a personal vision. I must share that vision. I need to seize every opportunity to campaign for support of my vision (Doud, personal communication, April 12, 1993) and speak with intensity and emotion. I believe Ms. Mystic shared her vision by her praise of the curriculum committee, the values she placed on a healthy school environment, and her commitment to staff development for continued growth and learning.

What begins as a personal vision being shared through passion and enthusiasm, should then be realized by encouraging others to take part in the shaping of what will be the school's mission. Sergiovanni (1991) said that this "building of a shared consensus about purposes and beliefs . . . creates a powerful force bonding people together around common themes" (p. 100). I see this as the key to making visions a reality. The school vision cannot be realized by the principal alone. I am reminded of that wonderful Pogo line, "We have met the enemy and it is us." Schools are made up of individuals who exercise a

great deal of autonomy in their classrooms. We have been our own worst enemy at working collectively.

Once we succeed in a collective vision, it is important to give time for our vision to take root before we try to harvest the fruit. Being patient about such matters is not a virtue I possess and one which I realize I will need to work on. Perhaps Ms. Mystic was not patient enough or has not sought a collective vision and that accounts for the portion of the faculty who view her as a threat.

My personal vision is largely derived from my personal values regarding appropriate human interaction and the purpose of the school. I envision a school that is a "community of learners" (Barth, 1991, p. 37). It is a safe and nurturing place where students and teachers are not afraid to try new things and they support each other in their efforts toward continued learning. School is a place inhabited by people who want to be there. Collegiality is valued and practiced and a win/win attitude prevails. I envision a school in which honest, heart-felt caring pervades our interactions with all members of our school community. This may sound idealistic, but I value it, I believe it, I can visualize it, and I will live in the pursuit of it. That is the only way it will ever be possible.

Am I a visionary? I think I am. In the words of Shakespeare, taken from King

Lear:

Lear: Yet you see how this world goes.

Gloucester: I see it feelingly.

Conclusion

Warren Bennis (1989) stated that "management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things" (p. 45). Anyone who has spent any length of time in the public schools recently can appreciate that knowing what is the "right" thing is not always evident. Changes in our society, noted earlier, have created schools filled with at-risk children. Our society is demanding that schools do something to raise literacy, stop crime, prevent pregnancy, ensure future employment, provide day-care and the list goes on. All of this is to be done at no additional taxpayer expense. I think Guthrie and Reed (1991) summed up our dilemma very well by their reference to our educational system as one of paradox:

Schooling is intended to benefit those who are gifted, those who are handicapped, and all those in between. The old, the young, the elite, as well as the poor are all targets of specific school programs. Education is expected to enhance social cohesion as well as ensure cultural diversity, promote academic achievement as well as motivate individual self-enhancement. Schools are expected to be free of politics yet responsive to public clients; sensitive to national needs yet subject to the desires of local citizens; and controlled by lay persons while staffed with professionals. All such expectations are to be met in a national climate of values which stresses, however incompatible, equality, liberty, and efficiency. (p. 276)

Considering all of this, why would anyone want to become a principal? I have to admit I have asked myself that question repeatedly during the last year. I have actually tried to talk myself out of this new challenge many times. I am well aware of the potholes that lie in the path before me. And yet I am drawn to it, or maybe pushed is a better word, by an inner conscience. Frankl (cited in Covey, 1989) stated that we detect rather than invent our missions. I think this is true of me. There is that little voice inside that keeps saying, "It won't be easy, but you can do it. You should do it!"

I have done my best in preparing for the roles discussed in this paper. I have seized every opportunity this year to make the most of this preparation. I have intentionally taken on responsibilities I was unsure of in order to challenge and test myself. I have much yet to learn. Like my first year of teaching, it will be trial by fire.

I know my strengths and weaknesses. I have good communication skills and I consider myself perceptive and sensitive to the feelings of others. I like looking at the whole picture and I can deal with ambiguity. I am organized and have a good sense of humor. But most of all, I like children and have great respect for the teaching profession. I need to work on my knowledge of curriculum and financial management. I have not had as much experience at leading group process as I would like and more experience in working with

Special Education programs will be necessary. I tend to take things personally and I do have an occasional flash of temper when students are disrespectful.

In my original scenario of Ms. Mystic and the Shared Vision School we never knew specifically what Ms. Mystic said or how she said it. I would hope I could get through all the encounters she faced with a smile on my face and a prevailing sense of optimism and confidence.

When I get to the end of my life I want to look back and feel that I made a contribution to the lives of others. In the library at Hansen Elementary School in Cedar Falls, Iowa, is a small dog-eared collection of poems written by a little girl in the second grade. She writes about being a princess and about her friend, but my favorite is one entitled, Life.

Sometimes life is good.

Sometimes life is not so good.

Sometimes life is bad.

But it is always life,

And that is about the most important thing.

I agree. Life is the most important thing and to help make it better for children in whatever way I can will be my contribution. Why do I want to be a principal? I answer that in the words of Pascal (cited in Covey, 1989): "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of" (p. 236).

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