Principal Reflection Paper

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EDAD 707 – The Principalship

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Introduction

I have been a teacher at Madison Middle School in Madison, SD for sixteen years. I love being a teacher and making a difference in the lives of children. I teach at the middle school level and always have. When people I meet for the first time ask me what I do and I respond that I teach middle school students, I almost inevitably get the following response: “Ooooh, that’s a tough age!” I couldn’t disagree more with those people. I think students from the ages 11 – 14 years (middle school ages) are really hungry for education and interpersonal relationships. I love it because most middle school students are still “little kids” at heart and mind, but physically and emotionally they are starting to become “adults.” I really feel like this is a crucial time to mold and shape kids into what they will become as adults.

This class is one of two classes that I am taking this summer as I continue on my journey to obtain my Masters of Education Administration from South Dakota State University. My goal in taking these courses is to one day become a principal and have the opportunity to lead a staff in educating and preparing a school full of students for their journey in life. Being a principal is something that has always been at the back of my mind ever since I first got into education. Many of my peers and family members have encouraged me to go back to school to get my master’s degree but I hesitated to do so because I wanted it to be the right time. I didn’t simply want to get my master’s degree “just because.” I wanted to get my degree at a time when I thought I would use it. Well, that time is now for me!

EDAD 707 – The Principalship is course that focused on who the Principal is, or at least should be – the person behind the suit so to speak. The title of the course textbook says it all: The Principal: Creative Leadership for Excellence in schools. This course gave us a look into the everyday life of a school principal. It provided us with a bridge from the theory of school administration to the practical problem solving in which high school principal engages. The
textbook is broken down into four main sections which I will expand on in this paper. The four sections were organized around the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards and focused on the key issues that form the heart and soul of effective leadership. (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011)

Creating a Vision of Leadership and Learning

An education leader promotes the success of every student with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011). Great leaders know where they're going and have a strong sense of vision. If you are going to lead others, you have to know where you are going yourself – people are more likely to follow a person that leads with a strong sense of confidence and direction. Vision should not just be talked about, it should be written out and shared with those that you are leading. An effective school principal will even involve their people in the process to create the goals to be achieved. Schools can be looked at as “organisms.” They exhibit growth and are centered on interdependence, collaboration, individuality, uniqueness and self-renewal (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011). In this kind of setting, the principal serves as a facilitator of a shared vision that will unite all stakeholders in the educational process – students, teachers, parents, administration, support staff, and the community. A school principal brings to a school their values, beliefs and philosophies. The impact a principal has on his staff and students is dependent upon what the principal values.

The principal is responsible for building a sense of community in their schools. They will do this empowering their students and teachers to be individuals and promote a learning environment that responds to each learners individual needs, interests, ability, and style of learning. The school principal does not just make all the decisions. Instead he involves others (staff, students, community members) to be a part of the decision making process. While not all decisions require a
team approach, it is wise to involve those who are affected the most some input in the process. Involving others establishes a sense of ownership and community.

**Developing a Positive School Culture**

An educational leader must promote the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011). Developing a positive school culture might be one of the most difficult – but most important things – a principal does in their building. Creating a positive school culture creates a sense of belonging for students’ teachers, parents, and community. It provides an opportunity for students to develop a relationship with caring adults in the building. In this environment, the teachers feel like they are part of a “team” and are provided time to meet and collaborate with their colleagues in professional learning communities. For parents and the community, the sense of belonging comes from being invited and included in the educational process – being shown that they welcome and needed (Habegger, 2008).

A positive school culture is also established when students are provided with the best opportunity to be successful. There are many factors that must be taken into consideration in helping a child be successful. Teaching strategies, grouping, lesson implementation, motivation, feedback, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, special services, and support are just a few of those considerations (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011). It is also important to remember that success is not the same for all students and that not all students will achieve at the same level. An effective school principals understands the importance of a positive school culture and how it can help student achievement and professional growth in their school building.
Managing the Organization

An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011). All of the factors that can help student be successful are irrelevant if the principal does not provide an environment in which the child feels safe and welcome. A principal builds that environment by staffing their building with people that share their vision of what a successful school should be. They organize their staff in a way that best serves the function of the school, and they treat their staff as professionals with insight and ideas of how the school can be improved. An effective school leader will establish learning communities that give their staff opportunities to interact and collaborate with other professionals in the school.

Scheduling, budgeting, and building management are aspects of school management that the principal must be aware of, knowledgeable about, and sensitive to. The school schedule is what brings people, materials, and curriculum together at a designated time and place for the purpose of instruction. The budget process is a continuous cycle involving planning, administration, and review. Proper budgeting leads to the successful operation of school districts, and provides an opportunity to plan the mission, improve operations, and achieve the educational objectives of the school district. Building management affects how the school looks and reflects the attitudes and organization of the school itself. The physical condition of the school affects the teaching and learning environment. A clean school that looks good and is good repair can promote a sense of pride and belonging.

Interacting with the External School Environment

An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing
community resources (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011). In many cities and towns across the nation, the school is the life-blood of the community – it’s what brings people together. Family and community involvement play an important role in the success of schools. An effective school principal will design professional learning communities where the school and community work together in partnership with families to educate youth and the entire school community. There are numerous student benefits from well-implemented school and community partnership programs. They include increased student attendance, higher achievement and report-card grades, a sense of greater security, fewer behavioral problems, and an increase in positive attitudes about school and homework (Student Support Services Center, 2012). When used properly, community involvement is schools can be the little extra that makes a big difference.

Summary

American scholar Warren Bennis once wrote “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” (Meier, 2011) As a school principal, I will help to create a shared vision for students, staff and community members. I will take the time to gather input and knowledge from as many stakeholders as possible. I will have high expectations for students, staff and myself. I will help to empower others to take control of their own learning and development by establishing an environment built on accountability and responsibility. I will base every decision I make on what is best for students. I will support and encourage those with whom I work and I will work to embrace a sharing and collaborative school culture that takes risks in an effort to do great things.
References


