PREPARING BEGINNING PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Recently, there has been increased awareness of the important role that principals and vice-principals have in schools and a realization that many of the incumbents will soon be retiring, leaving a large percentage of schools with inexperienced leaders. This project examines how school districts in British Columbia and the British Columbia Principal and Vice-Principal Association view the complex role of principals and vice-principals by analyzing a number of recent principal and vice-principal job posting postings, as well as taking a critical look at the British Columbia Principal and Vice-Principal Association's *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals.* I then describe and critique various attempts that education leadership programs are using to support new school administrators.

The majority of programs in British Columbia do not include formal practicums, are rich in leadership theory and focus on many of the administrative responsibilities associated with the day to day realities of being a principal or vice-principal. Educational leadership is often lumped in with other forms of leadership and the project examines why this can be potentially problematic for emerging educational leaders. Using personal experiences as a beginning school administrator going through an educational leadership program, I identify some of the pros and the cons for principals and vice-principals in these programs. I conclude by arguing that unless both educational leadership programs and school districts are committed to helping beginning principals and vice-principals better understand their own beliefs about what is educationally important and the importance of working with partner groups to help create that environment for students, we will continue to fill the vacancies for principal and vice-principal positions, but perhaps with the wrong people.

Introduction

"Hi Jamie, I am calling to inform you that you got it. Congratulations, we know that you

will do a wonderful job." With that, the superintendent of my school district (School District #47

– Powell River) hung up the phone. I was a newly appointed vice-principal. Three days prior to

that telephone call I had received the news that I was going to be laid off from my teaching

position for the third year in a row. The district did not have a job available for me at that time

but my school principal, reassuringly, stated that most likely "something would come up."

Shortly after receiving the news of my lay-off, I noticed that our district was advertising

internally for two elementary vice-principals. I read the job description online and thought about

my options. I did not have a Masters degree and I had only been teaching for three years, but the

shortages in administrators across British Columbia and in Powell River had me thinking that it

might be the right direction for my career. I mentioned the posting to my wife, a teacher who had

a continuing job, and she encouraged me to call the assistant superintendent and inquire about

the positions. I called and, to my surprise, after talking about the positions and my interest in

pursuing a career in educational leadership, the assistant superintendent said that I was welcome

to interview for the position if I was interested.

The morning of my interview, my official lay-off notice arrived in the mail. At noon, I

put on my only suit and went to the School Board office. I sat at the end of a long wooden table

in front of panel consisting of current principals, the superintendent, the assistant superintendent

and our district trustees. I was nervous. The interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes. I left

feeling that, if nothing else, the interview process was a good learning experience.

The phone call that night from the superintendent was a complete surprise. When I told

my wife that I had got the job she thought I was joking. At work the next day I informed my

colleagues that I was going to be a vice-principal the following year. They did not believe me. Not exactly a great confidence booster. Later that afternoon the district sent a mass e-mail to all members of our district announcing the new hires. I was officially laid off from my teaching job in the morning, interviewed for an administrator job in the afternoon and hired as a vice-principal in the evening.

Unsurprisingly, I felt completely unprepared for the job ahead of me. The district placed me at an elementary school with an experienced principal who was nearing retirement. During our first meeting in August we spoke about the upcoming year. I asked her what my administrative role in the school was going to be. (My 1.0 assignment had me teaching .8 and acting as vice-principal .2). She stopped what she was doing, looked up at me, smiled and replied, "Books, balls and barf … and not necessarily in that order." She laughed and quickly explained that when she was in her first year as a vice-principal her "mentor" had told her those exact words. She was to order textbooks, maintain gym equipment and clean up any "accidents" in the building. Through the course of my first year I ended up doing all three of these things, plus much more.

In retrospect I can see how clueless I was about the expectations, demands, and nuances of my new job as a vice-principal. I was absolutely unprepared for the challenges that lay ahead of me, and although I did my best, I feel that those first years were more about survival than effective leadership. Indeed, many new administrators echo the same sentiments. Sciarappa (2010) notes that many novice administrators comment that they felt "shellshocked" and "lonely" in their first years as an administrator. One of Sciarappa's interviewees even went so far as to say that she felt like she had been "fed to the lions" (p. 36) during her first year as an administrator. It seems that the teaching profession is not the only profession in education that

"cannibalizes its young" (Ingersoll, 2004, p. 28). The sink-or-swim mentality that new administrators find themselves in only adds to the "intense and unrelenting stress [that they feel] as they try to adjust their textbook understanding of leadership to the real world of practice" (Lashaway, 2003, p. 1). Several themes emerge from the literature in regards to problems that new administrators have in their new jobs. New school administrators often experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, a disconnection from colleagues, an overwhelming sense of responsibility, self-doubt, an imbalance between work and personal lives, and a lack of preparedness for some day to day activities that their new role requires them to handle.

Many of the findings outlined in the research echo my own experiences. I remember feeling like an imposter at times early on in my administrative career. Due to my lack of experience in the education profession I lacked confidence when communication regarding professional concerns with colleagues and teachers was necessary. In particular, I felt very inadequate when discussing work-related issues with experienced teachers. I also felt the need to do more to prove myself. I felt a need to prove myself to my staff, to my superiors and to my new colleagues. This "need" inevitably stretched me far too thin, and I felt that I was doing a lot of things and none of them very well. The self-doubt was crippling at times. Coupled with these professional feelings was trying to find the balance between work and home. I was a new father of two children under the ages of three and I was having difficulties finding that balance between work and home. Even when I was not at school, my new administrative position felt like it was with me all of the time. Upon reflection of those first two years, I can see that it was one of the most mentally draining and stressful experiences that I have encountered. Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the job was the inability to share some of my frustrations and fears with someone else.

The knowledge I gained through the Master of Education program at the University of British Columbia, although valuable, did not seem connected to the everyday responsibilities and demands of my job as a new school administrator. I realize now that even if I had finished my master's degree before taking the position as a vice-principal, I would have had those same feelings of inadequacy. Looking back, I wonder what would have helped me better "survive and thrive" in my first years on the job (Hollaway, 2004, p. 87).

I now believe that in order for new principals and vice-principals to feel more effective in their roles as educational leaders they need a combination of propositional knowledge and the informal knowledge that can only be gained from on the job experience. I believe this realization is one of the main difficulties that educational leadership programs face when developing new principals and vice-principals. In retrospect, I feel fortunate that I had some experience in the job as a vice-principal prior to engaging in some of my university course work. It allowed me to filter what was being taught and discussed and to apply it to actual, on the job experiences that I had. The majority of my classmates in the educational leadership program I was a part of did not have experience as principal or vice-principal. I feel that this made it more difficult for them to be able to evaluate and critique some of what was being taught.

Further complicating the difficult situation in which new principals and vice-principals may find themselves is the fact that there is a shortage of candidates to fill the demand, especially in rural areas like Powell River. According to the Ministry of Education, there will be approximately 1000 administrative vacancies over the next five years, and there is a real fear that with the mass exodus of experienced principals from the system, their knowledge and wisdom will disappear with them (Leadbetter, 2005). As I began to make connections with other principals and vice-principals across the province, I realized that my situation (being hired as a

vice-principal with only three years of teaching experience), although rare, was certainly not unique. Increasingly, relatively inexperienced educators are being placed into the roles of principals and vice-principals. Although the high retirement rates of educational leaders in British Columbia plays a part in the shortage, there are other factors to consider when examining the decline in existing and potential educational leaders; stresses in the job (The Educational Alliance at Brown University, 2003; Gill, 2005; Lovely, 2004; Mulford, 2005), social problems in schools (Mulford, 2005), institutional interference (Lovely, 2004), and lack of monetary compensation for workload (The Educational Alliance at Brown University, 2003; Lovely, 2004) are just a few of those factors mentioned in the research. Regardless of reasons, as Chapman (2005) aptly notes, "the loss of leadership experience, expertise, knowledge and wisdom has the potential to impact adversely on school quality and student learning" (p. 4). Clearly, principal preparedness and support is an important issue. This is, especially, important for potential and novice administrators in rural districts where shortages are even more evident (Howley et al., 2002).

In Powell River, a rural district in British Columbia, the positions of principals and vice-principals have been held largely by the same group of educators for the past ten to fifteen years. The Powell River Principal and Vice Principal Association (PRPVPA) is made up of 14 members. As members of this group grow closer to retirement, School District 47 (SD 47) is experiencing a lot of personnel change in school administration. This is expected to continue over the next five years. Since my hiring, seven years ago, five more school-based administrators have been hired in SD 47. It has been projected that within two years, as many as four new school administrators will need to be hired in the district. That could potentially mean nine principals and vice-principals with under five years of experience working in our small district. I

am not of the belief that an experienced principal or vice-principal is automatically better than an inexperienced person in that role, but I do believe that experienced principals and vice-principals have valuable experiences to share. This trend is not unique to Powell River; it is happening in many rural and urban communities throughout our province. With the important role that principals and vice-principals play in Powell River's public education system, I believe it is worthwhile to further research and evaluate how principals and vice-principals are being prepared for their roles and how newly appointed administrators feel they are managing. Therefore, the purpose of my project and analysis of the literature is threefold: (1) Develop a better understanding of what I believe the role of school principal and vice-principal is. (2) Describe and critique various attempts being used to initiate principals and vice-principals. (3) Identify promising directions for the initiation of principals and vice-principals.

Review of the Literature

The Job

Principal Opening: Qualifications: Wisdom of a sage, vision of a [chief executive officer], intellect of a scholar, leadership of a point guard, compassion of a counselor, moral strength of a nun, courage of a firefighter, craft knowledge of a surgeon, political savvy of a senator, toughness of a soldier, listening skills of a blind man, humility of a saint, collaborative skills of an entrepreneur, certitude of a civil rights activist, charisma of a stage performer, patience of Job. Salary: Lower than you might expect. (adapted from Copland, 2001, p. 528 as cited in Lovely, 2004, p. 9)

Although the above description is obviously exaggerated, it is not far off the mark. The world of a school administrator is "fast-paced, fragmented, frustrating, exciting, exhausting and exilerating…[where] leaders are enmeshed in complex, overlapping, conflicting webs of

relationships from which they must make educational meaning" (Stack, Coulter, Grosjean, Mazawi, Smith, 2006, pp. 13-18). School administrators are "called upon to exercise instructional, financial, community and individual leadership, and every day they are held accountable for the academic, social and emotional success of children" (Dukess, 2001, p. 1). My own experiences as a school principal of an elementary school certainly show this to be true.

I work upward of 60 hours a week, including weekends and evenings. Today my cell phone rang at 6:10 a.m. It was our teacher-on-call dispatcher informing me that I had three teachers who were going to be absent on Friday, but only two certified teachers-on-call available. She needed my approval to start trying to track down a non-certified person who might be able to cover the other absence. I arrived at school at 7:00 a.m. and noticed that a window had been smashed overnight in our Grade 7 portable. I called it in to maintenance and then swept up the glass inside and outside of the building, knowing that students would be arriving soon and that the window could not be replaced until later in the day.

Our office manager arrived at 7:50 a.m. panic-stricken because she realized she did not have enough certificate paper to create all the student recognition awards for the assemblies scheduled for that morning. After calming her down and reassuring her that things would turn out okay, we decided that I would announce that students would be called up and recognized and that certificates would be given out on Monday. A few minutes later, a recently appointed, beginning teacher came by my office to discuss one of her more challenging students. She had some great ideas about how to help this student, but just needed to be heard and affirmed before implementing them. I complimented her on the job she had been doing with her students for the past three weeks, and she left with a smile on her face and excited to try out a new teaching strategy. Shortly after that another teacher stopped at my office to talk. His father had just

recently passed away and he, himself, has had a number of health related issues. By his own omission it has not been a great year for his students and I believe he is feeling a sense of guilt for not delivering the program he would have liked to.

During morning supervision, a group of Grade 4 students informed me that there was graffiti up on the blacktop. One of our primary classes left some sidewalk chalk outside of their classroom the day before and someone decided to use it to decorate our blacktop area with some colourful phrases and illustrations. I called over a group of Grade 7s and enlisted their help. We went to the custodian room, filled a number of buckets with water and washed away the chalk messages.

The bell rang, signaling the start of the school day, and our students head inside. I wait outside to greet any late students, thank our volunteer crossing guard and see one of our teachers just pulling into the staff parking lot. I made my way over to her and as she rushed past me, she apologized for being late. We had a conversation about her arrival times early on in the year. This has been the first incident since that conversation, but I still make a note to discuss it with her later in the day.

Heading back into the school, I noticed a familiar parent of a Grade 7 student waiting to speak with me. She is concerned that her child is not being challenged enough academically and that he may start losing interest in school. Again, this has been an ongoing conversation throughout the year. We discuss possible strategies for about 15 minutes and I make a note to talk with the classroom teacher later that day. I then make my way to the gym to check to see that our student leaders have the gym set up for our morning assemblies. They have and I make a note to thank them. As I walk back down the hall, I see one of my teachers consoling "David," a Grade 4 student, at the end of the hall. David is having a tough time lately, largely due to an

unpleasant separation of his parents. David feels comfortable with me and I ask if he would like to come to my office. He would. We walk down in silence and he picks one of the big chairs. David is teary-eyed and says he is just having a "sad day." Our first assembly starts in 25 minutes and I still have a little prep work left to do, but I ask David if he wants to help me with a job. He does. "Roof or boiler room?" I ask. "Roof." We grab the big ladder out of the storage room, take it outside and set it up. David's job is to hold it while I go on the roof and collect all the playground balls that have found their way on to the school roof. I throw them off and he collects them. We finish our job, put the ladder away, have one last check-in and he is ready to go back to class. I return to my office and notice that parents, grandparents and friends have started to arrive for our assembly.

There is another parent waiting for me outside of my office. She is concerned that her Grade 2 daughter has only been recognized once this year at our assemblies and the other children in the class have been recognized at least twice. I politely suggest that she speak with the classroom teacher first, as it may be a simple oversight. I invite her to come back and speak with me after that conversation occurs. I check the time and realize we are a bit late. I go on the p.a system and call all of our primary classes down to the gym. Feeling a bit rushed, I grab my assembly notes and make my way to the gym. As student, staff and audience members make their way into the gym I notice that one of our school trustees has decided to take in the assembly. I make a note to ensure that I introduce her formally during my opening remarks. I also realize that I am not wearing a tie. At the end of last year our local principal and vice-principal's association was told that trustees like to be formally introduced at any school event they are attending and that principals should be dressed formally when hosting parents. Too late to do anything about the tie, but, hopefully, my warm welcome makes up for it. The assembly

goes smoothly despite a couple of technical glitches with our monthly review in pictures powerpoint presentation. At the end of the assembly I make sure I personally thank our trustee for coming and supporting our students.

The bell goes for recess and I head outside for supervision. I make a point of visiting the portable and see that the window is being replaced. I stop in and check on our non-certified teacher on call who is in our Grade 6/7 class. It is a former student who is back in town for the summer after completing his third year of university. We quickly catch up and I ask him how it is going. He says great. I ask to look at the day plans that were left and they are very detailed. The day will be fine. I make a note of sending the absent teacher an email thanking her for such a good toc plan. I then proceed to the road hockey court. We typically have 50 – 60 students, mostly boys, on the blacktop every recess and lunch. I play with the intermediate students and, to be honest, it is a very nice release for me. Recess ends and our students start heading back into school. I return to my office and see two Grade 6 students sitting outside my office. They were sent in for play fighting at recess. I send them back to class and make a note to call them back down after the intermediate assembly.

I call our intermediate classes down to the gym. The school trustee is not sitting in on this one. I still can not believe I forgot to wear my tie. The assembly goes smoothly. I teach a Grade 4/5 class PE and the students know the routine. They quickly begin taking down chairs and cleaning up. Eleven minutes. We break our record and I let them know how proud I am of them for working as a team. We then begin an intense game of Dr. Dodgeball until the lunch bell rings at noon. I stop by my office, glance over my growing "To Do" list, grab a cheese sandwich and a granola bar and head out for supervision.

The weather is great and I make my rounds visiting with a lot of students along the way. I end back up at the hockey courts, grab my usual stick and begin to play. "Billy," a strong Grade 7 player, is getting too aggressive. He is a new student this year who had a history of being "difficult." There have been a few incidents over the course of the year but he has responded to interventions very well. He has a lot of influence over the other students. I give Billy a look and tell him to settle down. He does not and then swears loudly when he misses a shot on net. I call him over and give him a couple of choices. He chooses to no longer play and walks away. Three other students follow him. I make a note to check in with him that afternoon. The bell sounds to end lunch and I follow some of the last students in. Two separate groups of students await my arrival. A group of Grade 3 girls are having an issue about creating clubs and limiting access as to who can be in these clubs. Two Grade 5 students were found playing in an area in the forest that was past the school grounds boundaries and one of our supervisors deemed it a safety risk. I worked through both issues with the students and then went to get a cup of coffee. My office manager passed along a couple of phone messages. One was from our Secretary Treasurer. I knew this was about trying to get my school budget reimbursed for new kindergarten furniture and resources I purchased earlier in the year to accommodate the first year of full-day kindergarten. We had been going back and forth on who was responsible for the funds. To my pleasant surprise, he informed me that my school budget had been reimbursed that morning with the full amount that I submitted. Great.

There was also a message from a colleague who was a first year principal in the school that I was principal at for the previous three years. We had spent a lot of time communicating over the course of the year. It always made me feel good when he asked for my opinion. (Perhaps, a reassurance that at least someone believed I knew what I was doing). He had a Grade

7 student who I was familiar with who openly defied his classroom teacher's reasonable request

and proceeded to swear at and confront my colleague when he tried to get involved. My

colleague had the student in his office and was calling me from his office manager's phone. We

discussed some of his options, talked through one in detail and he made his decision. It is

amazing how two schools in the same small town can be so different, I thought.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent checking in with students who made it on 'my

list' for a variety of reasons throughout the week. I hate not seeing them before the weekend.

This was interrupted by a 2:15 p.m. invitation to watch a puppet play put on by one of our

kindergarten classes and their Big Buddies. It was fantastic. By the time the dismissal bell rang I

was fairly satisfied with the amount of students I managed to connect with. I went outside for bus

supervision and wished the students and their parents a great weekend. The bus came and went

yet "Sally" and "Roger" were still waiting out front 20 minutes after the bell had gone. Mom was

supposed to pick us up. Let's go in and phone. This is not uncommon for this brother and sister. I

called and mom answered the phone. She was very apologetic, and says that she just lost track of

time. Her boyfriend had the car and he didn't have any minutes left on his cell phone so she

would call her mom to see if she could pick up the kids. She called back and said her mom was

on her way. Fifteen minutes later Sally and Roger's grandma showed up and they were on their

way. I return to my office and check my list.

I made my way down to the classroom of the teacher that was late in the morning only to

find that she had left for the day. I leave it on my list. Two teachers called me into the staff room

as I made my way past. They ask if I am up for a "Book Club" meeting today. I realize that I

haven't really spoken to them all day. "Book Club' is our staff code phrase for a drink at the

pub. They said there are about 7 or 8 people going. I readily accept. It is a great opportunity to

unwind and check-in with staff members. I say give me 30 minutes and I'll meet you there. I spend the next half an hour transferring my "To Do" list to my "Weekend" list. I have a quick visit with our custodian on my way out. I ask him to check the portable with the broken window for any glass.

As my own day in the life of a school principal reveals, principals and vice-principals must continually juggle the needs and wants of students, parents, teachers, district administrators and school trustees while determining what they believe to be educationally important. Herein lies one of the main difficulties in helping to prepare emerging school principals as leaders: What exactly is educational leadership? Stack et al. (2006) state that "[s]chool leaders are enmeshed in complex, overlapping and often conflicting webs of relationships from which they must make educational meaning" (p.18). They further acknowledge the difficulty in determining which leadership skills, knowledge and values are required, and who decides them and by what criteria? They state that it is this conceptual vagueness around educational leadership that reveals a fundamental challenge with programs and policies that foster educational leadership. I agree.

The process of trying to identify one's own beliefs in the purpose of education can be like trying to nail Jello to a wall: difficult and messy. However, I believe that in order to stay grounded, it is essential that a principal or vice-principal candidate has a clear view (or a developing view) of what they stand for educationally. This view may or may not evolve over time. I believe that a lot of beginning principals and vice-principals have not developed a clear idea of what they believe the purpose of education is and that can lead to early difficulties. It is this belief that should help determine the leadership skills and values that an emerging educational leader will determine to be important. This belief needs to be visited often as many of the decisions principals and vice-principals made daily have an impact on education.

When examining the above vignette depicting one day in my role as principal, my own views on what I deem to be important about education are revealed. I believe that the purpose of education and schooling is to help children identify and have a better understanding of who they are and to provide them with opportunities to safely explore the possibilities of who they can be. In my opinion, education needs to occur in such a manner that students, with guidance and encouragement of educators, have opportunities to learn, to do, to succeed, to fail, to experiment, and to foster relationships in a safe, caring and respectful environment. It is my view that children, their families and members of the community have a collective responsibility to help students seek out what is best for them. As a principal, I believe I am not alone in helping them discover their individual paths. I would like to think I am a key contributor, but, ultimately, it is a shared responsibility.

Within this shared responsibility I believe that a major part of my role as a principal is to ensure that children are being provided with some of the learning opportunities and lessons they need to, hopefully, live a good life. In order to achieve this it involves working with a variety of different groups of people (students, educators, parents) and helping them reach their full potential. For example, in the vignette I mention a number of interactions that I have with teachers. I believe that, as a principal, one of the best ways I can help provide opportunities for students is to support and guide the teachers. The beginning teacher that wanted me to hear about her new strategies in dealing with a challenging student needed to be heard. They were decent ideas, but more importantly she was making an effort to reach that child and improve circumstances for him. The teacher who had just lost his father and had not delivered a great program for his students that year needed to let me know, in his own way, that he was disappointed, too. I believe that the following year was going to be much better for him and his

students. There was no point in rehashing what had happened. We both acknowledged it and

were ready to move on. The teacher that arrived late needed to know that it is not acceptable and

that it does have an impact on students. The absent teacher that left very detailed teacher-on-call

notes needed to know that her extra effort makes things a lot better for her students and that I

appreciated it. Again, by engaging and working with my teachers I firmly believe that through

them I can help improve the opportunities for my students.

A moving job description and responses

The role of a school principal is continuing to evolve. Gone are the days of the

authoritarian, intimidating, and aloof principal that many of us remember from our own school

days (Lovely, 2004; McWilliam & Hatcher, 2007). Leading schools is increasingly complex

work and the role the principal plays has changed to meet the needs. Lovely (2004) states that the

changes in school expectations and functions has created the need for "a more culturally

conscious leader" (p. 7). According to the McWilliam and Hatcher (2007), these new leaders

replace "…distance with empathy, aloofness with warmth, and power with partnership" (p. 234).

Frustratingly, however, there is an aura of conceptual ambiguity associated with educational

leadership and how best to develop it (McWilliam & Hatcher, 2007; Stack et al., 2006). Part of

the ambiguity lies in the fact that administrators have dual roles: their role as leader and their role

as manager. Each of these roles requires a different set of skills and expertise and effective

principals are ones that can translate their own educational values into effective management and

leadership practices.

Many provinces, states, and educational organizations have developed standards for

administrative practice that define what contemporary principals should know and be able to do.

In the spring of 2006 the British Columbia Principals and Vice-Principals Association

(BCPVPA) developed *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia*. The document was designed to make student learning and achievement central to all leadership practices. It provides a framework "to assist in understanding the knowledge, skills, and qualities required to carry out the responsibilities of a school leader" (p. 2). The committee responsible for the *Leaderships Standards* was hopeful that the document would assist individuals to identify and develop the competencies that would enable them to be successful principals and vice-principals. It could also be used as a tool for personal growth plans as principals and vice-principals assess their current strengths and areas for development. A review of this document should reveal a clearer picture of what the job of a school principal and vice-principal entails.

   Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia list nine key elements (knowledge, dispositions, and performances) that an educational leader should know, feel and be able to do. According to the *Leadership Standards*, principals and vice-principals

1. guide the development and implementation of shared values, vision, mission, and goals to support learning and achievement for all students.

2. foster quality teaching and learning opportunities to support learning and achievement.

3. create a system and structures for effective supervision focused on instructional and assessment practices that maximize student learning and achievement.

4. are knowledgeable and provide guidance regarding current curricula, instructional and assessment practices and their impact on student learning and achievement.

5. develop and sustain a culture and climate to support student and adult learning.

6. build positive and effective interdependencies between the school, families and the larger community.

7. incorporate systems thinking to strategically plan and manage for student learning and achievement.

8. demonstrate self-knowledge and personal qualities that support positive relationships that build cultures of integrity.

9. build and support positive and effective working relationships within the school and community.

Each standard then lists illustrative actions that describe the expectations for quality leadership practice and is accompanied by several guiding reflective questions aimed at assisting individuals to begin thinking and reflecting on their own abilities to demonstrate competency in each standard. The *Leadership Standards* reflect the knowledge, skills, and qualities that are required by administrators aspiring to professional excellence, but the committee responsible for the formation of the standards acknowledge that depending on where principals and vice-principals are in their career path, not every administrator will be skilled in all areas. The actions and questions listed are "not meant to be used as instruments for evaluation or the judgment of the individual performance of principals and vice-principals by districts" (p. 4). Instead, they are meant to be used as a framework for leadership succession and professional growth.

Reviewing recent job postings for principals in British Columbia reveal the skills, many drawn from *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia*, that districts feel are necessary for principals in their districts.

Haida Gwaii – Principal – Elementary and Secondary

1. Excellent conflict resolution and interpersonal skills with the ability and desire to work collaboratively with the school community including parents, staff, students, First Nations Band Councils and community;

2. Evidence of connecting school and community in authentic and sustained ways;

3. Intervention strategies and effective leadership and collaborative decision making abilities;

4. Knowledge of instructional supervision practices;

5. Detailed knowledge of instructional strategies and programs;

6. Proven ability to provide educational leadership and to motivate students and staff;

7. Ability to implement the goals in the District's Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement;

8. Working knowledge and experience with Special Needs students;

9. Knowledge of Safe Schools initiatives, coupled with successful experience

Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School District – Principal – Elementary and Secondary

Ideal Candidates will demonstrate the following professional qualities and personal skills:

1. A commitment to student success within an inclusive education model;

2. Leadership skills and experience in the maximization of student learning and the development of a school community which is inclusive of staff, students and parents;

3. A focus on learning as evidenced by current knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies;

4. Ability to motivate and engage both student and adult learners;

5. Ability to work with a network of principals and vice principals in a dynamic and collaborative environment;

6. Proven skill and experience with respect to collaborative leadership, teamwork and positive working relationships with divers groups and stakeholders within a unionized environment;

7. Excellent communication and interpersonal skills with the ability to act courageously and make sound decisions in difficult situations;

8. Knowledge and experience with developing and implementing a school growth plan;

9. A positive inquiry approach to problem solving and systems change;

10. A Master's degree in an appropriate educational field

11. Membership or eligibility for membership with the British Columbia College of Teachers

The most glaring omission in the *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia* is the failure to find any mention of education. This realization has become an extremely important part of this project for me. The following terms were found frequently throughout the document: quality, effective, maximize, learning and achievement, learning positive and effective, student learning and achievement, positive relationships. Similarly, there is no mention of education in the job postings for principals and vice-principals that I reviewed. I found terms and phrases such as conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, collaboration, supervision, motivate, implement the goals, maximization of student learning, sound decision making and act courageously. Many of these terms are used synonymously for education, but I do not believe they are necessarily educational. In my opinion, education can and should be messy, confusing and immeasurable at times.

The *Leadership Standards* make no mention of a principal's role to work with partner groups to determine what in fact is educational and therefore, what is really important. They come close in stating that principals and vice-principals "guide the development and implementation of shared values, vision, mission and goals to support learning and achievement

for all students" (p. 11). There is a lot packed into that single statement. At first glance this may seem like an overwhelming set of tasks for a principal to complete; however, I would argue that many principals do accomplish this in their schools year after year. They can also, through mission statements, codes of conduct, school improvement plans, school planning council notes and student data, provide evidence of it. I would argue, however, that all of this could occur at a principal's school and it still may not be educational. I believe that it must be acknowledged that education is going to look very differently from one school to the next. For that matter it will look differently from classroom to classroom and from student to student. I do not believe that it can be effectively measured, nor should it be. This can be a very awkward and uncomfortable realization for some to accept. It is very difficult to determine accountability, direct or deflect blame and/or receive accolades when thinking of education in these terms. Perhaps that is one reason why there is no mention of it in the *Leadership Standards.*

Key Skills for the Beginning School Administrator

Although the standards and responsibilities outlined in *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia* and a sampling of current British Columbia job postings for principals and vice-principals fail to make any mention of education they do outline the knowledge, skills and virtues expected of school administrators. For many new principals and vice-principals, at first glance, the *Leadership Standards* seem simply too overwhelming to comprehend. Buckner (2007) argues that beginning administrators need a more focused list that highlights the essentials for success in the rookie year. Many researchers have attempted to provide beginning administrators with a more focused list that does not seem as daunting as the knowledge, values, and responsibilities laid out in the *Leadership Standards* or current job postings.

Lovely (2004) argues that it is an individual's emotional intelligence that matters in leadership positions and emphasizes interpersonal skills when looking for new school administrators. She encourages school districts to look for members of their school staff who demonstrate superior interpersonal skills. Using the principles of relational leadership, she argues that potential and new administrators must be able to adapt to individuals and situations, and that it is the relationships rather than the tasks that make an effective leader. This "more culturally conscious leader" (p. 7), uses their emotional intelligence to manage both the leadership and managerial tasks of a school administrator's job. Lovely lists several aspects of emotional intelligence that school administrators, new and veteran, should focus on. First, school administrators should focus on their ability to build and mend relationships, showing compassion and sensitivity to others. Second, they should focus on their ability to listen and communicate, trying to involve others to promote a work team orientation. Thirdly, school administrators should commit to creative problem solving, especially when met with conflict and during change.

McWilliam and Hatcher (2007) discuss new theories in leadership that call for principals to learn the discipline of the three Cs: caring, creativity, and communication. In their analysis of the literature, McWilliam and Hatcher noted that there is a lot of research to support the notion that the emotional intelligence of principals is the component that differentiates a good principal from a star principal. In this new leadership framework, "'soft' skills provide the way to achieve 'hard' targets" (p. 236). The emphasis becomes one of focusing on "soft" skills, not at the expense of management issues, but as a way to optimize managerial performance and production. The emotionally intelligent principal, one who responds passionately to their work (caring), heightens the imaginative response to problem solving (creativity), and communicates

effectively with all stakeholders, is the new way of "thinking, being, and doing principalship" (p. 244).

However, Lovely (2004) and McWilliam and Hatcher (2007) make no mention of education in their analysis. It is difficult to argue that the emotionally intelligent principal, who is passionate, sensitive, imaginative, creative and an effective communicator would not be successful; however, successful at what? The skill set described could be used in a lot of different ways but still may not end up creating good educational environments for children. In fact, an individual who does not possess all the attributes described may be better at creating an educational environment. McWilliam and Hatcher describe leadership attributes that they feel will be beneficial for principals to acquire in order to become "stars" and to reach those "hard targets." They do not discuss whether those "hard targets" are educational and whether or not part of the principal's role is to help determine that.

Buckner (2007) also focuses on communication, caring, and creativity as key skills that new principals need in order to be successful in their new positions. When the foundation for success or failure is being built in those first years, Buckner asserts that the standards utilized by many states and educational organizations are too broad in order to be of value for the beginning principal. Instead, he lists four areas of focus for new principals to be constantly aware of during the important first years. (1) Communication. Buckner argues that both verbal and non-verbal clear communication is essential in order to help others understand them better. Seeking the opinions and feelings of others, while also expressing their own views help "school leaders to set expectations, motivate others, share their vision, and help the school community engage in dialogue that can create a vision all can share" (p. 114). (2) Feedback. Buckner encourages new principals to seek and give feedback that is strength-based in order to develop a positive school

culture where all work toward continuous improvement. He advocates that new principals form a feedback network that seeks out honest and specific feedback about how the leader is excelling and although criticism has some merit, it is the least helpful if it comes just from individuals or small groups who may have an agenda different from the broad values that a school principal encompasses. School principals, too, must be willing to give feedback to everyone in the organization. Again, he advocates for specific, strength based feedback that shows individuals exactly what they have been doing that works in order to further develop their strengths. (3) Measurement and Assessment. He claims that new leaders have the opportunity to show others what they deem important by what they choose formally and informally to measure. As instructional leaders, student achievement is a major focus; however, Buckner argues that placing emphasis solely on test scores rather than improving instructional delivery can be a pitfall for new principals. Principals who take the time to improve instruction will improve student achievement. (4) Problem Solving. New principals should focus on helping others solve their own problems, rather than taking on the problems from various stakeholders. This takes times and coaching skills, but has multiple benefits in the long run.

I believe that Buckner feels that a smaller list of focal points may allow a newly appointed principal or vice-principal to feel some sense of accomplishment throughout their first year on the job and that this will help them lay a solid foundation for them to continue on to a long career. I am not sure if this is worthwhile for a newly appointed school administrator to pursue. The role is challenging, frustrating, exciting, infuriating and more, sometimes all at once. Principals and vice-principals, with the help of other groups, are put in place to help provide an education for children. Again, this is a challenging task that will take on many different looks depending on the context. A scaled down list of focal points may make an individual feel better

or successful in their first year at times, but I believe it is superficial and not sustainable. From experience, I understand the importance of new principals and vice-principals feeling at least some level of success or like they are making a positive difference; however, I do not think that can be prescribed, nor should it be. Often, a first year principal or vice-principal feels successful after running a great assembly, figuring out a supervision schedule that works for everyone, handling a difficult parent, or solving a bullying issue on the playground. All are worthwhile pursuits that most likely help to make the school a better place for students; however, new principals need to be able to make the connection as to why they are important and where they lie in the bigger picture of providing an education for their students. The sooner this realization can occur for principals and vice-principals the better. I am not sure that narrowing one's focus is the best way to achieve this.

McWilliam and Hatcher (2007), Buckner (2007) and Lovely (2004) have similar views when identifying what they feel are important focal points for new school principals and vice-principals to be aware of, particularly in their first years on the job. A focus on "soft" skills such as caring, creativity and communicating early on in a newly appointed principal's career can help lay a solid foundation for future success as an educational leader. In some ways, I agree with their claims. One of the challenges that a newly appointed principal is faced with immediately in their new role is working with a variety of new groups of people including students, staff members, parents and community members. It can be overwhelming. The relationships formed with these groups are of critical importance for a principal. In order to provide good opportunities for children, a principal works with these groups daily and attempts to guide, motivate, influence and inspire them. A principal must also work with these groups to determine what, indeed, is educational. I believe that this essential role for a principal is missing from the

literature provided by McWilliam and Hatcher (2007), Buckner (2007) and Lovely (2004). The failure to recognize or acknowledge that one of a principal's most critical roles is to work with partner groups to determine what is educational is problematic. I believe an individual's emotional intelligence and skill set in relation to the "soft" skills previously mentioned are very important; however, how a principal chooses to use those attributes and for what ends is more important. Furthermore, I believe that an individual who does not have the favoured skills listed by the researchers can still provide a quality education for children. Principals may have the best of intentions and some wonderful ideas on how to provide an excellent education for their students; however, they can not singlehandedly provide those opportunities. I would argue that unless meaningful relationships with school community members have been established or are being established, a new principal will have difficulty as an educational leader. Communication skills and leadership attributes are tools a principal can use but a desire and the belief in working with partner groups to determine what is educationally important for children outweighs them.

Preparing Beginning School Administrators

Attention is now beginning to focus on new administrators to ensure that they are not chewed up during the transition to becoming school administrators. However, "…despite much activity to promote leadership, there exists no consensus on what it means or how best to develop it" (Stack et al., 2006, p. 2). As one begins to wade through the reams of research on how educational leaders should be prepared and supported, it becomes clear that there are a variety of different models. It becomes apparent to me that the challenging role of helping to prepare individuals for school leadership roles should be shared by multiple people and organizations. Stack et al. (2006) point out that "The Ministry of Education, school districts, provincial and local professional associations, and universities all play a part in preparing new leaders" (p. 14).

By using a multi-pronged approach, school districts can ensure quality candidates for new school administration vacancies, and offer on-going support for candidates during those crucial first years.

Academic Preparation for Educational Leadership

Much like leadership, educational leadership is a very broad, complex and widely debated concept. Educational leadership is often lumped in with other forms of leadership. Stack et al. (2006) state that,

> Leadership becomes an attribute in and of itself and little distinction is made between educational leadership and, for example, military or business leadership. The lack of explicit concern for purpose leads to conversations about educational leadership that default to the type of ends that might be defined by CEOs or generals (e.g., Covey's "Begin with the end in mind"). In this way, the ends of education can reproduce business or military values, with little regard for the distinctive features that, especially in a democracy, incorporate concern for the pursuit of multiple, often conflicting, yet equally worthy ends. (p.48-49)

One of the main challenges of preparing new principals and vice-principals is attempting to determine what their role actually is. Educational leadership is not unique to individuals in formal school leadership roles or school management roles. In fact, one could argue that there are many teachers who are educational leaders and some principals and vice-principals who are not. An educational leader creates opportunities for students to grow, develop and discover themselves and the possibilities that lie ahead for them. There is a lot to explore in this relatively simplistic statement. The form of leadership required to meet this end can take on many different forms. From teacher to teacher, principal to principal, superintendent to superintendent it may,

and most probably will, look differently. When developing, navigating, and working within the complex systems of schooling, educational leadership will take on many different forms. Principals and vice-principals are placed in important roles within these systems and have opportunities to help create good situations for their students.

Stack, et al. (2006), in their research of 12 graduate educational leadership and administration programs offered in British Columbia, estimated that there are between 1,200 and 1,300 BC students attending the 12 programs they studied for their project. In British Columbia, university programs are often the first step for interested teachers to transition to the role of principal or vice-principal. Although there is more and more interest for local school districts and school boards to set up an internal recruitment process for finding and training new school administrators, most new hires are from a limited pool of teachers who have gone through a graduate program in educational leadership and administration regardless of proven competency or potential in areas of leadership and management.

As most of the new hires for principal and vice-principal roles are selected from teachers who have completed an educational leadership program, it is important to examine how universities are preparing new educational leaders. Stack, et al. (2006) examined 12 graduate educational leadership and administration programs offered in British Columbia. Their purpose was to explore how BC educational leadership programs determined their program goals and to examine the means these universities use to help individuals become educational leaders. In their summary of their research, they found that dialogue and conversations among the universities and the various educational leadership programs are sparse. Similarly, however, most of the programs examined emphasize the administrative responsibilities associated with school administration, rather than the democratic responsibilities (exploration of what counts as

educational and who determines what is educational), despite many of the universities inclusion

of a moral framework when articulating its program's purposes. Although, Stack et al.

acknowledge the difficulty and, indeed, the paradox, of each university being able to justify their

educational ends using democratic principles, they advocate for a move away from "fostering

educational leadership…primarily as an epistemological matter" to one that "reflect[s]

contemporary democratic dialogue and is contingent" (p. 51). Democratic dialogue and change,

then, becomes an important framework for deciding how to foster educational leaders.

      Democratic dialogue is the notion that all parties have equal status and are engaged in

continual public debate regarding the aims of education. Principals and vice-principals would

make up one of the groups who, obviously, have a vested interest in education. Stack et al.

acknowledge that "such dialogue is rare in our institutions precisely because they are (and, to

some extent, must be) inhospitable environments for fully democratic dialogue" (p. 50). They

also acknowledge that democratic dialogue in a large, complex, multicultural society such as

Canada seldom results in unambiguous ends. They go on to state that "[d]emocratic educational

leadership would involve beginning, sustaining and sometimes temporarily closing such

conversations only to reopen them later. While 'doing the right thing' may be a common mantra

in the leadership literature, the 'right thing' in a democracy is subject to ongoing, exciting,

frustrating, energizing and often debilitating conflict" (p.51). I strongly agree with this claim.

Principals and vice-principals are often on the frontlines of these conversations. They are

interacting with students, parents, teachers and district administrators on a daily basis. Often each

of these groups can have a completely different idea of "the right thing" in comparison to one

another. Principals and vice-principals are placed in a position where they have a lot of exposure

to these conversations, so the decisions that they make can weigh heavily on the process of democratic dialogue.

Based upon my own experiences as a newly appointed vice-principal and principal I believe too often newly appointed school based administrators measure the success of their leadership role based on how smoothly things are running at their schools. The more fires you are able to put out and the fewer complaints that your supervisor is hearing about your site translates into the type job that you are doing as a leader. Programs that focus too much on specific kinds of knowledge, at the expense of incorporating context and relationship in management and leadership issues, do not take into consideration the intellectual and moral dispositions required of school administrators; therefore, a very large piece of leadership goes unanalyzed or explored in today's BC educational leadership programs.

Although, graduate programs in educational leadership are currently diverse in BC, they all, more or less, purport to prepare beginning principals with the theoretical aspects of leadership; however, it is apparent that traditional graduate programs in educational leadership still struggle to help people prepare completely for this critical educational role. Stack et al. (2006) further describe the complexities of the role of principal stating,

> No mantra of "improving student achievement" can capture the epistemological and ethical complexity of a role that affects the lives of so many people in important ways. Addressing even the first of many dilemmas involves at minimum, knowledge of the people involved gained over time, consideration of the different relationships the principal has with students and teachers in general and in particular, the availability and suitability of others to help, and the immediate and long term claims on the principal's attention. Making these kinds of decisions is not simply a matter of applying a general

rule to a particular instance, that is, beginning with ends (however clear or unclear) to determine the requisite means. Moreover, the ends are partially constituted by the particular circumstances, the available means and ethical environment: the principal has to discover the ends by acting, by engaging with others and learning with those others what is the best thing to do. Indeed, in Kantian terms, the others must be treated as ends themselves and not means to the principal's ends. (p.51)

Furthermore, they argue that the call for graduate programs to implement a standardized-certification for licensure of leaders can also limit the democratic dialogue that they believe is essential for attracting and preparing a wide range of competent leaders. The one-size-fits-all approach to educational leadership goes against "a democratic society that aims to promote a range of educational values and practices" and "narrows the scope of the discourse around effectiveness as representing a particular set of skills" (p. 53). In our ever changing society more dialogue, not less, is needed to create varied entry points into school leadership roles, or, at the very least, according to Stack et al., "there is a need for sound research and greater participation of all involved if the issues at stake are to be clarified before a regulatory regime that would close the door on dialogue is instituted" (p. 54).

Most graduate programs, through a variety of course work, aim at providing new principals and vice-principals with the basic principles and concepts needed for their new role. The propositional and procedural knowledge acquired through this process is very important for new principals and vice-principals. My own graduate program experience included courses with titles like: Educational Finance, Educational Law, Study of Organizations in an Educational Context, and Educational Leadership, Counselling and Drama. The courses provided me with a broad base of educational leadership understandings; however, the real value I found in the

teachings was when I was able to apply it to an on-job experience that I previously had or when I was able to further discuss an idea with a colleague in the profession. Having two years experience as a vice-principal prior to beginning my graduate program was extremely advantageous for me and highlights one key area of preparation in which graduate programs fall short: the much needed field experiences that can help new administrators see and work with current school principals on the job (Lovely, 2004; Portin, 2004). Unfortunately, once districts make new hires, most new administrators are left to learn their jobs on their own through the day to day learning that occurs through being on the job (Brown, Anfara, Hartman, Mahar, & Mills, 2001; Holloway, 2004) Personal feelings of inadequacy and the sense of isolation, two major sources of stress for new administrators identified by Lashway (2003), are only intensified by this "learn-as-you-go" approach.

Lovely (2004) points out that most professions (lawyers, doctors, teachers, police officers, etc.) require some kind of work experience or simulated learning before full licensing is granted to individuals. However, when it comes to the principalship in British Columbia, new administrators are expected to "jump right in" without any field experiences. Many stakeholders have a vested interest in gaining and retaining quality school administrators, and as Lovely (2004) notes "university programs alone will never be enough to prepare principals for the day-to-day challenges of the job" (p. 33). Only through experience can an individual fully attempt to comprehend or understand the complexities of the role of principal. As my earlier vignette depicted, a principal is continually making decisions throughout the day. Each of these decisions, big and small, has an impact on how the school community operates as a whole. School related decisions made by a principal or vice-principal also tend to be magnified by other members of the school. I believe that in order to better prepare individuals to become principals and vice-

principals preparation programs need to find ways for their students to experience some aspect of the role.

Graduate Programs that Include Internships/Practicums

Most educational leadership graduate programs available in British Columbia do not include formal practicums, similar to the practicums in teacher education programs, as part of the degree program, but Stack et al. (2006) found that some BC educational leadership programs they reviewed did make "some attempt to provide structured experience or practica in their programs" (p. 52). The only experience I have had in a formal practicum situation was during the teacher education program that I was in. I was involved in a cohort of approximately 30 students and we were all required to participate in a lengthy student-teacher practicum under the guidance of our university supervisor and a sponsor teacher. While I believe some of my colleagues found the experience positive and worthwhile, I did not. In retrospect, I do not believe I matched up well with my sponsor teacher. He was a very experienced high school social studies and history teacher who, by his own omission, had a lot of success in his 25 year career. I did not doubt it. I learned a lot observing his classes. I learned a lot in discussing how he prepared his units and lessons. I learned a lot about the amount of work and effort that went into being a teacher. Perhaps the most important thing that I learned was that simply trying to copy and emulate what he did was not good for my students or for me. My sponsor teacher, however, was not comfortable with me experimenting or taking risks with ideas of my own. I quite quickly realized that in order to have a successful (receive a pass) practicum, I needed to listen and follow the advice of my sponsor teacher and that is what I did.

I was also involved in a more informal practicum of sorts. After completing my first year as a vice-principal at the elementary school, I was transferred to our district's only high school. I

did not have any secondary teaching experience and the move came as quite a shock to many, including myself. I was told by the superintendent that it was a trial. In place at the school was an experienced principal of over 20 years and a vice-principal who had been at the school in that capacity for 7 years. Both the principal and the vice-principal were very welcoming. Each of them made time to get me up to speed, to answer any questions I may have had, and to discuss issues further. They eased me into the role, monitoring the tasks they chose for me, controlling the situations that I was placed in, and allowing me to feel successes, frustrations and failures. This on the job pseudo-practicum went on for two years before I ended up taking a principalship back at the elementary level. The experience was invaluable for me and I feel very fortunate to have had that type of opportunity early in my career.

There are obviously many differences between the experience I had during my teacher education program and the one I had during my second year as a vice-principal. For starters, in the formal practicum I was paying tuition to be there and have that experience. In the informal situation, I was on the job and getting paid. I believe the main factor in determining what I believe was successful was the individuals that I was working with. During my first year as a vice-principal I worked with a very experienced principal, as well, but I did not find that beneficial. It was much like the experience I had on my formal teaching practicum. The key to my positive experience was having the opportunity to work alongside colleagues who I respected and shared similar views on what they believed we were trying to accomplish as educators.

In search of formal programs that offer a similar experience to the one I mentioned I discovered some programs that use practicums and internships to help newly appointed school administrators gain on the job experience before they become fully certified. This enables new school administrators to not only handle the day to day aspects of their new positions, but also

reflect meaningfully on their practices and gain assistance from others who have experience in the field. Bloom, Danilovich, and Fogel (2005) outline a program from the Association of California School Administrators and the New Teacher Center at the University of California Santa Cruz that offers intensive, coaching-based induction support to first- and second- year administrators. The program is tied to the professional certification of new leaders, and has demonstrated that the new principals involved have been more proactive and focused upon systemic instructional issues than the principals who did not receive the support of a one-to-one coach (Bloom, Danilovich & Fogel, 2005; Strong, Barret & Bloom, 2003). All participants have pre-service training in educational leadership, while the one-on-one coaching component "helps participants to climb the steep learning curve that links theory, aspiration and vision to the daily realities of school leadership" (Bloom, Danilovich & Fogel, 2005, p. 31). The coaches, all retired administrators, undergo certification as a School Leadership Coach to ensure quality coaching skills. One coaching participant reflected that his 28 years of secondary school administration experiences enabled him to support and challenge his mentees in several areas, including stress reduction, standards-based instruction, work-life balance, and issues of school culture. The program enables new administrators to go beyond the "sink-or-swim" mileu new administrators often find themselves in and leads to supportive growth.

For some of the participants, the program described by Bloom et al., most likely yielded some of the positive experiences that I had during my two years as a vice-principal at secondary school working with my two colleagues. I believe when newly appointed principals and vice-principals are given the opportunity to openly discuss their work in a safe and timely manner it is beneficial in some form. However, I question how they are able to measure the success of the program. I'm not sure if a new principal who is ' more proactive and focused upon instructional

issues' is better than one who is not. It is situational. Perhaps there are groups in the system who feel that 'instructional issues' are the most important focal point; however, is that focus coming at the expense of other parts of the job. One of the most intriguing part of the program for me is the coaches themselves. As my personal experiences revealed, 'experience' in a particular job does not always equate to being an excellent coach.

Before I went into education as a profession I was heavily involved in hockey. I played junior hockey, received a scholarship to university, played professionally in Europe and returned to coach junior hockey in British Columbia. I often find, even look for similarities in my experiences as a player and a coach and try and use them in my role as a teacher and principal. The amount of similarities between the two amazes me. Wayne Gretzky was arguably one of the best hockey players in the world to ever play the game; however, he had a lot of difficulty translating that success to his coaching career. It is not automatic. My teacher sponsor during my teacher practicum sought out the opportunity to work with student teachers. He felt that he had something worthwhile to pass along to the next generation of teachers. He definitely did have a lot to pass along; however, it did not resonate with me. Perhaps it may have with another student teacher. The first principal I worked with again had a lot of experience and had been a principal for over 15 years. Reflecting upon that experience, most of what I took away was how I would not handle certain situations. I believe that a program such as this will only truly benefit new principals if the participants have a good understanding of what they deem to be important educationally and if they are partnered up with a coach who is willing to further develop their beliefs. In order to be fully beneficial for the new principal the relationship between the two is essential. If the partnership is not valued by both participants it can quickly become yet one more task or hoop to jump through for the new principal.

Regardless of whether or not an educational leadership program contains a component that utilizes field based experiences, the completion of a graduate degree is often viewed as the end of formal training (Brown, et al., 2001). As stated beforehand, once districts make new hires, most new administrators are left to learn their jobs on their own, and this can by extremely problematic for all parties involved. Other learning activities such as professional development are largely left for principals to identify and explore ways to provide it on their own.

Conclusion

I believe that principals and vice-principals have very important roles in British Columbia's school systems. At times the job is exciting, frustrating, draining, rewarding and above all else, challenging. Three months into my eighth year as a school based administrator in Powell River, I speak from experience. I love my job as an elementary school principal. I believe that I am well suited to the position. I love children: always have. I have good interpersonal skills, and I have leadership experience that I gained from a career in hockey as a player and a coach. I have a strong work ethic and I have received good feedback from my superiors early in my career. In fact, at the beginning of this program, I viewed this project as my last "hoop to jump through" so that I could start earning the same salary as my principal colleagues who had completed their Master degrees. While I am still looking forward to the pay increase, over the course of working on this project I uncovered some new realizations that I hope will help me become a better educational leader. Through an analysis of the literature, the purpose of my project was threefold: (1) I wanted to develop a better understanding of what I believed the role of the school principal and vice-principal is. (2) I wanted to describe and critique a variety of attempts being used to initiate principals and vice-principals. (3) I hoped to identify promising directions for the initiation of principals and vice-principals.

A few years ago, during a conversation with our assistant superintendent, he said to me that they (District Administration) really liked me because every time that I had been placed in a new position or a new school they noticed that they received fewer complaints from my staff and parent groups. I was delighted. I took this as positive feedback, something that can be in short supply at times for a principal. Throughout the course of this project I have become less enthusiastic about the comment. It has me thinking about my own practice and my role as a principal. I can put out fires. I have proven that. As an educational leader it got me thinking about whether I should be putting all of them out and, perhaps more importantly, whether or not I should be starting some.

Principals and vice-principals walk a fine line among all the other groups that share in the responsibility of educating our children. They are educators but are not in the union with teachers, they have a responsibility to the board of education and district administrators who they work for and they have a responsibility for their students and their students' families. Quite often there are conflicting views among these groups and principals and vice-principals are on the frontlines trying to make sense out of the conflict. I believe a lot of beginning principals and vice-principals feel that navigating these rough waters and attempting to smooth them out is the main part of their job. Based upon my own experience as a newly appointed vice-principal, I remember how difficult it was to question, even comment on a district administrator's suggestion, even if I strongly disagreed. It still is at times. The same was true of initiating a conversation with a senior teacher who I felt should be doing something differently. These types of situations, these conversations are very easily avoidable for principals and vice-principals if they choose. The day will go on and their schools will continue to operate; however, these

realizations got me thinking more about the role of the principal and the meaning of an educational leader.

A review of the *Leadership Standards for Principals in British Columbia*, a review of current principal and vice-principal job postings in the province and a review of the literature on key skills for beginning school administrators all were missing one key term: education. They use a lot of synonyms for education in describing the skills and attributes necessary to become effective principals and vice-principals but they do not make any mention of education. This realization was an extremely important part of this project for me. What is education? How can one describe the role of an educational leader, let alone try and prepare people for it without that individual having a deep understanding of what education is? This, of course, will look differently in different settings but the key point is that in order for an individual to become an educational leader they need to have a clear idea of what they believe is educational. At first I thought this was too simplistic of a notion. However, after a review of the literature and reflecting on my experiences I believe it is bang on. Within all the layers, interests and agendas of our schooling systems principals and vice-principals must work with their partner groups to determine what is educational for their students. This is key to their role. I do not believe that this can be adequately done unless they have a well developed and articulate belief of their own to share. This view may evolve over time but it must be present, it must be revisited and it must be used as a guide for the decisions that principals and vice-principals make each and every day. Without this understanding it is difficult for principals and vice-principals to truly become educational leaders.

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to become a vice-principal early in my career. One of the reasons I believe that I was selected for the role was because I have had a lot

of leadership experience through sport and I possess a lot of the general leadership attributes that are often listed as being required: strong communicator, healthy work ethic, good conflict resolution skills, etc. While those experiences and skills have definitely helped me in my role, another realization for me throughout the course of this project is that leadership and educational leadership are not the same. There are principals in schools who are strong leaders but I would argue that they may not be educational leaders. This is precisely the main critique that I have of the literature on attempts to initiate new principals and vice-principals: smooth and efficient is not necessarily educationally good.

Unlike some of my colleagues, when trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life I did not aspire to become a principal, let alone an educational leader. Through a series of twists and turns I found myself with an opportunity and I took it. Again, I feel very fortunate that I stumbled upon it. I love the job and I feel principals and vice-principals have a very important role to play in our school systems. This project allowed me the opportunity to research the role of the principal in more detail and forced me to reflect upon my own experiences and my own practice. One of the best outcomes of this project was probably due to the timing of it. I am completing it early into my eighth year as a principal or vice-principal. I believe that this experience in the role has afforded me the opportunity to better be able to critique much of the literature that I have reviewed. I believe that this lack of experience, for many students in educational leadership programs limits their understanding.

I am not overly concerned about the projected loss of a large percentage of principals and vice-principals due to retirement in the next five to ten years. Experience can be good to pass on but just because someone has done the job for twenty plus years does not mean that they have done the job particularly well. As principal and vice-principal positions continue to come up

there does not appear to be a shortage of candidates applying for them. That being said, the job

of initiating newly appointed principals and vice-principals and educational leaders continues to

be important. Due to the complexities of our school systems, a principal's critical role in those

systems and of educational leadership in general, this is a difficult undertaking. Currently, a

review of the literature revealed that education leadership programs more or less focus on

preparing principals and vice-principals with theoretical aspects of leadership and the

administrative responsibilities associated with school administration. I do believe that there is

value in these teachings. Principals use this knowledge and skills daily in their jobs. However,

this project has revealed for me that they do fall short in helping their students discover the

importance of determining what they truly believe is educational. In essence, what the true

purpose of their educational leadership role is. I believe that in order for this type of deeper

understanding to occur, educational leadership programs can plant the seed but new principals

and vice-principals will require further support to help it grow. I feel very fortunate that I had the

opportunity to have a variety of different principal and vice-principal positions throughout my

educational leadership program. Equally as important, I worked with a number of different

principal and vice-principal colleagues throughout that time. I believe that my program work,

coupled with these on-the- job experiences have played a large part in my development from a

leader to an educational leader. A question for school districts may be whether or not they are

willing to work with educational leadership programs and other partners to create better

conditions for this learning to happen more often for new school administrators. Perhaps a more

important question is do they want more principals and vice-principals or do they want

educational leaders?

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