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Learning Today... For Tomorrow

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TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Leadership Capacity

As a proud alumni and a graduate of the College of Education, I am continually pleased with the Grand Valley State University teaching candidates I annually interview. Serving in a small west Michigan district, I am involved in K-5 interviewing, both in general and special education. Grand Valley candidates come to interviews well prepared.

If you pay any attention to the federal (No Child Left Behind) and State (Education Yes!) mandates, you know Reading and Math instruction lie at the forefront of elementary school teaching. Candidates come in with the current terminology; such as MLPP (Michigan Literacy Progress Profile), Guided Reading, Leveled Reading, and Four Block. Yet an all important capacity, a capacity to lead, is emerging as an important factor in teacher hiring.

experienced teachers, feel a lack of confidence and uncertainty at times, as well as reserve your strong opinions in the lounge and at staff meetings.

Reflecting on Mr. Whitaker's perspective however, I saw value in his approach. He further stated, "After all, I wanted my school to become more like the best teachers I hire..." This makes all the sense in the world. Our top performers should be setting the bar and they do! Parents soon learn who the most effective practitioners are and want their children placed in those classrooms.

From a building principal's point of view however, it's bigger than pleasing parents. The challenges of educational leadership in the 21st century cannot be effectively met through an outdated perception of the building principal. "When we equate the powerful concept of

service, even as part-time employees.

In a greater sense, teacher candidates demonstrate leadership within their college of education training. University instructors quickly pick up on students who are positive leaders in their classes: group work, class participation, willingness to volunteer for unique one time assignments. Students should not shy away from opportunities to lead, in all aspects of their lives.

In her book, "Building Leadership Capacity in Schools", Linda Lambert observes, "The school would need a significant number of skillful teacher-leaders who understand the shared vision of the school and the full scope of the work underway, and who are able to carry them out." New teachers should take some time to reflect on that perspective. It seems likely that local school districts will be seeking



Learning Today... For Tomorrow

by Duane Langeland, *Principal, Hamilton Elementary*

In his book, *What Great Principals Do Differently*, Todd Whitaker cites "Fifteen things that matter". Thing # 7 is "Hiring Great Teachers." He reviewed several trains of thought for selecting great teachers. A common one is to look for candidates that are a "Good fit." We also tend to look for candidates that are technically sound in instruction, especially reading and writing.

An experienced principal, Mr. Whitaker takes a different approach, and boldly stated "Wanted: Leaders!" He further said, "Great Principals look for more..., they look for those who will be influential in the school... I sought teachers who could lead their peers."

Quite frankly, I was startled by this the first time I read it. New teachers are typically prone to "submit" to their more experienced peers. You don't want to "rock the boat," come across as a "know it all" fresh out of college. Rather, you ask respectful questions of more

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leadership with behaviors of one person, we are limiting the achievement of broad based participation by a community or society... Leadership is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively (Lambert -1998)."

"Students should not shy away from opportunities to lead, in all aspects of their lives."

So how does a teacher candidate posture themselves as a leader in anticipation of earning that first teaching contract? There are numerous opportunities in the university setting for leadership roles; clubs, fraternities, sororities, dorm RAs, intramural teams. Likewise in the workplace, young people can emerge as leaders in retail, hospitality, food

candidates who go well beyond being the "good fit" that we might have looked for in the past. Be prepared to speak of your leadership history and your leadership capacity. Demonstrate that you grasped a "shared vision" in some previous capacity (work, school, home). Further state how you carried out the related work, responsibilities.

Gaining that first job is a mighty challenge and an exciting time for all teacher candidates. Consider some attention to your leadership offerings as you prepare for those interviews.



Building Learning Capacity in Schools. Lambert, Linda. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, VA. 1998

What Great Principals Do Differently. Whitaker, Todd. Eye on Education, Larchmon, N.Y. 2003.