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What I believe about leadership and education

Abstract

I remember when my mom was driving me to my first day of preschool. I asked her if she would drive me to school when I went to the University of Northern Iowa too? I was going to be a teacher, and I didn't want to go alone. That was about twenty years ago, and my mom kept her promise. I did attend the University of Northern Iowa; I did become a teacher, and my mom did take me for my first day of orientation.

Education is an American value that I feel is one of the most important ideas our Founding Fathers gave us. American education has plenty of challenges and is far from perfect, but I believe it is the best in the world. We may not always have the highest test scores or produce the most engineers, but our country does value education so much it is illegal not to send a child to school. Every child deserves the chance to achieve their dreams and do what they want with their lives.

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

By

Debra A. Kisch

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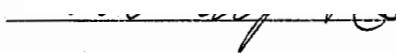
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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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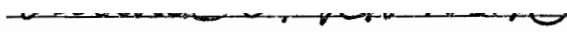


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


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What I Believe about Leadership and Education

I remember when my mom was driving me to my first day of pre-school. I asked her if she would drive me to school when I went to the University of Northern Iowa too? I was going to be a teacher, and I didn't want to go alone. That was about twenty years ago, and my mom kept her promise. I did attend the University of Northern Iowa; I did become a teacher, and my mom did take me for my first day of orientation. Since the first time I set foot in a school, I knew I was going to be a teacher because of my love of children and learning.

Education is an American value that I feel is one of the most important ideas our Founding Fathers gave us. Every child, regardless of gender, race, religion, or socioeconomic status, deserves a great education. American education has plenty of challenges and is far from perfect, but I believe it is the best in the world. We may not always have the highest test scores or produce the most engineers, but our country does value education so much it is illegal not to send a child to school. Every child deserves the chance to achieve their dreams and do what they want with their lives.

I chose to become an educator because I believe education is something one can earn to help in life and never be taken away. My parents stressed the importance of receiving a good education. College was in the plans from day one. I didn't even realize some kids weren't going to college after high school. What else would one do?

My parents also talked a lot about finding a job you love. Finding a job you love was and still is the number one goal. They insisted that without an education, this would be very hard to achieve. Education provided one with benefits, security, and possibly, happiness.

Children are the future of our country. This is a cliché, but it is true and deserves to be mentioned. If the children of our nation are not educated, and educated well, what will become of our nation? Other countries value education differently than we do. Not everyone is educated, or paths of education are in place for students. Gender, wealth, and class determines who goes to school. Not here. We believe that all children can learn, maybe not at the same pace or to the same degree, but every person is an important and integral part of our country.

I had great educators growing up, but my parents were the ones who encouraged me to do what I wanted with my life. I always felt good knowing what I wanted to be when I grew up. There was very little stress when it came time to apply to colleges and decide upon a major. I applied to the University of Northern Iowa and declared my major to be in elementary / middle school education.

A funny thing happened during my junior year of college. Classes were going well; I was earning achieving good grades, and I enjoyed my field experiences. Unlike so many years before, however, I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a teacher anymore. I liked all the other students I met, but I wasn't particularly fond of some of the education classes. There was so much theory and research. I called home and said I was going to law school. My parents said they would support whatever decision I made. I signed up and took the LSAT exam, researched law schools, and read about different jobs available to one with a law degree. I was excited and nervous!

By the time my senior year arrived, I was excited about finishing my degree and graduating. I planned on student teaching, then teaching for a few years, and then go on to law school. Something happened, though; I loved working with students and in

teaching and I felt like I was making a difference. Teaching really was what I wanted to do; I just had to experience it first. I learned that I needed to stick with something to really see what it is like.

I have had some great mentors in my life. They have encouraged me to strive for my best and help others along the way. Good leaders get things accomplished, but great leaders help others fulfill their dreams too. I never thought about becoming an educational leader until my first year of teaching. I thought it looked like a lot of work, but could really make the difference in the lives of a lot of people. A good leader would not only help the students in their building, but also help the staff become the best educators they could be. They would provide good examples of leadership to the building so everyone had something to strive for. They would create a building climate that would be warm and inviting to all who entered the building. Finally, a good leader would possess qualities that would lift the confidence level of those around them, and help others when necessary. In short, the leader would have a good heart, be a person of integrity, and help others reach their full potential.

I know that educational leaders need to have the understanding of curriculum, budgets, discipline, and a multitude of other things. However, I feel that the leader must have a caring heart and a listening ear first and foremost. I really do believe that students and adults don't care what you know until they know that you care. When I see that someone is genuinely interested in helping me, I open up and take their input to heart. I think most people are like this too. Educational leaders must show that they are there for the best interests of both their students and their staff.

Having now taught three years in an urban school that is frequently maligned for its low ITBS scores and poor discipline, I see how important the educational leader is for the school. Educational leaders have the power to help families in need, raise test scores, increase student confidence, and retain qualified staff. Overall, principals make or break the school!

I want to help people achieve their dreams and enjoy the process in the meantime. I want teachers to enjoy going to their jobs and students enjoy going to their classes. I want to work in a building that has a positive atmosphere, student and adult learning taking place, and fun and celebration occurring regularly. I think all of these things should be happening in schools along with the urgent need for change to meet the challenges of the future. For all of these reasons, I am working to become an educational leader who can make improvements and shape the future of our educational system.

The Reflective Practitioner as the Leader of Learning

School leadership has changed from principals being the master teacher with limited duties required to the chief executive officer of the campus. Today, the principal is in charge of curriculum and instruction all the way to management and operations. Part of this change is due to the fact that American society has changed from being primarily agrarian-based to today's high-tech and global economy. It no longer works for the principal to be the ceremonial figurehead of the school.

The modern school leader is now a model for others in the building to follow. Gone are the "good old boy days" where the principal is strictly the disciplinarian or "principal teacher," (Wilmore, 2005, p.4). Today, the school leader is the person with integrity and trustworthiness. They must lead the school community during crisis, have

moral authority for others to follow and hear, and be a strong voice for the children and communicate with all stakeholders.

Elaine Wilmore states that “the role of the principal has transitioned from school manager to the school catalyst for success for all stakeholders. The principal is the primary voice of the school, the main educational facilitator of the learning community, and the person others look to in times of need and crisis. Therefore, school leaders must become reflective leaders to ensure learning for all stakeholders in the school community,” (Wilmore, 2002, p. 19). Iowa’s Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) also support the principal having the knowledge and understanding to develop and implement strategic plans (ISSL Standard One).

First, the principal’s work has intensified immensely because of recent interventions by the United States Government, the public’s view of education, and a changing global economy. “Student achievement is now at the center of national standards regarding effectiveness, or the viability of public schools,” (NAESP, 2002, p. 1). The public targets schools, which in turn, has made a greater focus on teacher and school performance through a range of different measures.

A school principal must be able to gauge their own set of emotions before they can accurately work and help others. Daniel Goleman states that “self-confidence is an inner map of our proclivities, abilities, and deficiencies,” (Patti & Tobin, 2003, p. 16). Is low self-confidence to blame on the failure of innovations to work in our school buildings?

According to the social psychologist Albert Bandura, people with self-efficacy are more likely to have high aspirations and take the long view and set high standards.

School leaders must accurately assess their efficacy beliefs when implementing change.

Bandura suggests that successful people make self-judgments that are slightly higher than what they can accomplish (Patti & Tobin, 2003). If school administrators have high self-efficacy, the sky really is the limit on what they can achieve as leaders, as well as the impact they may have on their school. ISSL Standard five also states that the school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

School leaders must not only have a strong emotional competence, but they must possess other qualities that allow others to see them as the leaders of the building.

Optimism is an important characteristic to model. Principals who model this competency help create a climate that fosters persistence and hopefulness, (Wilmore, 2002 p. 25).

Even if a school administrator does not already possess this competency, authors Patti and Tobin write that optimism can be learned. The first step is self-awareness. One must identify feelings that trigger the emotion of failure or pessimism. Secondly, the leader must put themselves physically in places where good things are happening. If there is a problem, act as if the problems will be solved. Our minds want to believe what we say and do, so the more one acts like an optimist, the more likely the person will become one.

Finally, develop a support group of other optimists, (Patti & Tobin, 2003 p. 25).

“Effective communication is the spine of a caring, supportive, learning school community” (Patti & Tobin, 2003 p. 25). Communication enables people to learn, share, address needs and solutions, discuss the future, and remember the past. The school leader who wants to succeed will learn and model effective communication skills.

The two types of communication are verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication pre-dominantly conveys emotion. This means that the principal must know how to “read” people through their verbal and non-verbal clues. Some important non-verbal clues include proximity, postures, gestures, tone of voice, rate of speech, and facial expressions. At times, the amount of information communicated nonverbally may reach more than 90 percent (Wilmore, 2002, p. 28). Therefore, it is extremely important to pick up on the non-verbal cues thrown out by students, parents, and faculty.

Frequently, educators and parents harp on children to be good listeners. However, this important trait does not only pertain to children; adults must be active listeners too. Listening is an active process that is not synonymous with hearing. During listening, one may nonverbally give responses that signal to the speaker you are interested, reflect feelings to attempt to interpret the emotions being expressed, paraphrase the message so you understand, clarify questions to enhance new meaning, and encourage the speaker to keep communication going, (Wilmore, p. 67). ISSL Standard four promotes the educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Empathy is the ability to understand the perspective and feelings of another person. According to Daniel Goleman, empathy is built upon our self-awareness and self-management competencies so that we must be aware of our own feelings to tune into those of others (Patti & Tobin, 2003, p. 30). It provides a social awareness that one can use to accomplish jobs at the school. The ability to anticipate and meet the needs of

students, parents, and teachers is encouraged by empathy. Empathy also allows one to better value diversity and respond to many of the social interactions that make up school.

Finally, a school leader must be a self-directed learner, which is defined as “intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are or who you want to be, or both,” (Wilmore, 2002, p. 36). A school leader must know what their vision is, know and understand themselves, build on their own strengths while reducing gaps, practice and experiment with new behaviors, and develop supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible, (Wilmore, p. 38).

I think school leaders must first look within themselves in order to work on their own areas of deficit and promote their strengths before they are capable of bringing out the best in others. Administrators must understand what motivates them and how they can implement their vision. Looking to oneself is the first step in becoming a leader who promotes action and change.

The Leaders' Role in Educational Change

“Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future,” (John F. Kennedy). Education is an occupation that requires almost constant change and tweaking. It is hard to imagine a time in which there has been more change in our society than the decade between 1990 and 2000. The Internet was virtually unknown outside of academic institutions, but now there is a rapid spread of high-speed information being transferred in our new globalized economy. *New York Times* columnist and best-selling author Thomas Friedman claims the world is flattening and countries like India are catching up with other industrialized nations. However, it is

clear that schools are needed to step up to the challenge and produce students that are able to function and perform in our new economy.

The cumbersome action being addressed will make for a slow process, and with resistance from many teachers, staff, and other organizations, any change coming will likely take a long time, especially in the area of technology. However, technology is one key that schools must embrace to produce capable young people in our ever-changing world. The task is daunting, but with capable and energetic leaders, it is possible.

First, as a future educational leader, I must be open to different strategies to implement change. Humans as a group are not always receptive to change, so there may be a struggle. I need to understand that the change process is slow, sometimes tedious, and often fiercely fought against. Another thing I think is important to remember is student voices. Many times, school change is adult-dominated conversations that rarely involve student input. Without the voice of students, schools serve no purpose (Rubin & Silva, year, p. 1). There is only minimal research on the significance of "student voice" in school practices and processes, (2003). I would like to find further studies that identify trends in involving students in matters that are important to them and affect them on a daily basis.

According to Dr. DeWitt Jones, Superintendent of Waterloo Community Schools, change can be broken down into five main areas: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action plans. Having all of these in place will constitute change. However, if even one is missing, a change may occur, but not smoothly or effectively. Without a clear and concise vision, there will be confusion among stakeholders. If the necessary skills of people involved are absent, there will be anxiety felt by people. If

incentives are missing, the change may occur, but it will not be done as quickly. If the necessary resources are not in place, there will be huge frustrations felt among staff. Finally, if action plans are missing, there will be false starts.

One of the first steps an educational leader must do is incorporate professional learning communities. In order for this to be successful, the researcher Boyd identified 17 factors that described an educational context conducive to change. Then, Boyd and Hord (1994) clustered them into four functional groupings. These include: (1) reducing isolation, seeking to bring staff together into closer proximity so that interacting and working together is easier; (2) increasing staff capacity using professional development to increase knowledge; (3) providing a caring, productive environment that supports productive work and contributes to the staff feeling valued; and (4) promoting increased quality in the way that staff assesses their work to increase their effectiveness.

Working with these four groupings, there are many things principals could do to promote change. Working on the master schedule to allow common planning time, researching and sending staff to excellent educational opportunities, and promoting a caring school climate would all be effective strategies to implement change.

When change is being implemented, there are different types of personalities that my staff will have. It is important to get staff "on your side" when an important change is taking place. The innovators are the first people to adopt an innovation or change. Because they are usually such a small percentage of the population, it is also important to have the early adopters on your side too. Early adopters adopt new ideas quickly, but only after reasonable consideration (Hall & Hord, 71). Opinion leaders are also

important members to have on board. They are people seen as solid citizens, well-respected, and turned to when expert advice is needed.

When change is in progress, there are many personal feelings that can be felt. These are called concerns. There are different stages of concern people can go through. It is important to assess your staff and determine where they fall on the stages of concern scale. Unrelated concerns usually are not centered on teaching issues. Self-concerns tend to involve teaching, but mostly only affect the one person. Task concerns can happen when there are many things going on in a staff member's life, and impact concerns focus on what is happening with students and what the teacher can do to make themselves more effective. Obviously, as an educational leader, I would hope to curtail other problems so teachers could fall on the impact concerns part of the continuum.

When change is occurring, it is important to make interventions when necessary. Usually, the facilitator of the change provides the interventions. These will allow for the potential for increased success for the change. Examples might include stopping by a staff member's room to ask if there are any needs involving the change, or providing feedback on a new instructional strategy. Interventions will help keep the change process moving along.

Finally, it is important to look for and identify negative mushrooms. It is important to intervene on mushrooms and turn them into positive mushrooms before they become insecurity mushrooms or worse, a forest of poisonous mushrooms. When this occurs, the facilitator essentially must retrace and intervene to "round-up" the mushrooms.

Hall and Hord have identified six dimensions of change for facilitators. Having a concern for others within both informal and formal relationships is important. Getting to know your staff is essential to creating a positive school climate. Secondly, they identify having organizational efficiency. The educational leader must have trust in others. The assumption must be that teachers know how to accomplish their jobs, or the feeling of incompetence will prevail. Leaders must also have efficiency for running procedures smoothly and helping others do their jobs efficiently and effectively. This must be a priority! Lastly, an educational leader must have strategic sense. This includes the day-to-day planning along with having a long-term vision for the school. With all of these in place, the educational leader has many steps in place for a change to occur successfully.

The Leader of Learners' Role for the Improvement of Learning for Both Students and Adults

The school principal is ultimately the leader of all learners, both students and staff. The outside world usually regards the school administrator as being there for the students, which administrators are, but they are also the practitioner that must keep staff current on educational trends and up-to-date on educational changes, laws, and mandates. With new legislation, it is now more important than ever to keep all learners in the school building focused and achieving their potential.

Many times school leaders regard staff professional development as a "one-shot" program. Increasingly, administrators realize the value of thinking about the concepts learned, trying them out, and then returning to the group for more interaction, (Ezarik, 2002). With the ever-present budget cuts, principals must be creative in planning their professional developments to be both informative and financially responsible. Many

leaders look to the private sector to view how “they do it,” and see if there are any similarities. The book *Fish*, by Lundin, Paul, and Christensen claims, “that work made fun gets done!” They claim that morale needs to be boosted in work places all around. This idea should be used for planning in-services for teachers.

Ezarik also suggests some helpful tips for school administrators to follow:

- Understand that teachers of non-related subject areas might still benefit from spending time on an activity.
- Allow staff to take ownership of development topics. Teacher empowerment is essential.
- Use “train-the-trainer” methods. This also saves time and money.
- Find opportunities where incentives are included for participation. Staff receives something, and might learn a thing or two!
- Never ask staff to read professional development that you yourself are not reading.

Many school districts are looking for their leaders, especially their assistants, to take on more leadership roles as opposed to the ever-present managerial duties.

According to Richard DuFour, former principal of an award-winning high school, you must take a “can-do approach” if you want to create a results-oriented system. You must look at your current situation and ask questions such as: How am I managing my time? How can I better delegate responsibilities? Where can time be saved and where does it need to be added? (Duvall & Wise, 2004).

Many principals are also taking the reins in classroom teaching. One interesting example I found was at the Hartford Elementary School District. The district wanted

principals involved in modeling in the classroom, rather than focused on traditional administrative tasks. The school secretary position was replaced with a school operations officer who made office decisions, facilities management, budgets, student transportation, food service and supervision of classified employees that did not require the approval of the principal. An attendance clerk dealt with attendance issues, and a student specialist was essential in working with discipline. The principal was kept in the loop by daily meetings and e-mails. Obviously, this type of scenario is going to cost more for a district, but student achievement is put at the forefront. In this district, principals were given additional hours of professional development to give them confidence and credibility. They now had something to offer the teachers in terms of instruction and learning, and teachers realized they were being held accountability for delivering the curriculum (Duvall & Wise, year).

I think this school system definitely had the right idea. Every school would benefit from this type of operation if administrators were competent in leading curriculum. With budget problems, some districts could choose to implement this type of program at failing schools. This type of modeling would also benefit first-year teachers and keep them in the profession for a longer period. About 30% of beginning teachers leave the profession during the first two years; another 10% to 20% leave during the next five years, and approximately 50% of all beginning teachers leave the profession within seven years (Urzua, 1999). If this trend continues, there will be even more pressure on the shortage of teachers already starting to occur.

Principals must keep current on student learning as well as adult learning. If the building climate is in chaos, learning probably will not occur at its highest level. It

seems as if daily a new learning theory comes out that will be the panacea for student achievement. I think people are waiting for a miracle solution to suddenly appear and fix our educational system.

However, educational leaders must make informed decisions regarding implementation of new techniques. I think it is important to pick a few methods that one really believes in and implement them with your whole heart. Random implementation and staff burnout will not increase student achievement, but instead create a chaotic climate for all learners. It is important to look at the staff and students and create a buy-in for all stakeholders. Change is a slow process and must be handled with the utmost of care.

All of this learning correlates to the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL). Adult and student learning fall under the category of creating a culture and climate for student and faculty growth. Essentially, because it is a standard for administrators, it becomes part of the "job description" of school principals. Without adult learning and motivation, student learning and achievement will never be at its potential. I think the future of school leaders will now depend on instructional leadership more than ever. The days of school principals being managers are quickly coming to an end. Instructional leadership is the future of administration.

The Role of the Leader of Service

I had a principal once tell me that he was there for the students and teachers to serve them. His job was to make sure they were happy, doing their jobs, and basically taken care of. I thought it sounded odd when he told me this, but the more I study the principalship and watch good leaders, I realize he is exactly right. Our job as future

administrators is in the service industry. We are there to serve others, making their needs paramount. As John Quincy Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

Servant leadership is actually a coined term by Robert Greenleaf that emphasizes the leader's role as steward of the resources (human, financial and otherwise) provided by the organization. There is a lot of literature that pertains to servant leadership. However, the concept is thousands of years older and stems from Jesus' teachings on leadership. He sought to teach his disciples that in order to be first they must "wash each other's feet." And again, Jesus said in Matthew 19:30 that "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first," Matthew 19:30, meaning that true leadership was leadership based in servanthood.

Servant leadership emphasizes collaboration, trust, empathy, and the ethical use of power. It is different from traditional leadership where there is a common top-down hierarchical style. The individual is a servant first, making the decision to lead; his drive is to lead because he wants to serve better, not because he desires increased power. From this, there will be an increased growth of individuals in the organization and increase teamwork and personal involvement.

Ten major areas have been identified that contribute to the meaningful implementation of servant leadership (Spears, 2000). Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community all go together to make an effective servant leader. All of these characteristics can be learned and taught to help learners become better leaders.

Listening is important for all people, not just leaders. A good leader listens receptively to what is being said and unsaid. Body language plays an important role here too. It is important to take the time to listen to others showing them you truly care. This leads to empathy. Empathy means showing understanding and caring to others. People need to feel accepted and recognized for their uniqueness. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.

The healing of relationships is important for leaders. A servant leader has the potential to heal one's relationship with others. A broken relationship can lead to divisions within the school and community. As leaders, it is important to remember we are serving others and may need to put our pride away for later.

Awareness helps people understand issues going on around them and allows them to take a more integrated position. Along with awareness, servant leaders must focus on persuasion, rather than on coercion. When an effective leader wants something different than others, but knows the idea will benefit the group, the leader needs to phrase things in the proper terms. An effective leader explains in a manner so that the common goals are clear, or the advantages of doing things a certain way become obvious. You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. A servant leader knows and uses the language of his or her constituents.

All leaders must look to the future and think beyond their day-to-day responsibilities. Conceptualization means seeing the dream come true, possibly many years down the road. This reminds me of being an educational leader as opposed to a manager. Servant leaders need to find a balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day operational approach. Foresight is similar to conceptualization, but helps the

leader understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future.

Stewardship is “holding something in trust for another,” (Block, 1993, p. 7). This leads to servant leaders whom assume first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. This also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion.

Servant leaders see that they have a commitment to the growth of people and in building their community. Good leaders see that the staff in their buildings are much more than just teachers, para educators, or custodial staff; all people have an intrinsic value. It is also paramount to realize that the school building is, in fact, a community of its own (Spears, 2000).

A true community can lead to greater feelings of self-efficacy, which can lead to higher student achievement. I also think this is similar to the hierarchy of needs where students can’t learn until their basic needs have been met. Does a positive, inviting, and welcoming school climate meet the needs of its inhabitant leading them to achieve higher?

Finally, as educational leaders, we must inspire others to service. A good leader knows that they can’t do it alone. A servant leader wants to work with and for others. To do this, a leader must be able to inspire those s/he serves. There are six qualities that are identified to help inspire others. Honesty, awareness, empathy, passion, the ability to overcome obstacles, and a sense of joyfulness. Two of these qualities are previously mentioned. If a leader is honest and up-front with all issues, it will allow others to feel comfortable and hopefully encourage others to follow this practice. Passion and a sense of joyfulness go hand-in-hand. If you love your job, others can see this! The school

climate can be either negatively or positively affected depending on the demeanor of its leader. Staff can tell when the leader is genuinely involved in the building and wants to be there. Educational leaders set the tone for the building and must remember that their body language is heard loud and clear throughout the entire learning community.

Educational leaders are servant leaders. Building administrators need to serve others to encourage a caring learning community. Modeling positive behavior will benefit all involved. The idea of leader as “servant first” can give direction to both teacher and student as they strive to change from a classroom of order to a community of caring, (Herman, 2005). Schools can benefit from implementing the ideas of distributed leadership and the principal as a servant. Distributed leadership empowers staff members to feel that they can contribute in terms of strategic thinking, ideas, and continuous improvement, (Garbett, 2005, p. 29). It is also important to remember that it takes people, not programs, to run a successful school (Whitaker, 2003, p. 7).

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