

REPORT OF A GRADUATE INTERNSHIP ON THE  
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A  
MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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REPORT OF A GRADUATE INTERNSHIP  
ON  
THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES  
OF A  
MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

By

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The internship experience has given me the opportunity to experience leadership through practical participation. It has most certainly been a worthwhile experience. It is a credit to Memorial University's Graduate Program in Education that this option is available.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education is in the midst of significant changes. While the prospect of change is exciting for educators, it requires principals to become aware of new philosophies and changing roles. Success as a principal will require an individual with a positive attitude who is cognizant of the new directions in educational practices, one who is willing to adopt many roles in the capacity of an administrator. More than ever, a more cooperative style of leadership is needed. Principals must become proactive while working collaboratively with the entire school community. Educational reform has brought massive public attention to the education system and educators are accountable for preparing students for the fast moving technological society of the new millennium. One, therefore, cannot diminish the importance of good administrative practices in today's world of education. As Houston (1998) has stated, "Virtually every piece of educational research recognizes that effective schools and school districts start and end with strong leaders" (p.1)

The role of the principal has become complex and multi dimensional. This report will examine the administrator's role in five primary categories as outlined by Sybouts and Wendall (1994), and Kimbrough and Burkett, (1990). They see the primary responsibilities of the principal as falling into five categories: curriculum and instruction; relations between the school and the community; staff personnel; pupil personnel; and the overall organization and structure of the school. An overview of my internship will be presented, followed by a literature

review on the role of an administrator. The third part of this paper will present my personal reflections on my internship experience. The paper will conclude with my final observations on the school administrator's role and responsibilities as they exist in a middle school.

### **Rational for Internship Option**

Memorial University of Newfoundland offers a Master of Education Degree in Educational Leadership which requires the graduate student to participate in an intensive course of study designed to examine the current theories, paradigms and research in the field of Educational Leadership. There are several program routes available for the student to choose from:

- 18 course credit hours and a thesis
- 24 course credit hours and a project, paper folio, or internship
- 30 course credit hours

Although, I firmly believe, it is necessary to possess a wide exposure to, and knowledge of, educational leadership theory, I also believe that some first hand observation and practical application are needed. The internship route offers the graduate student the opportunity to learn how to effectively lead a school. On site interaction with an individual who is currently operating as a effective leader within the education system should provide the graduate with an opportunity to learn the day to day routine of administration while also being awarded a chance to reflect and possibly utilize some of the various leadership theories and practices studied throughout the program.

My teaching career began in 1977 in a rural school setting in central Newfoundland. Since that time I have worked in several urban and rural senior and junior high schools. My initial interest in administration resulted from working on various committees within the education system. Over the past three years, I have served as the English Language Arts Department Head in a large junior high school. As part of the school's administrative team, I have been involved with some very worthwhile leadership experiences in school, and have come to enjoy the challenge that administration brings. Working on school improvement teams; participating in personnel selection; planning and delivering inservice, seminars, and conferences; structuring curriculum; serving on the executive of special interest councils; participating in the design of school policies; and administering the English Language Arts Department have lead me to discover that I have the ability and desire to become an administrator. I believed that an internship with a principal in a school, different from my current school, would provide excellent training. The opportunity to observe an administrative team combining professional knowledge and skills to create a learning environment where children reach their potential would be a great asset in my professional development as an administrator.

### **The Internship Setting**

The site I chose for this internship is X Middle School, located in the state of Florida, U.S.A.. The county where this school is located, has a population comparable to that of St. John's, Newfoundland. The school is large with a student population of approximately eleven hundred fifty students, thirty percent

of whom constitutes minority groups. It houses grades six to eight students and, therefore, awarded me the opportunity to interact with students in both the elementary and junior high grades. The school's leadership team consists of four assistant administrators and one principal. The school has: fifty-four professional teachers; three counsellors; a media specialist; a technical coordinator; a school resource officer; and several secretaries, cafeteria personnel, custodians, teacher aids, and bus drivers.

X Middle School serves a diverse school population where it offers a variety of programs to meet student needs. The academic programs range from a drop out prevention program to remediation to in-school enrichment. The school is also heavily involved in extracurricular activities such as competitive sports.

My choice to complete the internship at X Middle School was based on my desire to observe and interact with a leadership team in a large school in a different setting. Most of the current literature in the field of educational leadership has originated from areas outside of Canada, with many articles originating in the United States. The state of Florida has channeled a great deal of money into education in recent years and has initiated innovative ideas within the school system. I feel this experience has provided me with new ideas for administration within our current system here in Newfoundland.

## Internship Goals and Objectives

The primary intent of this internship was to allow me the opportunity to observe and participate in, when possible, the role of a principal in a middle school. Within the ten week period I fulfilled the following goals and objectives:

1. I learned about the various roles and responsibilities of educational leadership in a middle school;
2. I developed a mentoring relationship with the members of the administrative team through which I experienced significant learning and development;
3. I documented my observations on the specific role of the administration as gained from my many experiences during this internship;
4. I compared the roles and responsibilities of the principal in this school with the current literature research on this topic;
5. I reflected on my current philosophy, practices and beliefs about education and educational leadership;
6. I gained insight into the principal's role in promoting positive relationships among all the stakeholders, (students, staff, parents, community);
7. I observed the varied shared leadership roles played by all people in the learning organization of a middle school.

## Means for Realization of Goals and Objectives

My list of goals and objectives outlines my focus during the internship.

My internship experiences have allowed me exposure to many situations and activities which have enhanced this learning experience. I have employed several qualitative research strategies as means to reaching my goals and achieving my objectives. They are as follows:

1. I made field notes on my daily experiences which provided a chronicle of the various activities;
2. I used journal writing to reflect and comment on my observations and experiences. These reflections served as a basis for discussions with the principal about various questions and issues that arose. Also, both the field notes and journal entries provided valuable information for the preparation of my internship report.
3. Through observing, shadowing, and participating in administrators' daily duties, I gained insight into the roles and responsibilities of the administrators.
4. To develop an awareness of how the principal deals with scheduling, personnel, and various administrative/managerial issue, discussions with the principal, attendance at staff and various committee meetings, and observance of any other administrative interactions were utilized.
5. I was present at, where confidentiality permitted, meetings between the administrator and a parent, student, staff member, or any other

stakeholder. This provided some insight into how a principal deals with conflict and highly emotionally-charged situations.

6. I attended meetings with associations, businesses, organizations or committees that had a vested interest in or impact upon the school. Insight into how the principal builds parental and community partnerships was gained through these interactions.
7. I attended conferences, meetings, and professional development activities available for administrators that broadened my knowledge about current administrative theories and research.
8. I continued to read current literature about the roles and responsibilities of a principal so as to enhance my analysis of and reflections on my experiences.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Leadership

Leadership has received various definitions and has been assigned numerous characteristics often associated with a particular set of behaviors. Lambert (1998) sees leadership as a concept that “is broader than the sum total of its leaders, for it also involves an energy flow generated by those who choose to lead” (p.5). This flow of energy is generated among the employees or staff of an institution or school which then creates a situation where all are working and learning together, practising the principles of collaboration. Thus, as Lambert (1998) further contends, “it needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole” (p.5).

Schmoker (1996) posits that leadership involves two primary features: actions that identify common goals; and actions that promote unity among all the stakeholders in an institution. Tied into the success of leadership is the necessity of quick results or accomplishment of certain goals combined with constant praise and recognition awarded to employees who work to fulfill these short term goals. Sergiovanni (1996) adds support to this perception of leadership when he states that “leadership is generally viewed as a process of getting a group to take action that embodies the leader’s purpose” (p. 87). He develops his definition further by suggesting that leadership involves empowering workers, thus creating a situation where the leader and the followers directly impact upon each other in the attainment of common goals.



Heifetz (1994) adds to the definition of leadership by recognizing a leader as the person who has accepted the task of uniting the members of his community to recognize their assignments and problems, and then working cooperatively to find and formulate the solutions. Leadership means influencing others to mutually agree upon the mission and goals of an organization.

Patterson (1993) supports this notion of leadership when he advocates that leadership is a process which places the leader as a person with admirable personality traits who can influence others and, when necessary, become the follower, allowing others in his/her organization to lead him/her.

Leadership can involve many tasks and numerous skills on the part of the leader. This person needs to be able to work cooperatively with the staff, yet influence them to recognize the collective problems and formulate a set of common goals. The leader needs to possess an awareness of the persons directly under his/her supervision and respond to their needs as individuals, yet at the same time direct everyone towards a cooperative approach to achievement and improvement for the betterment of all stakeholders.

### **Characteristics of an Effective Leader**

An effective school principal is in effect a leader in the field of education. Research indicates that effective principals exhibit certain characteristics in their decisions, discussions, and behaviours. Sheppard (1996) quotes Glickman as saying that “the principal of a successful school is the coordinator of teachers as instructional leaders” (p. 7). He presents LaRocque’s and Coleman’s view of the school’s principal as an administrator who can move beyond the image of merely

a leader of instruction to the individual in the school who can formulate a climate of community, collaboration, and collegiality within the school. Sheppard (1996) concludes that the principal is an instructional leader whose “leadership activities affect student learning” (p. 326). Despite the variations in perceptions, the principal is commonly viewed as the individual within the school’s structure who exhibits “leadership in instruction and curriculum, community and school relations, staff personnel, organization and structure of the school, and pupil personnel” (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). It is through the fulfillment of these aforementioned roles that the principal exhibits effective leadership skills and leads a successful school that fosters improvement and necessary change.

Successful schools are characterized primarily by “collegiality and continuous improvement” (Reitzug, 1997, p. 339). An effective principal would encourage “reflective dialogue and conversations that hold practice, pedagogy and student learning under scrutiny, and focus on student learning and shared values. These principals should create positive climates that promote inquiry and risk-taking behaviours (Reitzug, 1997; McBride & Skau, 1995). The principal should “foster nonthreatening interactions, give teachers choice and exhibit authentic interest” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p.157) in their innovative suggestions for improvement in curriculum delivery to students. Ebmeier and Nicklaus (1999) believe that an effective school possesses four important characteristics, namely “commitment, efficacy, trust, and collaboration”(pp. 371-375). Principals can enhance the development of all these characteristics by clarifying the school’s mission, awarding teachers a sense of control both in their classrooms and within

the curriculum, building teamwork opportunities, increasing conferencing between the principal and the teacher, and among teachers, providing consistent feedback to teachers, being accessible and visible, and possessing and sharing a repertoire of professional knowledge (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999). According to Griffith (1999) the principal places emphasis on instruction, manages the school, and facilitates communication within an environment that is supportive for teachers. Chance (1992) lends support to this vision when he suggests that school leaders should “delegate and empower others” (p. 31). The school principal is viewed as the person who assumes the utmost responsibility for creating a collegial climate conducive to collaboration, and hence, is a promoter of student achievement.

In fulfilling one’s task as an effective leader in a middle school setting, the principal needs to be cognizant of the major transformations currently occurring in the education system. An awareness of new philosophies and changing roles in leadership is essential. Seyfarth (1999) has described the new role of the principal “as a cultural leader and professionalized manager” (p. 22). He contends that within this role, the principal has to manage the many varying cultural groups within one school, and be held accountable to all parties involved within the system, primarily students and their parents.

## **Leader in Curriculum and Instruction**

“Effective instructional leadership by school principals tends to affect teachers holistically, that is, emotionally, intellectually, and behaviourally (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p.156). The principal is a lifelong learner (p.167) and he/she promotes this professional growth and learning among the teachers.

The principal’s commitment to the curriculum, instruction and delivery of varied programs is of major significance. Drake and Roe (1999) contend that within this responsibility, principals must have an awareness of the varying needs of the students in their schools where teamwork among the various faculty is essential to identifying individual student needs and implementing instructional programs to meet the needs of the exceptional child. Within the context of the middle school, the concept of interdisciplinary teaming is the recommended choice.

Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999) advocate several positive effects of this approach seen in the work climate, parental contact, higher student achievement, and teacher job satisfaction. The organization of middle schools into “smaller communities to promote learning where trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for personal growth and intellectual development” was a strong recommendation proposed by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989, pp.36-37). This idea received support from the National Middle School Association (1995). They saw teaming as essential to building community within the school and as an opportunity to provide for integration of the various subjects in the curriculum. Stevenson (1997) defines a team as consisting of approximately 125 students and five teachers from the various

disciplines. These teachers and students spend a high percentage of their school day together. As George, Stevenson, Thomason and Beane (1992) advocate, this concept of teaming has become a highly recognized characteristic of middle schools. In the initial set up, teams should be created with teachers who can both collaborate with and complement each other (Bishop & Stevenson, 2000). The results of a study conducted by Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (2000) indicated that providing a common planning period in the daily schedule was an essential element for team success. Thus, the principal's role in organizing this structure is a critical component of effective curriculum and instruction in a middle school.

In meeting the individual needs of students, the principal has the responsibility of ensuring that students with disabilities and exceptional learning abilities "receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment" (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2000). In fulfilling this role, the principal plays a leading role in ascertaining that adequate staff members are trained in producing and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and Functional Behavioural Assessments (FBA) (Byrne, 2000; Bugaj, 2000; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2000). Given the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which demands that all students participate in state testing and the emphasis on inclusion of all students in the regular school setting, the principal has inherited the responsibility of ensuring collaboration between specialists, regular classroom teachers and special education teachers (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Smith, 1999). These requirements demand exposure to the

prescribed curriculum for all students. In the state of Florida, George (2001) posits that Governor Bush's A+ Program has forced middle school principals to emphasize academic achievement, doing everything possible to raise FCAT scores, thus attaining an "A" status for their respective schools. "Instructional leadership is now a professional survival strategy" (George, 2001, p. 44).

Reitzug (1997) has commented that the principal's role as a leader in instruction is an extremely valuable function. Acheson and Gall (cited in Reitzug, 1997) see the principal as being "responsible for helping teachers develop ... a broader repertoire of teaching skills and techniques" (p. 328). To fulfill this responsibility, principals must possess a current knowledge of instructional practices, discipline tactics, and classroom management skills and the foresight to provide teachers with the opportunity to work together to learn and adopt these current teaching techniques (Bartell, 1990; Keefe, 1987; Little & Bird, 1987; Ubben & Hughes, 1997). However, as McGeachy (1992); Pajak & McAfee (1992); and Bartell (1990) suggest, it is not necessary nor is it a realistic expectation that principals have a broad knowledge of the various academic disciplines. Blasé and Blasé (1998) believe that it is more important for the principal to have knowledge of generic teaching skills found among successful teachers and to discuss these "sound pedagogical practices" (p.164) with teachers in an open non-judgemental manner. Various educators and researchers have identified several successful teaching strategies for the middle school. Atwell (1998), Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy, (1998), and Beane, (1993) suggest whole language, cooperative learning and integrated curriculum

as the three prevalent teaching strategies for middle school teachers. A middle school principal would need a familiarity with these essential strategies in the role of instructional leader, more importantly than an indepth knowledge of the curricula content.

As a leader in instruction, the literature suggests that a principal's primary responsibility is to ensure that the resources and services necessary to meet the demands of the curriculum are available and offered enthusiastically in an environment which places a distinct emphasis on high achievement levels in all areas of the prescribed curriculum (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990; Moorthy, 1992). In the role as curriculum leader, the principal inherits a responsibility to be aware of the district's curricula, and to become the leader in developing a common curriculum that adheres to the school district's educational goals and standards. It is also vital for the principal to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum in promoting student achievement and to implement revisions and improvements when necessary (Glatthorn, 1997).

### **School and Community Relations**

The face of today's community has changed significantly over the past two decades. We see a drastic increase in: single parent families, children living in poverty, child prostitution, violent deaths among young people, divorce, working mothers, and elderly living alone (Koehler & Baxter, 1997). Also, the latest technological advances have prompted young people to decrease the amount of reading and increase the amount of television viewing and computer use. Thus the education of youth brings new challenges to the schools. Koehler and Baxter

(1997) posit that “school administrators must promote input from parents and other adults in the community to meet the needs of students” (p.117). This will undoubtedly mean more parental involvement in many areas of school life. However, as Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) and Nichols-Solomon (2000) contend, time and work constraints prevent many parents from participating in the school community. Yet, as Fege (2000) suggests, it is crucial for schools to go the extra mile to reach these absentee parents as the “customer who does not become involved is as important as the customer who does” (p. 42). Therefore, the school now has a responsibility to identify its students’ varied needs and tap into the community’s resources for provision of such services. Today’s schools must do more than just teach academics: instead they must provide a vast array of services which often involve many facets of the whole community (Sybouts & Wendell, 1994).

Seyfarth (1999) develops this concept further by stressing the importance of involving parents and school councils in the school’s decision making. “For years research has demonstrated that parental involvement is one of the key factors of success in schools” (Mau,1997, p. 268). It is essential for schools to be aware of the community’s concerns and opinions on their policies and programs in order to develop a collegial relationship which will lead to positive parental involvement and improvement of their children’s education (Martinson, 1999). In this regard the principal must also ensure that the staff and students enthusiastically support the establishment of good school and community relations (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). Sergiovanni (1990) suggests that a



partnership could be established with parents where they are viewed as the resident experts on the social, mental, and physical welfare of their children while teachers and administrators are the education specialists. At times, such involvement/partnerships may be as simple as parent input in homework policies. Yet, whatever the involvement, Sergiovanni (1990) recognizes the necessity to guide and train parents as to how they most effectively contribute to their children's education. Notwithstanding the level of contribution, as major stakeholders, parents and the community must be given a voice. As Varner (2000) contends, the voices of all who hold an interest in the school must be heard if "principals are to understand how to implement practices that reflect the best thinking of everyone who has an interest in creating and sustaining effective schools" (p. 31). It is also essential to promote a collective ownership among all stakeholders so as to ensure that parental and community involvement does not simply mean catering to the individual demands of a few vocal citizens where we see the squeaky wheel getting the most grease (Fege, 2000). Traditional methods of inviting parents to view their children display their talents, attend teacher/parent conferences, distribute newsletters and handbooks, use the media to promote positive public relations and the routine distribution of student report cards are still extremely relevant in the promotion of positive school and community relations.(Ubben & Hughes, 1997, Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). The establishment of school councils where members from the community work alongside members from the school community to contribute to programming,

budgeting, and staff development also continue to play an important role in fostering positive relationships (Ubben & Hughes, 1997).

With the increasing financial demands for services and resources, several schools have adopted a corporate presence and in many instances business partnerships have emerged between a school and a prominent corporation or community business. George (2001) reports that many schools have allowed companies to air advertisements or to “monitor student web habits” (p. 43) in exchange for technical equipment and /or funding for schools. The Conference Board of Canada has estimated the existence of approximately 20,000 school/business partnerships where the terms of contracts range from the funding for general school activities to the supply of specific technological equipment and resources within the schools, to professional training for staff (Froese-Germain & Moll, 1997). Wacaster and Blake (1999) see these partnerships as a necessary component in enabling schools to obtain the resources needed to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

Azzara (2001) believes that “the heart of school leadership lies in developing positive personal and community relationships” (p. 64). Recent researchers have broadened the definition of leadership to include references to parents and other community members as well as teachers, students, and administrators (Neuman and Simmons, 2000). Sanders (1999) reminds principals that what the community says about a school is what forms a lasting impression of a particular school among the general populace. Neuman and Simmons (2000) develop this idea further by suggesting that schools should tap

into the expertise, and resources of their community to enhance their development. Fullan (1998) believes that the “out there is now in here” (p.6). Elements of the community at large such as the business interests of the corporate world, advances in technology, parent needs, and government policies have all permeated the school. Therefore, a principal must become a leader who works towards establishing a positive climate where all participants with vested interests cooperate to examine the various issues which arise in any given school, finding the best possible solutions for all parties (Fullan, 1998). Levin and Young (1994) support the necessity of strong community and school relationships as “one of the critical elements of the teaching profession in the 1990’s” (p. 222). Empowerment of teachers, parents and administrators is important to the successful operation of today’s educational institutions (Sergiovanni, 1995). Once again the concepts of collegiality, trust, cooperation and risk-taking top the list in importance for the principal’s role with parents and the community. When dealing with the education of a child, the educator must pay homage to the old African adage as quoted by Van Hoose and Legrand (2000) that “it takes a whole village to raise a child” (p. 37).

## Staff Personnel

The leader of any institution assumes a degree of responsibility towards human resources. Castetter (1996) sees the principal as playing a major role in the recruitment, selection, introduction, development and appraisal of school personnel. Skills in human relations are crucial to survival in school leadership (Azzara, 2001, p. 62). Hart and Bredeson (1996) add support to this idea as their research has indicated principal success can often be attributed to relationships of friendship and trust with teachers and peers.

This aspect of the principal's job requires supervision of staff whereby the principal performs "a general leadership function that coordinates and manages" (Wiles & Bondi, 1991, p.11) activities and personnel affecting student learning. As Nolan (1997), Olivia (1993), and Sergiovanni (1995) contend, a school's leader should work with teachers to improve their instructional practices, with the ultimate aim being an improvement in student achievement. Brundage (1996) posits that principals should observe teachers in their classrooms and as Rettig (1999) suggests, use these observations as pivotal points for discussions aimed at promoting professional growth. In a sense when dealing with teachers, today's principal may become somewhat of a "peer coach working alongside the teacher, providing assistance while the teacher addresses his/her classroom concerns." (Zepeda & Ponticelli, 1998, p.76). The principal is acting as a "coach, facilitator and guide" (Senge, 1990, p.11). Coutts (1999) contends that teachers are the key to student achievement and thus monitoring teacher instruction is crucial. The principal has the responsibility of hiring competent teachers where

frequent monitoring and supervision will identify teachers who require some mentoring in instructional strategies and/or classroom management techniques (Cross & Rice, 2000; Glickman, Gordan, and Ross-Gordan, 1998). The research of Blasé and Blasé (1998) has indicated that teachers who expressed positive views towards their principals described them as being very visible in the school making frequent routine “walk-throughs” (p.105) in their classrooms. They felt the principal was interested in them and their students. These principals were commended for their interest, support, and ownership of the school community.

To help teachers improve, principals should: attempt to keep teachers informed of current instructional trends; encourage the teaching staff to attend seminars, workshops and inservice pertinent to their field of instruction; and encourage collaboration, thus eliminating the feeling of isolation which exists among many teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 1998). Often many resources are allocated to the analysis and development of grade appropriate curriculum and curriculum teacher guides, but very little is directed towards the insurance of the successful implementation of this curriculum. Teachers should be encouraged to dialogue about the curriculum communicating to the administration “what’s not working” (Mojkowski, 2000, p. 80) as well as what is working. Sparks and Hirsch (1997) believe that putting resources into effective staff development is crucial to educational success.

According to Glickman (1990) another requirement of the effective administrator is to establish and maintain a relationship of trust and credibility with staff where a caring, non-threatening environment is evident. Blasé and

Blasé (1998) develop this idea further by advocating that teachers develop a feeling of self and professional worth, seeing themselves as an asset to their schools when they receive praise both publicly and privately from the administrator. However their findings also suggest that “inappropriate or unauthentic praise” (p.126) produces negative results, hindering the affirmation of trust and credibility.

Changes in recent times have indicated the necessity for principals to empower teachers to share decision making. Teachers should be awarded the opportunity to have control over the decisions in areas directly affecting them such as school goals, school policies, curriculum content and instructional strategies (Blasé & Blasé, 1994). Blasé and Blasé (1994) further contend that teachers should be seen as professionals capable of major decision making, not just as employees who were given step by step directions to follow in their teaching performance. Logic will tell us that if people have vested interests in the final outcome of their labours, then they should play a significant part in decisions regarding the means and methods utilized to achieve this outcome. (Chandler, 1999).

Research has indicated that an effective form of professional development can be achieved through teacher empowerment. Brooks (2000) contends that if the administrator finds opportunities for teachers to gather together, and provides them with current professional literature, they will learn, create, and develop. Hargreaves (cited in Brooks, 2000) supports this idea by arguing that schools

should be given their own autonomy, where the teachers themselves decide on their own professional development course. As Chandler (1999) posits, the most effective schools encourage “decision making from the bottom up” (p.118) and as principals when, “we empower teachers, we empower ourselves” (p.118).

### **Student Population**

When operating as a school’s leader, relating to the student population is crucial. Rossow (1990) sees the principal as having a responsibility to become involved in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. Hart and Bredeson (1996) contend that the principal has a direct impact on the social and psychological climate of the classroom that, in turn, affects student motivation and the fulfillment of learning outcomes. Within the education system, the principal also needs to ensure that the legal rights and responsibilities of all students are protected. Ubben and Hughes (1997) support this belief and add that attention should be paid to the special programming needs of some students. The principal needs to ensure the acquisition of all resources available to help students reach their full potential.

The principal must act first and foremost keeping in mind the interests of the school’s clientele, the students. Hart and Bredeson (1996) see the principal as having the responsibility of solving major conflicts among all stakeholders with the best interest of the student foremost in mind. Research reveals that principals impact both directly and indirectly on student achievement. “The principal’s most direct influence on individual students comes from her personal contact with them through occasional teaching and coaching, and through

modeling of particular behaviours in her daily work” ( Hart & Bredeson, 1996, p. 213). Given the large population of many middle, junior and senior high schools, individual personal contact with all students is an insurmountable task. Being visible in classrooms, in corridors, at school events, and giving students feedback on their academic and non-academic achievements directly impact students (Hart & Bredeson, 1996). Murphy and Hallinger (1988) and Duke (1987) lend support to the indirect influence of principals on student learning and behaviour. The principal’s role in the attainment and distribution of resources, the professional development of teachers, the development and practice of policies and guidelines, the personal interaction with parents and the community, and the overall management of the school indirectly impact student achievement.

When interacting with youth, it is important to remember that one is dealing with people. Often, they will have needs which go beyond the academic needs. Before their higher level skills can be used, their more basic needs must be met. Therefore the school system will often have to provide social programs and value education for students. Core values such as honesty, respect for others, a strong work ethic, and good citizenship are important. Students should have input into which values are important in their lives and from this can often have input into a code of conduct which will secure this value system in their school. Hence, the students assume ownership for the school’s code of conduct and consequential disciplinary action for failure to follow this code (Koehler & Baxter, 1997). Sparks and Hirsch (1997) suggest that it is necessary for educators to also assess student academic needs before delivering curriculum



and instruction. We should not only teach the concepts and skills a program dictates, but, also allow students' input into what they need to improve performance.

### **Organization and Structure of the School**

A final area that constitutes a significant part of the principal's daily tasks is the overall management and operation of the school. This section of an administrator's duties ranges from the establishment of procedures and policies such as emergency evacuation plans and a code of conduct for staff and students to the daily operation of the physical plant. Seyfarth (1999) outlines management responsibilities that include: "budgeting; scheduling; fund raising; knowing, acquiring and managing computer technology; and involving school personnel and parents in major school decisions" (pp. 335-336). Sybouts and Wendall (1994) refer to the principal as the person in a school who often has to assume the primary role in planning and coordinating various school activities for the students. The principal may often delegate the supervision to teachers and parents, but the overall responsibility still rests with this administrator.

In this context, principals often cannot exert control over certain factors. As Hart And Bredeson (1996) point out, the physical plant, legal and government regulations, a school and community's former practices and traditions, employment contracts, and supplier agreements are all factors. The principal must manage and improve the educational institution within the context of these established procedures.

Managing the school's budget is a monumental task that presents many challenges to principals. Often, depending on a school's projected increase or decrease in student population, a principal may have to carefully examine every aspect of the school and alter spending throughout the school employing either zero-based or incremental budgeting. A principal will normally avoid the total elimination of a program or the use of zero-based budgeting. The most common practice is to cut expenditures slightly from all areas, using the technique of incremental budgeting (Ubben & Hughes, 1997). The amount of money assigned to schools is usually calculated on a per pupil basis. Extra monies are often allocated for students with exceptionalities/special needs. Primarily, in North America, student population serves as the basic determinant for public funding. However each province and state will have some local variations in their funding policies (Lawton, 1996). The state or province also develops a formula using a student/teacher ratio to determine the number of teachers, administrators, guidance staff, and non – teaching personnel to be assigned to a school (Ubben and Hughes,1997).

The onus now falls on the principal's shoulders to use these funds as wisely as possible to operate the school. These operating costs run from the purchasing of technological equipment, providing professional development to teachers, buying instructional materials, to the repair and maintenance of school facilities. (Ubben & Hughes, 1997). Unfortunately, as we are now living in times of fiscal restraint, fundraising to supplement the already strapped school budgets, has now become a necessity in the schools. Raising funds from the community

is “a necessary evil” (G.C. Rowe, 1999) that has been added to the principal’s responsibilities. Thayer and Shortt (1997) posit that the advent of technology has called for excessive amounts of money for equipment, training, wiring, networking, programming, maintenance and upgrading; thus revenue gained from fundraising products is often needed for the maintenance and delivery of the curriculum. As Greenwald, Laine, and Hedges (1996) contend, “sufficient resources are essential if schools are to provide the educational opportunities we desire” (p. 79).

The principal has the managerial responsibility for both the instructional and non-instructional staff. Drake and Roe (1999) see a necessity for the establishment of a procedures’ manual to communicate effectively the roles and responsibilities of all staff in the day to day operation of the school. Linked to this task is the principal’s role in providing a physical plant which is appealing to “persons working in it and to those who visit it” (Drake & Roe, p.423). The non-teaching personnel play a vital part in ensuring that both the school building and the school grounds are maintained properly and are aesthetically appealing (Rossow, 1990).

The daily operation of a school is a never ending task which requires strong organizational and communication skills. Despite the popular belief that a principal’s primary leadership role should be in the area of instruction, it is the day to day administrative work that consumes the principal’s time (Sharpe & Harte, 1996). The operation of the school facility so as to ensure a safe, clean physical plant, the provision of necessary funds and resources, and the overall

leadership of a school are major responsibilities for the principal in the role of general organizer of a school (Neuman and Fisher, 2000).

## CHAPTER 3: PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

### Overview

X Middle School is an effective learning organization which epitomizes the principle of collegiality in its leadership. This educational institution is managed by a team of professional leaders with the principal as the overseer. Four assistant principals work effectively, side by side to create a positive learning environment where the needs of individual students are given priority, and the emphasis on high academic achievement is paramount in the school's mission.

Our school will provide a curriculum that encompasses multiple teaching strategies, including the use of technology. We will address academic standards, provide various assessments, and promote social responsibility and belonging. (Mission Statement - X Middle School, 2000-2001).

The staff at X Middle School display interest in both curricular and extra curricular activities. Their support of and participation in the many sport and club activities sponsored by the school are further indicators of the school's commitment to its aforementioned mission. This aspect of school life plays a fundamental role in developing the students' sense of self worth and their appreciation for the position,(rights and responsibilities), one must hold in society.

The members of the school's administrative team each perform specific duties paramount to the school's successful operation. However, it is not unusual for one administrator to help another at times when the demand in one person's assigned duties is great. This collegiality appears to exist as a natural

occurrence, a complement to the principal's effective leadership as this type of collegiality does not exist in all schools. However, this type of relationship among the administrative team members enhances the school's smooth operation and provides exemplary practices for the teacher teaming which exists at each grade level.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

X Middle School follows the structure proposed for effective middle school education. Within each grade level, two teams of teachers are created. These teachers teach all subjects to the five classes assigned to their team.

The teachers on a particular team are all assigned the same planning period each day. This provides opportunity for the sharing of valuable information on individual students, for planning projects and activities which may meet the objectives of more than one curriculum discipline, and for the exchange of ideas concerning ways of increasing student academic performance in meeting the state standards. Within each team, provision is also made for SLD (specific learning disabilities) students and for students who do not necessarily meet the requirements for ESE (exceptional student education) identification, yet for some reason they are experiencing difficulty in meeting the Sunshine State Standards. This latter group of students are placed in one class, termed "Alternative Education". Students in this class are usually given extra reading instruction. The identified SLD student is normally placed in a co-taught class. Here, these students interact in a class with "regular" students, yet they have the added advantage of another teacher who has specific special education training. These

two teachers collaboratively teach the class. This current school year, the grade 6 SLD students receive co-teaching in both Language Arts and Mathematics, the grade 7 students received these services in Geography and Mathematics, and the grade 8 students experience co-teaching in the areas of Mathematics and Language Arts. The particular subject areas where co-teaching exists can depend on a number of factors including the co-teacher's academic qualifications, the areas of student need, and/or personality characteristics of the teaming teachers. The assistant administrator whose primary function is scheduling, curriculum, guidance and professional development is the key individual in this arrangement.

This administrator works diligently during the summer months to ensure that all student and teacher schedules are ready for the first day of school. When completing the master schedule, she says, "The master schedule is made after ESE students are placed with teachers and in specific programs where an attempt is made to schedule Language Arts and Mathematics in the morning session." X Middle School is noted as one school in Florida which has made great strides in the field of "Inclusion" for ESE students. In addition to the co-taught classes and the alternative education program, it also offers resource room services to students who do not fit in the regular education milieu, but are identified ESE. These teachers form their own team. An alternative grouping for these students varies from the traditional grade level placement ; instead these students are grouped according to their ability. This may mean that any one student is placed in a lower level reading group, but a higher level mathematics

group. Six teachers assigned to this team teach Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science, to these students in classes where the composition is based on ability, not age or grade. Within these classes, the students encounter various teaching techniques aimed at increasing motivation, yet meeting the academic needs of these students whose needs, abilities and learning styles vary significantly. For example in Teacher L.'s language arts classes, the students move through a number of stations where they are exposed to a different skill at each station for a set period of time. A timed clock will alarm when it is time to move stations. This seems to appeal to the students as they readily cooperate, engaging in the task presented. Keeping ESE students focused on task is difficult, yet this teaching technique employed by Teacher L. appears to work well. This particular arrangement is facilitated by the presence of a teacher aid who assists with instruction at some stations.

The students in the ESE team are assigned to one of these teachers for their Advisor/Advisee (A.A.) class according to grade level. The "Inclusion" program at X Middle School is aimed at providing the students with the accommodations they need and sometimes this may mean resource room and not regular education.

The team approach appears to be a positive aspect of this middle school's program. In a survey conducted this spring among parents, several commented that they liked the team approach. In a school with approximately 1200 students, the task of knowing and recognizing the educational needs of each individual student is aided significantly with this approach. Each team establishes its own



name and identity. Competitions are often held between teams. When students were asked to submit parent surveys, a pizza lunch was rewarded to the class at each grade level which returned 100% of the surveys first and a lunch was awarded to the team of teachers whose classes submitted the most surveys. The structure of each team includes a team leader who is also one of the teachers for that team, and a teacher for each of the core subject areas: Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The team at each grade level that includes the co-taught and alternative education classes also includes the other teachers involved with these classes. The principal meets with the six team leaders once a week after school. Here, any problems, concerns, and suggestions, are discussed. The team leaders then meet with their teams once a week to discuss concerns and suggestions regarding students and the school. Parent teacher conferences are usually scheduled with the whole team during their planning period or before school in the morning. This provides an opportunity for parents to get an overall picture of their children throughout the entire school day in various subject areas. This is advantageous for both the parent and the teacher as both are able to receive a more comprehensive picture of the whole child.

The long term effects of the team approach are also visible in the effects on teachers and programming. This concept establishes a sense of family and community among staff and students. College and high school students who visit X Middle School distinctly remember their team names and will often ask if a particular teacher is still with that team. It gives them a sense of identity and

structure during the turbulent years of early adolescence when students are involved in a natural state of physical change and emotional transition. This approach provides an opportunity for teachers to engage in collaborative planning and promotes the growth of collegiality among peers.

Other teachers who have been included in the grade level or ESE teams are the physical education teachers and the elective or specialist teachers. In this regard the teachers in each of these groups comprise a separate team, which teaches students from all grade levels. For their elective class, at different grades, courses such as Band, Chorus, Spanish, Speech and Drama, Home Economics, Business, and Technology are offered. Students are enrolled in a variety of subjects intended to expand their educational experiences in more than just the pure academic subjects. However, it is important to remember that to graduate from high school, students must pass the state Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (F-CAT), meeting all Sunshine State Standards. State legislation permits schools to suspend all curriculum except reading for any student who is experiencing difficulty with passing in school. Sometimes it is necessary to suspend certain sections of a student's curriculum in order to provide remediation in reading or one-on-one tutoring in a particular skill. Such initiatives may be introduced at any time throughout the school year if the administration, teachers, student, or parent, detects difficulty with any aspect of Language Arts or Mathematics. Once again, the team approach is helpful in an early detection of such difficulties.

In a further discussion of curriculum and instruction, the administrator has a responsibility to ensure that teachers are teaching in their areas of expertise and not teaching out of their field. If such a situation does arise, teachers are given a choice. They may take courses to upgrade their qualifications in a particular field or they may seek a position in their field of expertise. However, the assignment of teachers is the administrator's responsibility. These teaching assignments are made in the best interest of the students; therefore, it is essential for the instructors to be qualified in their subject areas.

Decisions on curriculum are crucial to the provision of an effective educational program. Principal A encourages suggestions and discussions about ways to improve and alter the curriculum so as to enhance optimum performance from all students at X Middle School. The assistant principal responsible for curriculum chairs the School Improvement Team (S.I.T.). One of the team's primary concerns is monitoring how their school's academic performance has improved and then generating ideas and plans for further improvement. This committee meets once a month. Its membership includes the principal and several teachers who are representative of each one of the six teams. Parents are encouraged to attend and when a parent did attend one meeting, the team welcomed him, making every effort to include this parent in all discussions, and inviting him to join one of the sub-committees arising from this particular meeting. The focus for the School Improvement Team for the term was to analyze the school's adequate progress with regard to the improvement of standards as outlined in the "Goal Priorities" section of the "School Improvement

Plan , 1998-2003” and to conduct a needs assessment, partially determined from the results of the climate survey conducted with the parent population.

The administrator’s role in curriculum is extensive, involving many hours of scheduling to meet every student’s specific needs. Each student’s schedule changes at the end of term one. Although all students take the core academic subjects during both terms, this change allows most electives to be semesterized, giving students the opportunity to gain exposure to a more extensive education where they can enroll in courses such as Band, Choral, Spanish, Art, Business, Technology, Speech and Drama. Another positive feature in X Middle School’s curriculum is the provision of Physical Education classes for each student every day. At a time in pre and early adolescence when young people possess an abundance of energy, Physical Education provides an avenue to channel this energy in a positive direction.

### **School and Community Relations**

The parent population can prove to be an asset to any school. At X Middle School parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school community. In addition to the opportunity to serve as volunteers, parents are invited to have a more formal role in the operation of the school through membership on the School Advisory Council (SAC). This council consists of teachers, students, parents, the principal, an assistant principal as facilitator, and community business people. According to the council’s by-laws, at least fifty-one percent of the membership should be comprised of parents and business people. This council is involved in many facets of the school including the

budgeting of school funds. They examine and initiate ways to improve the quality of education, and often provide a strong voice on community and district issues related to their children's education. One incidence of this occurred in March when council members were invited to travel to the state's capital for the purpose of discussing educational issues with the legislators. The county's school district provided transportation as an attendance incentive. Although this council is chaired by a parent, the facilitating assistant principal assumes responsibility for its smooth operation including tasks such as composing the agenda, setting meeting times, and providing copies of necessary materials/correspondence to all council members.

Another area where the community and parent population play a significant role is fundraising. X Middle School encourages the staff to solicit community businesses for possible monies to assist with the various clubs and athletic teams. In February, a large department store chain offered the district's schools the opportunity to participate in a "Charity Sale". Any school availing of this sold tickets allowing people to attend a four hour sale early on a Saturday morning. Profits from the ticket sales provided one hundred percent profit for the school. An administrative representative attended the store's promotional meeting and consequently, two clubs within the school adopted this project. Also, sponsorships from large corporations such as Coca-Cola are encouraged.

The principal has always ensured that the school was represented at any community meetings. When organizations such as the local Chamber of

Commerce wanted a representative at a monthly meeting of its Education Committee, once again, an administrative representative was in attendance. The principal then ensured that he met with his representative for feedback on all important issues discussed.

A vital component of any relations with parents is the reporting of student academic progress. The school devoted much time and effort in this regard. A formal report card is issued at the end of each nine week period for a total of four throughout the school year. At the mid point of each nine week period a progress report is issued. One copy of this report accompanied by a letter is mailed home to parents of students who have received any failing grades or negative behavioural comments. An additional correspondence which may be used upon parent request is a weekly progress report.

A strong component in school and community relations lies in the personal interactions that occur between staff and parents. The five administrators take every measure to ensure that all parental concerns are addressed in a timely, professional, caring manner. If disciplinary action has been taken, parents are informed immediately either by a phone call or letter, depending on the severity of the action taken. If parents have concerns about their children, these concerns are heard and action is initiated to facilitate a solution to the dilemma. When parents express concerns regarding the compatibility of their children with particular teachers, the administrator will usually request a meeting between the parent and the teacher and/or the teacher, parent and child. Sometimes, a class change is necessary, but often the conflict can be resolved through

communication between the parties involved. Every effort is made to accommodate parents, however changes cannot always be enacted as such changes could be detrimental to the child's academic progress. For example a student's schedule will not be altered if the resulting change increases class size.

X Middle School contributes to the community by allowing high school and college students to work volunteer hours, necessary for education scholarships. An assistant administrator takes the time to link these students with teachers whom they can assist. They will perform tasks which range from copying materials to tutoring students. A formal set of guidelines is established and credit is awarded to the students when they follow these guidelines.

X Middle School is a strong component within the community. In various public settings phrases, such as, "We love X Middle School", were often heard. The majority of parent climate surveys which are conducted each year, contained extremely positive comments, especially with regards to the teachers, administrators, and programs. The community feels part of the school as the school has a definite welcoming presence in the community.

### **Staff Personnel**

The principal illustrates a genuine interest in all staff members, both teachers and non-instructional personnel. Once a week he meets with his administrative team, bookkeeper, secretary, cafeteria supervisor, building maintenance supervisor, and resource officer. The next month's calendar is discussed and updated. Also any concerns, questions or observations are shared, discussed and usually resolved. These regularly scheduled meetings

are very effective in encouraging a sense of camaraderie and community among the varied employees. Then, during the faculty meeting, important concerns, and information are communicated to all teachers. Effort is made to keep the staff aware of all major occurrences.

The administrative team has the responsibility for teacher supervision. Each administrator is responsible for the supervision of several staff members. They observe teachers in their classes and during conferencing each teacher formulates a measurable goal, linked to the school's improvement plan, which they are expected to work on during the year. In the spring, teachers will illustrate to their supervisors how they have achieved this goal. The procedures and forms used in this process have been formulated by the Okaloosa School District. Teachers are also required to acquire 120 professional points (accumulated through inservice training and university courses) every five years. New teachers are always assigned a peer teacher who has received Peer Teacher Training as provided by the district. They must have completed this training within the three years prior to their assignment as peer teachers.

Observations of the principal and an assistant principal acting as teacher supervisors revealed a positive interaction between teachers and supervisors. Efforts were made to make the teachers feel at ease and to provide them with complimentary positive feedback. Areas where improvement could be made were indicated; however, the post-conferencing was full of encouragement and support for the teacher. The entire supervision process was clearly communicated to teachers as they all have access to a video on this process.



In addition to the formal interactions occurring between administration and staff, there appears to be a high degree of personal contact and genuine human interest in each other as individuals and not just employees. The principal makes a point of greeting each employee in the morning as he is visible at the doorway and in the corridor as most staff and students are arriving. When a staff member is experiencing personal difficulty (eg. illness, death), the principal may express his concern to the staff, asking them to lend support to their colleague. During the course of my internship, I witnessed several occasions when an administrator halted a task at hand to become a sympathetic listener, provide counsel, or just add moral support to help a fellow educator. On a professional level, advice and action were readily supplied. On one occasion, a first year teacher was seeking help in stimulating interest and attention in a eighth grade class. The administrator immediately took time to discuss this issue and supply the teacher with ideas, and resources as a possible solution to the problem.

A final example of the humanistic qualities of the administrators was illustrated in the principal's approach to "bad news" about the school's budget. In the faculty meeting in March, the principal was faced with the unpleasant task of informing the staff about major budget cuts that could result in a reduction of staff for the next school year. Therefore, he began the meeting with a humorous personal anecdote, and concluded by assuring the staff that they would ride out this storm together and X Middle School would maintain its reputation.

Another important aspect of staff and administration relations is effective communication. This is enhanced with the school wide telephone and two way radio system. Each classroom is equipped with a telephone and administrators, physical education personnel, the school nurse, secretaries, the resource officer, and maintenance personnel are equipped with two way radios. This adds a measure of security and provides a means for immediate communication. These technological communication devices do not replace the traditional means of memos placed in teachers' mailboxes or face to face communication; they merely enhance it.

### **Interactions with the Student Population**

The most valuable resource in our schools is the student population. All stakeholders work together to ensure that the students perform at their optimum level, reaching their potential, and that they become citizens, well prepared to utilize critical thinking skills in making decisions. Therefore, in dealing with students, curriculum is only one aspect of the total picture.

One important element of any school is the provision of a safe and protective environment. Students should not feel threatened. X Middle School has taken many steps to ensure safety. An assistant principal has been assigned the responsibility for building maintenance and safety procedures in case of emergencies. Clear directives are, therefore, established and communicated to all school personnel regarding procedures for crisis situations such as severe weather conditions, weapons situations, bomb threats, intruder situations, accidents, violent situations, disasters, classroom/hallway emergency,

and fights. All employees are aware of their specific duties, and drills are held to practice these procedures. During my internship, the school was in an area that was placed under a "Tornado Watch". The procedure outlined for this type of severe weather condition was quickly followed by all students and personnel. Students behaved extremely well, responding as directed; thus helping to ensure safety for all. Another safety precaution practiced at X Middle School is the request for an identification card for all visitors to the school. Parents cannot check out children unless they have produced satisfactory identification to office personnel.

An added protective measure for this middle school is the active presence of a full time resource officer who is actually a local law enforcement officer. He is available at all times to aid with safety issues, educate the students about legal issues and take a proactive role in preventing violations of the law. This officer will frequent classes to discuss various aspects of the law, informing young people about their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Perhaps, one of the most important measures employed to provide safety is the school's "Code of Student Conduct". To ensure that the Okaloosa County Code of Student Conduct is followed, Principal A has assigned student discipline as the primary responsibility of one assistant principal. He deals with student infractions every day. Ensuring that students obey the rules and regulations as outlined in the discipline code can be an unpleasant task for both the administrator and the student. However, the assistant administrator who has the primary responsibility in this field approaches this assignment in both a fair and

positive manner. Students are always given the opportunity to relate any incident from their perspective. Although maximum support is given to the teacher, the student's point of view is not dismissed or ignored. Teachers reporting students for infractions which they decide warrants the attention of the administration, provide a written account of the infraction on a discipline referral notice. A discipline file is available on any student who has been referred to the administration while at X Middle School. This is very useful in creating an overall picture of the student. The administrator can quickly scan the file's content to detect repeated infractions, particular behaviour patterns, sudden changes in student either in a positive or negative direction, and past disciplinary actions. A student's past behaviour is a necessary consideration before a decision is rendered on any disciplinary action.

Depending on the severity of the offense, a student is usually dismissed with a verbal warning for the first incident. However, further violations of the discipline code can lead to after school detentions, corporal punishment if a parent has signed a permission form, Saturday detentions, in school suspensions, and out of school suspensions. The recommendation of the county's "Code of Student Conduct" is that a student should not exceed ten days of out of school suspension. When a student's conduct has warranted several suspensions, a Functional Behaviour Assessment (F.B.A.) is often initiated. This involves: interviews with the student, parents, and student's teachers; documented observations of the student; and a review of all records and files on this student. Often, as a result of this assessment, a behaviour plan is

formulated which will accompany the student to high school. The written consent of the parent is needed to initiate this procedure.

Another action which is sometimes employed is the placement of the student in an alternate school setting. The county's school district has established the Okaloosa Academy for students with more severe behavioural and discipline issues. A student may be enrolled in the Academy for: serious violations of the Code of Student Conduct; expulsion; incarceration; a felony offense; truancy; previous enrollment at the Academy; and the inability to benefit from alternative strategies employed in the regular school setting.

Sometimes, serious issues are presented to the administration by parents and/or students themselves. Every complaint or report is investigated which will often result in the prevention of a more serious incident. For example, students will come to the assistant administrator's office regarding a dispute they are having with other students or disagreements they have witnessed between students. They are making an effort to avoid any physical fighting or violence. The Code of Conduct sets forth a "zero tolerance" policy for violence of any nature within the school setting. Usually when students are experiencing problems with peer relationships, the administrator will listen to all sides of the issue and then bring all parties together, impressing upon them that they have to find a solution to their differences as they are all students at the school and they need to "live" together in harmony during the school day. This action is often successful in solving disputes, however, unfortunately, all disagreements are not resolved and violent situations do sometimes occur at a later date in some cases.

Overall, most disciplinary action is successfully directed towards prevention of more serious infractions.

In addition to the services of an administrator in the area of student conduct, Principal A has made provisions in the school for three guidance counselors, one for each grade level. The administrator of guidance services has devised a system whereby a counselor stays with the students as they progress throughout the three grades at middle school. Therefore, by the eighth grade, a counselor knows the students well and has awarded a level of comfort to each student. In a large school, it is quite easy for a student to become "lost", yet belonging to a team and relating to the same counselor each year lessens the chances of any student feeling detached from the school community. These counselors provide academic and personal advice to the students. Meetings are held with both the staffing specialist and educational psychologist assigned to X Middle School to discuss any testing or alternate programming for any student. This school also holds Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) meetings with parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators to determine the Least Restrictive Environment (L.R.E.) for each E.S.E. student.

In a discussion of student personnel, the function of extra curricular activities cannot be ignored. One valued and extensive program at X Middle School is the sports program. Many students will register for try-outs in the various sports including football, soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis, golf, swimming, track, cross-country, volleyball, and softball. The school population is very supportive of their school teams witnessed by the many spectators at the

various competitions. Coaches, teachers, and administrators dedicate many after school hours to the success of the sports program. One assistant administrator manages this program which at times may be very controversial as winning a spot on some teams can be very competitive. Membership on a sports team has the added advantage of promoting academic performance as regulations require a student to maintain a 2.0 grade point average and a pass in five subjects. Another positive outcome of the sports program is the building of school spirit. The school holds pep rallies before and after major sport seasons. These are quite entertaining and enthusiastic. The entire student body, teachers, administrators and parents are in attendance to view performances by the band, cheerleaders, and dance team, and to verbally express their support for the teams.

X Middle School offers other activities to meet student interests. One Thursday in each month is designated as "Club Day". Students who are members of clubs such as the Beta Club, the Academic Team, the Kind Club, the International Club, and the Ecology Club will meet sometime throughout this designated day. The various bands such as marching, concert, and symphonic are very popular. As their elective, many students will choose band and/or chorus.

Principal A has also established a voice for the students through the establishment of a student elected Student Council. The executive of this council meets with him during AA on Thursday mornings. One interesting task performed by this council is the choosing of a "Student of the Week". Each team

is encouraged to submit information on a student who may be a possible recipient of this award. The council then votes to decide the winner. One council member goes to a local radio station and produces a short radio clip on this student and X Middle School. This is a great way to recognize students while promoting positive public relations with the community.

In any discussion of student relations, one cannot ignore the informal interactions which occur between the administration and the students. The administration is visible early in the morning, between all class changes, during all lunch periods and after school in the corridors, cafeteria and on the school grounds. They interact with the students in a less structured manner, yet add an element of security, creating a sense of community within the school. Students react positively to the administration's interest in them as individuals.

A youth mentoring program which is operative in the school district, has a strong presence in this middle school. In excess of forty mentors frequent the school where each is assigned to an "at risk" student. These students usually need a role model and friend who can help them meet success in school and overcome obstacles to reaching their goals. A mentor coordinator is hired to organize and oversee this program. Usually a mentor will visit the student once a week at a pre arranged time. This program has produced positive results and holds high esteem within the local community as some businesses will permit employees to spend a few hours of their work week mentoring students.

X Middle School offers further services to students through an "After School Program" and "Learning labs". These learning labs are held by the co-



teachers on specific teams before classes begin in the morning. Assistance with various concepts is given upon student request. Participation in both of these programs is optional. There is also individual tutoring available from high school and college students who are performing volunteer community service. One college student tutors a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student four days a week after school. Others receive this tutoring throughout the school day.

Principal A has given the students some leadership in the school. In addition to the presence of a student council, during A.A. class students in the technology class say the Pledge of Allegiance and present the daily announcements over the television monitors in each classroom. The principal is very supportive of this venture as he has appeared with the students reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and has even read a Dr. Seuss book to the student body on the national celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday.

Every effort is made by the school to offer students a positive experience in middle school. In the spring, the assistant principal responsible for curriculum visits each of the elementary feeder schools. With the assistance of some 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, she presents important general information about the school and its many academic and non-academic programs. Student registration forms are distributed so the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students may choose their courses and register for summer camps in preparation for their entry into middle school. At a later date, students are taken to X Middle School where a pep rally is held in their honor. The school's commitment to its students starts prior to their entry in sixth grade.

## **The Principal's Role in the Organization and Structure of the School**

The successful operation of a large school requires a well organized structure. The administration involves budgeting, scheduling, assignment of duties to various teaching and non-instructional personnel, supplying of resources, hiring of staff, the establishment of rules, regulations, and extra – curricular activities, and the overall operation of the physical plant. The administrative team at X Middle School divide responsibilities for these many tasks.

Each child is provided with an individual schedule based on the team approach discussed in the section on curriculum and instruction in this paper. The Okaloosa District has established a Code of Student conduct and emergency/crisis response procedures that each school follows. The administration ensures that staff, students, and parents are familiar with these policies and procedures. Specific duties are assigned to staff in the application of such procedures and policies.

However the major responsibilities in school management fall upon the shoulders of the principal. He has the task of managing all finances and hiring school personnel. Money is allocated to the schools on a per pupil formula known as a Full Time Equivalency (F.T.E.) where the base student allocation is \$2900. This discretionary budget is to be used for staffing, general operating expenses, and paying substitutes. Approximately eighty-five to ninety percent of the budget is used to pay salaries. The school may also receive some categorical or project money, some of which may be federal monies. This money

is budgeted by School Advisory Council (S.A.C.) for various projects such as educational technology and staff professional development. Other funds used by the school are categorized as internal funds. These are obtained through various fund raising activities such as product sales, various a-thons, and admission fees to the many sports events. Money is audited very carefully with the school employing a full time accountant.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This internship placement has provided the opportunity for observation and participation in the administration of a school. This included the organization and participation in meetings, professional development, special school events; administrative interactions with students, parents, teachers, and other administrators; and involvement in the daily operating routines of a large middle school. Through these varied experiences, the writer has gained insight and practical knowledge concerning the varied, complex, challenging roles and responsibilities of a school administrator.

Knowledge about leadership was gained from the study of current literature on this topic; however, time spent with an administrative team “working in the trenches” demonstrated theory in practice. Principal A at X Middle School was an example of theory in practice. He lead a complete learning organization where teachers, students, and parents were empowered. X Middle School has a leader who employed “the synergy of both knowledge and action,” (Hart & Bredeson, 1996, p.53) in his leadership. He exemplified the characteristics of effective leadership in all areas identified in the principal’s role in a middle school.

When assuming a leadership role in the area of curriculum and instruction, the principal attends to the demands for professional development among the staff as dictated by the curriculum and the teachers. Attention is focused on the provision of the resources and services necessary for the delivery of the curriculum to meet the varied student needs. Finally, it is important for any school leader to organize the school and provide opportunities for teamwork to

dominate the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum and the strategies used for instruction. At X Middle School, effective leadership is illustrated through the implementation of the teaming concept. Teachers are given the opportunity to work collaboratively in a situation where resources are supplied to address the needs of all students, including various ESE students. The principal, with the help of an assistant administrator, designs individual schedules which take optimum advantage of the various programs and teacher expertise. Each student is assigned to a team of teachers, resulting in the creation of a sense of ownership for their school while simultaneously providing an opportunity for parents to connect with their children's instructional team. The principal exhibits leadership through the overall structure of grade level and specialist teams and maintains an active role in curriculum and instruction through weekly contact with team leaders and daily contact with teachers and students.

The community is becoming more of a presence in our schools. Parents and adults from the general populace are encouraged to become active participants in the education of our youth. Their expertise, resourcefulness and enthusiasm are necessary and beneficial to the success of our students. The formation of school councils, allowing the community a significant voice in the education process, is important. Parents are main stakeholders in the schools and they must be heard. Principal A at X Middle School recognizes the importance of strong positive community and parent relations. Parents are encouraged to volunteer, mentor, and become members of the School Advisory Council. They often manage fund raising activities and assist in the operation of

school events. Some businesses within the community make financial contributions to the school's operation. A very open and effective communication exists between the school and parents achieved through a comprehensive frequent reporting system and through the provision of time for parents to meet with the student's complete team of teachers. A genuine effort is made to have a presence on any community based activity or meeting which has any connection to the school. Finally, student achievements and major school events are not only acknowledged through school memos and newsletters, but also through local media. At X Middle School the community is recognized as an essential component in the successful operation of this educational institution

The success of an institution is often only as great as the efforts and commitment of its staff. The principal of a school must show a definite allegiance to the instructional and non-instructional members of the staff. An atmosphere of concern, trust, and collegiality should be established where the staff feels empowered to participate in the school's decision making process. The principal assumes the responsibility for hiring competent personnel, supervising them, providing mentoring when required, and subsequently providing opportunities and encouragement for teachers to partake of current professional development activities. Principals should be physically visible in their schools, establishing a secure sense of support for the staff. Finally, a principal has the responsibility of finding time for the teachers to discuss and evaluate the educational process in their school. The responsibilities towards the school's personnel is a major focus at X Middle School. Principal A holds regular weekly meetings with all

individual student are recognized and accommodated. The school offers many opportunities for the student to participate in extra curricular activities. Sports plays a dominant role here. The principal and the administrative team are very visible at these events with one assistant administrative taking the primary responsibility for the school's sports program. Programs, such as the mentoring system and individual tutoring, are in place to provide extra assistance to students. Students are awarded leadership roles through simple measures such as a student council, representation on the School Improvement Team, and public relations via the local media. Principal A demonstrates care for the students prior to their attendance at the school. All grade five students are treated to a pep rally held at X Middle School in their honor. Added to these interactions the principal participates in various informal meetings each day with the students on the corridors, in the cafeteria, and in the classrooms.

The final major role fulfilled by the middle school principal involves the overall operation of the school. Here the principal is responsible for the school's finances, the provision of instructional and technological resources, the operation of the physical plant, the supervision of students, scheduling for staff and students and any major school decisions. Principal A assumes responsibility for all finances and fundraising. The school has also employed a full time accountant. The principal makes the major decisions regarding staffing, programming and budgeting. Rules, regulations, procedures, and the assignment of staff duties are established to regulate the operation of the school and the school day. Principal A has ensured that safety is paramount and all

school related activities are carefully monitored. The various assistant principals are each given certain responsibilities with one assistant taking the primary responsibility for the maintenance of the physical plant. Once again, Principal A has successfully fulfilled this role in X Middle School.

The principal of this middle school has assumed the multi-faceted task of creating an educational environment which is conducive to learning where teachers work as a team of leaders. The school personnel works collaboratively with the community and all stakeholders (parents, teachers, and students) assume ownership for X Middle School. Despite recent paradigm shifts, where the decentralization of power has added responsibilities to the principal, Principal A has created an environment where commitment to the school's vision and mission, and the demonstration of genuine concern for both staff and students are paramount.

True leaders are not people who strive to be first, but those who give their all to the success of the team. They are the first to see the need, envision the plan, and empower the team for action. It is through the strength of the leaders' commitment that the power of the team is unleashed. The writer's internship at X Middle School provided the opportunity to work with and learn from a "true leader".



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