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The Role of the Elementary Principle in School-Community Relations

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THE ROLE OF THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL
IN SCHOOL - COMMUNITY RELATIONS

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
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THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE PLAN 2
REQUIREMENT FOR THE COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH
PAPER.

Bill J. Ranniger FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not every school has an adequate program of school-community relations; some have done little such planning. Other schools have developed successful community relations programs. Even though opportunities and conditions for providing adequate programs of school-community relations vary among schools, Olsen has stated that each school should have a well-planned program to help inform the public and to secure better public understanding and support (19:335).

The basic unit for public relations work is the individual school. Therefore, the success of public relations depends more upon the elementary principal than any other person in the school district organization. This program usually demands little of the elementary principal's time in comparison with the time given to administration and supervision. However, it is a very important responsibility, and requires careful, intensive planning and execution (12:427).

The principal must keep the purposes of the public relations program in mind. These purposes go beyond selling the schools to the public. They are to:

1. Improve the quality of children's learning and growing.
2. Improve the quality of community living.

3. Develop understanding, enthusiasm, and support for the community's program of public education (4:424).

The significance of a cooperative school-community relationship cannot be underestimated. An understanding and conscientious public contributes to the success of our schools.

It must be understood that no institution in a free society will long exist without full measure of public support. So, this technique for community relations, newly required, becomes perhaps the most important quality in the good school administrator (22:5).

In this study an attempt was made to survey public relations practices for elementary school principals. It was intended to be of value to elementary principals who wish to improve or develop a public relations program.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to determine the role of the elementary principal in the school-community relations program. More specifically, the study considered the following questions:

1. What is the leadership function of the elementary principal in the school-community relations program?
2. What is the relationship of the elementary principal to teachers in the school-community relations program?
3. What is the relationship of the elementary principal to parents in the school-community relations program?

Limitations of the study. A good school-community relations program involves several school and community agencies. This study, however, was limited to the public relations procedures of the elementary school principal while working with teachers and parents.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

School-community relations. This term encompasses all aspects of the relationship between the school and the community which it serves. In this study it will be used synonymously with the term "public relations."

Community. The area served by a particular elementary school.

CHAPTER II

THE LEADERSHIP FUNCTION OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The quality of leadership exercised by the elementary school principal determines how well teachers and parents participate in the school-community relations program. All school activities have significant public relations implications, and it is highly desirable that the principal, teachers, and parents should take part.

Teachers, principals, and parents may well form a triumvirate that will give education a more truly significant place in the structure of good living (3:6).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATION

The elementary school principal must approach the school-community relations program with a cooperative point of view. He is responsible for an efficient program, and it is his job to assure his school and community that the program is successful.

The interests of individuals working with the principal will differ and at times appear to be in discord. Teachers do not always agree with their principal. Students often fail to accept the same value judgements as teachers. Parents resist curriculum changes, and certain community groups make impossible demands. The development of

cooperation requires deep convictions and complete skill of the elementary principal. He must, as a leader, resolve the differences among individuals and help them establish common goals.

The function of leadership is to help provide opportunities for all personnel involved to contribute in cooperative ways to thinking, to planning, and to action toward the solution of common problems. There is probably no difference in the principles underlying the leadership exercised by the good principal and the leadership exercised by other members of the group, whether they be teachers, parents, or children. Ordinarily, however, it can be expected that the principal will be more skilled (6:22-24).

The principal must develop a situation in which people work cooperatively. A community will grow as its members have opportunities to think, plan, and work together. The principal may fail unless he involves the community in the group work of the school (24:22-23). When school members and laymen work together for common concern, a sense of oneness will develop. Many opportunities will arise in which citizens of a community and school personnel can plan together for the improvement of education. School personnel and laymen working together will develop a better understanding of public education in the community (5:37-39).

THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL IN THE COMMUNITY

The elementary principal has an important role in the program by virtue of the position he holds in the community.

Community recognition of the principal for his personal qualities smooths the path to his assuming his role as a community leader, an educational statesman, a democratic administrator, and a successful executive. If the principal is unable to command such recognition in the first instance, his effectiveness in the other capacities incumbent on the principalship will be materially impaired (17:97).

As efforts are made to relate the activities of the schools more effectively to the total life of the community, the principal inevitably becomes involved in a wide variety of social, civic, and professional enterprises.

Participation in community religious, welfare, fraternal, political, and cultural groups will serve to bring the principal close to the dynamic currents of the community's life, and will have the effect of making him more truly a community member in the eyes of his neighbors and patrons. By active and intelligent participation in these groups the principal can enhance his standing as an educator in the community, and at the same time practice and develop his leadership and group membership technics and skills (3:29).

The principal should, however, exercise caution when deciding in which community organizations he should participate.

He should not accept so many responsibilities in community groups that he is prevented from devoting the necessary amount of time to his job as principal. Community and outside demands should not be so great that the principal is unable to give adequate attention to work with his school staff in the development of a better educational program (14:30).

The elementary principal will exercise his leadership in a complex of conflicting social, economic, and political forces and pressures. Much of his success will depend upon his ability to avoid being labeled as a conservative,

liberal, or radical. Without evading important community issues he will make an effort to establish his reputation for being a thoughtful, judicious, and fair individual.

ORGANIZATION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

Whatever plan of organization is employed in the development and operation of the public relations program, certain basic considerations should be observed. The principal should keep in mind the following basic principles: public relations should be based on the desire and practice of telling the truth; the program of public relations should be continuous; the public relations program should be conducted with thoroughness; and public relations programs should be effective (12:428).

The first principle suggests that it is not enough to present all essential facts. These facts must be presented impersonally, unselfishly, and honestly. The rights and interests of every person must be considered in order to avoid unnecessary and unwise injury to any person (12:400).

The second principle, that the program of public relations should be continuous, implies keeping the public regularly, rather than sporadically, aware of the educational program. It should also include keeping the school officials and employees constantly in touch with community and school conditions. It involves keeping the officials and employees

conversant with the attitudes of the public, of organized groups, and of individuals toward the educational program (12:40).

The third principle of organization is that the public relations program should be conducted with thoroughness. In the interests of the children fundamental information should reach each person in the community. Every available and constructive means should be utilized to provide for mutual understanding, create warranted respect, and further the best possible educational program (12:431).

The fourth principle, that public relations programs should be effective, is partly implied in the third principle. Other considerations, however, are also involved. For instance, information should be presented in such a way as to appeal to the persons for whom it is intended. Clarity, definiteness, and an interesting manner of treating every item should be required (12:432).

In organizing a public relations program the principal must have foresight. This means that he must anticipate problems before they arise. The concept of "continuing partnership" is useful here. The public must not be excluded from the school-community relations program (7:19).

THE UTILIZATION OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

A major responsibility of the elementary principal

is to identify and utilize effectively all community resources which are available for use in the school program.

Every community has many resources that can be utilized in the enrichment of its school curriculum. This is particularly important when the curriculum consists of fruitful experiences in daily living. In the classrooms, the pupils study and discuss significant aspects of daily living. Real learning, however, is not achieved until the pupils experience it in school, home, and community under the guidance of parents and community leaders as well as teachers. In order to achieve the results desired in a given school, the educational resources of the community must be known and utilized in the school program (20:510).

The principal directs the study of community conditions. This study leads to the discovery of resources that are available for use in his school program.

Many school systems have made extensive studies of local physical, social, and industrial resources. Files are developed, indicating places of interest which may be visited, the person to contact, the probable age level at which children might profit from the experience, transportation arrangements, the number which can be accommodated at one time, and the hour or hours during which visits may be made (21:122-123).

In the study of community conditions, the elementary principal will become aware of the institutions, organizations, and agencies available in the community. These resources, if used cooperatively, will influence the learning, growing, and welfare of the children.

The school should be cognizant of institutions, organizations, and agencies with which the school can cooperate in the interests of children's learning, growing, and welfare. Churches, Boy and Girl Scout organizations, public health agencies, welfare agencies, service clubs, the police, civic organizations, the education committees of labor unions, and the Chamber of Commerce are examples of such resources. Almost

invariably these organizations and agencies are most willing to cooperate with the schools in giving attention to the welfare of children (4:425).

The elementary principal should develop a set procedure for an efficient community study. According to Reavis:

The understanding should be developed (1) that the total process of community study is distinctly a long range enterprise, and (2) that the survey process is an integral part of the regular educational program and is to be apportioned to various levels and departments of the school over a period of years (20:518).

The principal also guides the classes in his school to make community studies. These studies are part of the educational process.

The chief machinery for studying community conditions and resources as these effect the school's educational program resides in the classroom and its work as conducted by pupils and teachers. Class work is a means for identifying, studying, and using community resources in the classroom and also for interesting class members in studying the community (20:519).

A short account of how one elementary school faculty identified the human resources available in the community is contained in the Thirty-first Yearbook of the Department of Elementary School Principals. A questionnaire was distributed asking parents to specify their special talents, hobbies, travel experiences, and similar information. Parents were also invited to indicate the activities they would be willing to help with at school. Information from the questionnaire was then transferred to small cards and

filed under subject headings for easy reference (9:122-125).

The effective use of resources will influence the learning, growing, and welfare of the children. The elementary principal should be sure all available resources are accessible and being used to enrich the curriculum of the school.

CHAPTER III

PRINCIPAL - TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SCHOOL - COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

Elementary school teachers are in continuous contact with children and the parents of children. Teachers have widespread community contacts as members of religious, fraternal and civic organizations. Because of their proximity to parents and community, teachers have an important role in the public relations program.

The principal must help teachers recognize their importance in the school-community relations program.

The principal should aid the teachers in recognizing their importance in this respect and the necessity for their co-operative planning and executing of the public-relations program. By means of teachers' meetings and individual conferences, the principal may assist the teachers in being constructive public-relations agents. They should acquire all the knowledge necessary for such work. Teachers should have a thorough grasp of community conditions, of the schools' educational policies and program, and of their own school's particular educational policies, purposes, and program (12:432).

Every teacher is a public relations agent, since he directly influences the major couriers of information about the school to the community--the student he teaches (2:316).

PROVIDING FOR TEACHER PLANNING

Providing for teacher participation in the planning and operation of the school-community relations program is

basic. In the recent series of attacks upon public schools throughout the country, the failure of teachers to present a unified front in defense of the schools has been embarrassing. In many situations where the schools have been under attack the disagreement among teachers on major educational policies has provided both encouragement and support to critiques. The elementary principal who wants to develop good school-community relations should recognize that the understanding and support of teachers is essential.

The elementary school principal should take steps with his staff to develop a unified outlook and philosophy of education. Internal dissension within the faculty arising from widely divergent and conflicting educational points of view, or inability of the principal or staff members to explain to laymen why they employ certain educational procedures rather than others, certainly does little to generate confidence in the school and its staff. On the other hand, when parents or other laymen discuss educational policy or method with teachers of different grades and find them holding similar points of view, and able to tell why they use certain educational procedures rather than some others, respect for and confidence in the profession is stimulated (4:430-431).

The principal should work cooperatively with his teachers in planning the public relations program. He must realize that he cannot promote the program alone. The teachers are a part of the program and should be regarded as such.

The best results and the best kind of program will come out of a genuinely cooperative and democratic approach in which teachers and supervisors work for the common good. An effective public relations program cannot be dictated or instituted by ukase--nor can it be run entirely by a central bureau. Its success rests

fundamentally on the degree to which the staff recognizes and understands its duties and responsibilities to the program, and on the degree to which its basic loyalties and convictions have been aroused and directed by the program (1:166-167).

As the principal involves teachers in making plans and decisions they become willing and competent to interpret and support the school program.

ENCOURAGING AND ASSISTING THE TEACHER

The elementary school principal will recognize the important roles that teachers play in school-community relations and will consciously provide ways in which effectiveness can be increased. All too frequently, teachers have been looked upon as individuals who are somewhat removed from the main current of life. A distorted, stereotyped image of the teacher has been formed in the public mind (1:157).

The good principal will seek opportunities to advance the stature of teachers and to increase their effectiveness as public relations agents. He should deliberately seek to create a climate of public opinion in which the teachers' rights as citizens are fully respected, in which there is no restriction on freedom of speech and opinion.

In order that teachers may become more effective and respected members of the community some principals have organized speakers' bureaus and have encouraged teachers to

appear at meetings of various community groups. Many individuals in the school system have talents and have achieved distinction quite apart from their work as teachers. Newspaper publicity and other media can be used to tell the public what interesting and resourceful persons their teachers are (1:162-163).

The principal should exercise leadership in creating conditions that are conducive to maximum job satisfaction and morale as well as to maximum personal and professional growth of teachers.

An important and continuing objective of the public relations program will be to improve both the quality of teaching services and the salaries paid for such services. The need of teachers to continue advanced professional study and the value of planned travel as a means of enriching the teacher's personality will be recognized and adequately provided for. In the development of personnel policies the administrator will be concerned with appropriate provision for sick leave and retirement that are designed to free the teacher as far as possible from the enervating effects of insecurity. The administrator should be constantly contributing to lightening the teacher's load-- especially with respect to (1) tensions and fears, and (2) clerical and other time-consuming work which can be done by others (8:409-410).

To summarize, the teachers constitute the largest employed group in the school and have widespread contacts in religious, fraternal, and civic organizations. Because of this teachers form a most important group in the school-community relations program. The principal must help his teachers become more conscious of their public relations responsibilities.

EMPLOYEE MORALE AS A PREREQUISITE
TO GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS

The principal must always bear in mind that the spirit and effectiveness of his teaching staff in public relations will depend to some extent upon their morale. Poor staff morale means poor staff relationships. Teachers cannot do an adequate job if they have a feeling of insecurity and inexperience. They must feel they are members of the group and have an important part in the group.

Jealousies among some staff members, personality clashes, teachers' feelings of the need to compete against one another in the classroom, the dominating teacher, the inexperienced teacher who feels "looked down upon" by the experienced, dissatisfactions with load, salary, hours, too much supervision, not enough supervision--these and others cause the tensions and gnaw away at staff morale (10:289-290).

The principal may prevent or overcome these problems, whatever the case might be, by examining existing patterns, policies, relationships, and, above all, the points of view of everyone concerned. More extensive participation in the development of personnel policies and more care as to their general nature must be exercised, since the nature of the organization is determined by how well the policies are carried out (16:38).

The morale of the teaching staff may be a determining factor in the public relations program. Therefore, the elementary principal must carefully examine the morale of

his staff and continuously attempt to improve it. Such factors as the following are very closely related to morale and should be matters of great concern to the elementary principal:

1. A feeling on the part of each person that his contribution is accorded merit by the group
2. A feeling that the organization to which he belongs is making a worthy contribution to the welfare of society
3. A feeling that he is becoming increasingly competent
4. A feeling that all members of the group are being fairly treated
5. Assurance that the channels of communication are free and open and will be used in reaching decisions
6. A feeling on the part of each individual that he is participating in all aspects of the job
7. A clear understanding on the part of each individual of his duties and responsibilities in relation to the total work of the group
8. Assurance that the conditions necessary to economic, personal, and academic security are being provided so far as conditions permit
9. A feeling that the administrator shares the responsibility for the educational program with the group
10. A feeling that the administrator considers himself one of the group rather than one apart from the group (18:64).

Good morale is a widely recognized result of effective leadership. It is the responsibility of the principal, in his school, to practice this leadership. He must work with his teachers in providing an adequate public relations program. There must be a harmonious staff relationship in the school if the public relations program is to be effective.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCIPAL - PARENT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SCHOOL - COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

A school's public relations program consists of what the parents think about the school staff and program and how they value them. Parent's attitudes about schools, teachers, and education are vital to the educational process. The elementary principal is often unaware of what the community thinks of his school until some explosive incident reveals the intensity of community feeling.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

In attempting to achieve cooperation between home and school the principal should emphasize the active participation of parents. If the parents have an active part in the school program they will be more able to understand the problems and achievements of the school. They will also gain insight into the complexities of teaching and develop greater confidence in their school. As a result they will become convincing interpreters of their school (25:92).

The elementary principal must realize that parent participation is necessary for school improvement. Parents can help plan the school program and may also serve as resource persons.

Teachers alone cannot improve the school. Adults of the community are needed in planning and to serve as resource persons for classes and activity groups (24:321).

Specific ways the parents can be brought into planning are:

1. Having individual teachers meet with the parents of the children they teach to discuss the program and the growth parents want their children to make.
2. Establishment of an advisory council on education.
3. Formation of curriculum committees that include teachers, parents, and pupils.
4. Creation of lay advisory boards to provide consultation service for special phases of the curriculum.
5. Bringing community members into the discussion of the school budget or other special proposals before the proposals are submitted to the board (24:237).

Parent participation can and should cover a wide range of activities. Needed changes in the curriculum can best be achieved if they are understood and accepted by parents. The principal, with skillful planning and guidance, can involve parents in programs of curriculum improvement without sacrificing contributions of professionally trained personnel.

Examples of this type of participation are: teacher-parent curriculum-planning committees; staff parent, and architect school plant-planning committees for new schools or renovation of old ones; staff and citizen committees on salary schedules; and parent and staff camping programs (23:17).

Parent participation in these activities provides an opportunity to make decisions cooperatively with the principal and his staff regarding school policy and

curriculum. It also offers a better understanding of the school program and its policies.

THE PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION

The most important organization related to the school program is the Parent-Teacher Association. The elementary principal should assist the Parent-Teacher Association's campaign for school improvement and child welfare.

The principal usually contributes to the Parent-Teacher Association as an adviser. He seldom holds a standing office in the association.

Holding no standing office, the principal should assume the role of adviser to the president and to the program chairman especially. Above all others, these two persons should be aided in planning the activities of the association so that they will meet the basic purposes and policies of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. With these officers, the principal may discuss educational plans, suggest programs, recommend speakers, and advise on contributions from teachers and pupils as participants in programs (12:458).

The principal should encourage the formal organization of parents and teachers in the P.T.A. This organization does much for community relations. It provides a natural medium for explanation of the school's program, exploration of new ideas, and normal reaction of parents to the school's program. There is no social or economic barrier to membership; any parent may belong. Therefore, persons who otherwise may be deprived of social status in the community may find a chance to work for school and community welfare (22:83-84).

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The future of our educational system is determined by the degree to which the public will give its support. An effective school-community relations program will keep the public informed about school progress and needs. It will encourage community members to take an active part in school affairs.

It is the duty of the elementary principal to develop a situation in which people work cooperatively. He must become a member of various organizations which will establish closer ties between the community and the school. Organizing the public relations program is a major concern of the principal. The program should be based on the desire and practice of telling the truth. It should also be continuous, thorough, and effective.

In every American community there are unlimited resources that can be utilized to facilitate the public relations program. The responsibility for effective use of these resources rests largely upon the principal. Much of the success of the public relations program depends upon how well the administrator performs this one job.

The elementary principal must recognize the importance of teacher participation in the public relations program.

Without participation of the staff the public relations program cannot succeed. The principal must help his teachers become a part of the community. He must also promote good staff morale, since the morale of the teaching staff may be a determining factor in the public relations program. Teachers must not only be informed about the school program, but must believe in it, and have favorable attitudes toward the school and its administration.

The principal must emphasize active participation by parents in the public relations program. Parents can help plan the curriculum and may serve as resource persons. Through this type of participation, parents will have an opportunity to make decisions cooperatively with the principal and his staff regarding school policy and curriculum. The elementary principal must also assist the Parent-Teacher Association in its organization and administration. He must realize that it is a natural medium for explanation of the school's program.

The children of any community will suffer through lost educational opportunities if the community is not properly informed about its public school system. It is the duty of the elementary school principal to see that the relationship between the community and the school is above reproach. The public should be informed about the school so that the link between the school and community is as strong

as possible, because if there is a weakness it could eventually lead to an inadequate educational program in the schools.

The best schools are those in which the people of the community have confidence--confidence comes from understanding and participation.

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