

SERVICE AND THE PRINCIPALSHIP

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Abstract

This project is a journey of self-discovery to uncover the connection between my own espoused theory and theory-in-action. My theory is based on the belief that a principal is someone who serves students, staff, parents and community and acts in the best interest of all students. This study is an opportunity for me to reflect upon my practice and look for evidence of my beliefs in my actions. The ways in which a principal pays attention to particular components of the school environment will affect the effectiveness of the school. In this project, I examine the events that as school principal capture and hold my attention. Quite often, people in leadership positions can discuss their philosophical beliefs about education but have difficulty engaging in reflection to determine the alignment among the spoken word, the written word and actions. This project will attempt to test this alignment, to measure the fit between my beliefs and daily practice.

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Background to the Project.....	3
Purpose and Focus of the Project.....	5
Review of the Literature.....	8
Methodology.....	32
Beliefs	39
Environment	41
Critical Events	
Critical Event No. 1.....	45
Reflection on Critical Event No. 1	53
Critical Event No. 2.....	59
Reflection on Critical Event No. 2	64
Critical Event No. 3.....	74
Reflection on Critical Event No. 3	84
Critical Event No. 4.....	87
Reflection on Critical Event No. 4	93
Findings	98
References	104

Background to the Project

In 1981, I was working as youth worker in an alternative school setting in northern British Columbia. Little did I know at the time that the experiences I would have in this role would shape my future and mark the beginning of a journey that I continue on to this day. As a youth worker, I quickly discovered I had much to learn. I did not realize then that the young people I had the privilege of working with would be my teachers. I not only learned about the young people, I discovered things about myself. It was a reciprocal relationship where I was able to grow and, at the same time, help others.

In 1990, I would find myself as the teacher in the same alternative program where I had been a youth worker. For the past three years, I have been the principal of both the alternative program and the adjoining high school. Throughout the many transitions that have occurred from youth worker to principal, I am mindful of my growth in a number of areas. Personally, I believe there have been changes in title, but I have remained true to my early beliefs about people and the role of schools.

Above all, I believe the positions I have held are about serving others. As a youth worker, I served the students, their families and the community. My purpose was to assist these young people to develop the awareness necessary for them to lead fulfilling lives; to dare to dream and believe their dreams could come true; and to have a sense of hope for the present and the future. As a teacher, my responsibilities increased. My role was to continue to serve as I had in the past but now there were added duties. I was responsible not only for students' social and emotional growth but also for their academic development.

As a principal, I was still responsible for serving those I had been serving up to this time but now I was also responsible for serving my colleagues. My role was to help create the learning environment that would best serve students, staff and community. I was aware that the educational leadership I provided would influence the culture of the school. School culture has become an area of special interest for me. The culture of the school consists of all the visible and invisible forces that are at work within the building. It is made up of norms, values and traditions, and it is the sense one has of the climate when first entering the environment. All members of the school community contribute to the establishment of the culture. I believe I bring strong beliefs about the significance of education to Chetwynd Secondary. I value education and believe it plays a crucial role in society. Education offers students opportunities and choices. I bring this perspective to my role and share it with others. I have a belief system that I believe guides my practice; however, I need to gather evidence to determine if this is true.

“The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands but in seeing with new eyes.”

- Marcel Proust

Purpose and Focus of the Project

The purpose of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of my professional practice. By critically examining the duties I perform and policies I support I intended to develop an understanding of my role and its relationship to my beliefs. This project has assisted me to become clearer about who I serve in my role as a high school principal. In addition, this study has also provided an avenue through which I was able to examine the relationship between school culture and leadership. The examination of school culture provided additional information that helped me to determine who was being served in the school community. As I searched for a place to start the project, my mind attempted to organize conflicting information into something meaningful. By keeping a journal and creating a series of vignettes from my experiences, I have been able to look for connections between my actions and my belief statements. In particular, I have searched for congruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use.

My initial interest in this project arose from a conversation with a professor during a summer session held in Dawson Creek. I enrolled in an educational leadership course during the summer of 2000, and the discussion focused on the role institutions play in maintaining the current social system. When I protested and stated I was not part of this system, the professor stated that I had signed on and therefore agreed to play the game by the rules dictated by the system of the day. I became indignant and decided this professor was naïve. He did not realize I was in my role to make a difference and change the world. I replay this conversation repeatedly and the time has come for me to step back to examine the role I am playing. Whom am I serving?

I have difficulty believing that my job is to maintain the social structure of the day. I believe my job is to enable all individuals to reach their potential and this is achievable by helping people discover their gifts and develop a heightened sense of awareness. Student achievement is my main focus. I believe it is the reason schools exist. Certain conditions promote this. I claim student achievement, measured in a variety of ways through a number of opportunities, drives the decisions I make. Having said this I am declaring that I believe the decisions I make pertaining to budget, staffing, instructional and assessment practices, codes of conduct and human interactions involving both staff and students are all viewed through the lens of student achievement. Achievement refers to the growth and development of the individual in the social, emotional and academic domains. Like Van Manen (1991) I believe “we have to be able to help the child grow up and give shape to life by learning what is worthwhile knowing and becoming” (p. 32).

By engaging in reflection that examines the alignment between espoused theory and theory-in-use, I believed, I would be able to increase my ability to serve students. As I engaged in critical reflection, I sought to uncover what it meant to me to be a principal.

When I was planning my project I had a clear picture of what I hoped to accomplish. I asked myself a number of questions:

1. What is it like to be a principal?
2. What does it mean to be a principal?
3. What is my espoused theory?
4. What is my theory-in-action and does it fit with my espoused theory?
5. What are my beliefs about the purpose of education?

While these questions were embedded in the inquiry I set out to complete, my focus was on identifying whom I serve and determining if my actions aligned with my beliefs.

Review of the Literature

Literature proclaiming the importance of the role of the principal and the role of school in society continues to identify several recurring themes. I have been introduced to numerous authors and leaders in the field and come to this project realizing there are those who affirm my beliefs and those who challenge them. Authors addressing issues relating to leadership, school culture and social transformation have influenced my beliefs and have caused me to reflect upon my practice. The long standing writings of Dewey and others in the Progressive Education movement remain a driving force and remind me that the pendulum continues to swing from one extreme to the other, as it has throughout the history of public education. This literature review is not an exhaustive list of authors; nor does it include all the initiatives proclaimed from time to time as key to school reform. However, it does represent a substantial cross-section of many different schools of thought, action, and practice.

The menu or blueprint approach that guarantees effective leadership and school improvement is one that is prevalent in the literature on education. For some educators, an understanding of an effective leader or school is reducible to a list of characteristics, policies or practices where one only needs to complete a checklist to determine their absence or presence. This approach works in a similar fashion to menu planning, where the chef compares a list of ingredients to the supplies on hand and simply purchases those missing. The information these authors provide can be helpful, but a cookie-cutter approach is not sufficient. My quest is always to further my understanding based on lived experience. The menu approach, that does not account for the context of each unique

situation and attempts to reduce each situation to a simplistic sequence of events, or characteristics, leaves me feeling empty, detached and segmented.

In my own writing, I have often compared education metaphorically to a large body of water with a number of feeder streams and tributaries. Some streams have very specific characteristics while others merge before entering the larger pool. It is a collection of many tributaries and larger, deeper pools that can be put in motion by the various forces of nature. Education is a collection of thoughts and beliefs that manifest into policies and procedures that can change based on the political climate. Some of the authors I refer to share an underlying philosophy of education and represent the streams that merge and travel in the same direction. Others are more specific and focus only on certain aspects of education and social conditions. They are the streams that carve out their own path and, upon entering into the larger pool, act as a current that is experienced according to proximity.

Education is about being with others, and establishing relationships. Aoki (2000), at the Writing Teachers' Lives symposium in Lethbridge, so eloquently captured my intention when I heard him say the goal is "to live well and to live well with others." As I strive to get to the heart of pedagogy, I must look below the surface of appearance and observable behaviours to find the meaning, and develop an understanding of practice in action. A study of lived experience provides an opportunity to engage in a search that will move me, the inquirer, to thoughtfulness. Van Manen (1990) writes extensively on this topic and provides insight into the importance of reflection, thoughtfulness and tact. Van Manen also points to the importance of stance, where we position ourselves while we are engaging in the search for deeper understanding. Aoki (1989) speaks about location in

space as an aspect of which we continually need to be aware. He suggests we should be mindful of its significance in terms of our sense making. For the purpose of this project, the literature review serves as a guide as I journey to make sense of my experiences and writings. I use the word *guide* intentionally as the sense making I hope to achieve is my own. The idea of “guiding” is to point out, and draw attention to interesting sights on the journey. As I share and make explicit my understanding, it is my hope that others will see their own practice reflected in the writing and be encouraged to reflect upon their actions. I hope, for example, that the understanding principals achieve through reflecting upon their practice will guide discussions at principals’ meetings. I can only imagine the rich conversations that could replace the hours spent on policies and regulations. They could transform principals’ meeting from business meetings to opportunities for principals to come together to share and learn from each other. I want to inspire others to embark on a journey of self-discovery and see the world of possibilities.

Deal and Peterson (1998) direct attention to the crucial role school culture plays in any educational institution. They state that for a school to be focused on the learning and achievement of students and staff, the attributes that shape and drive the institution need to be identified and maintained by principals, teachers and parents. These attributes cannot be assumed or inferred. They need to be explicit and evident in all aspects of the institution. For example, decisions should be made based on the needs of the students and not primarily to simplify the lives or workload of the staff. Deal and Peterson state culture is “one of the most significant aspects of any educational enterprise” (p. 1). Culture is the “underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions and rituals” (p. 1). Culture influences the attention given to student learning, instructional practices and

attitudes to change “where the informal network of storytellers, heroes, and heroines provides a social web of information, support and history” (p. 2). Deal and Peterson (1998) state that “principals communicate core values in their everyday work” (p. 3) and “leaders come from many sources” (p. 2). Leadership is not reserved for the principal; it is shared amongst staff, students, parents and community members. School culture is the glue that holds a school together and often consists of the unspoken and informal expectations that exist within the building.

Deal and Peterson (1998) describe the aspects of a positive culture as, “a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn” (p. 2). A visitor to a school with such a culture would witness “a shared sense of purpose, collegiality, attention to improvement and hard work” (p. 2). A positive school culture must be built on serving students, as well as adults. The authors refer to “something special and undefined” in the schools they visit and the role principals, teachers and parents play in “building positive culture” (p. 1). Success, joy and humour abound in a school where a strong, positive culture exists.

Roland Barth (2001) describes the importance of leadership and learning as the cornerstones of the entire building. Barth defines the term *educator* as one whose “primary responsibility is to promote learning in others and us” (p. 1). He asks educators to “examine every decision, practise and policy to find what, if anything, is anyone learning as a consequence of these” (p. 1). Barth identifies learning as the pivotal element of schools and discusses the role of each participant of the school environment in the context of learning. Barth (2001) describes all members of the school community as learners who are actively continuing to learn and points to the problems associated with

those who believe they have learned and have reached the end of the journey. He refers to these individuals as “at-risk learners” and points to the strong correlation between risk-taking and learning.

Barth (2001) focuses on the importance of modelling and begins by identifying the principal as the head learner. Principals must be willing to go wherever they expect their staff and students to go. As Barth says, “you can’t lead where you won’t go” (p. 2). To this extent, he assigns the role of “leading learner” to both teachers and principals as necessary to the cultivation of a community of life long learners (p. 2). “Improving schools without learning is an oxymoron,” (p. 2) he contends. Barth cites Ron Edmonds’ statement that “all children can learn” and he broadens this claim to include teachers and principals (p. 3).

Barth (2001) writes at length about the importance of vision as a fundamental element of school culture, one that provides direction and communicates a shared purpose.

It is an overall conception of what educators want their school to stand for, a map revealing how all the parts fit together and, above all, just how the vision of each individual is related to the collective vision of the organization. (p. 204)

A vision also provides a sense of hope and anticipation of what could be.

Collegiality is critical to the attainment of a shared vision and needs to be evident in the daily interactions of school staff. An example of this would be a school where staff members are actively discussing their practice, sharing knowledge of craft, observing each other, and entering into coaching relationships for the purpose of professional development.

Diversity is yet another important factor in the effectiveness of schools. Whenever we assemble people in the manner that occurs in the case of school, diversity will be present. How we respond to diversity is what matters. Diversity offers possibilities for new insights and fertile ground for learning. Barth (2001) asks the question, “How can we make conscious, deliberate use of differences in social class, gender, age, ability, race and interest as resources for learning?” (p. 7). Differences create opportunities for new learning as they allow us to broaden our view of the world and extend our thinking. Differences offer an added dimension to the texture of the fabric that is not present in an environment of sameness. Barth (2001) says, “What is important about people—and about schools—is what is different, not what is the same” (p. 7).

In addition to diversity, Barth (2001) adds humour to the mix of ingredients that promote learning. A final feature that Barth brings to the foreground is the tension that exists between anxiety and standards. The pairing of these two conditions produces the following series of possible combinations, high anxiety and high standards, low anxiety and low standards, and high anxiety and low standards. Barth contends the “condition of modest anxiety and high standards is the hardest to attain and least often seen” but the one that holds the greatest potential for learning (p. 8).

Improving School from Within is Barth’s (1990) comprehensive account of the hope he holds for schools and learners. He draws attention to the importance of collegial relationships and defines the school as a community of learners. He expands on this premise as he assigns each sub-group of school population the role of learner and leader. While Barth includes various other conditions that he claims will lead to school improvement, he highlights the importance of a shared vision if a school is to meet the

challenges in our changing world. “In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists” (p. 2).

Sergiovanni (1999) shares some of the same opinions as Barth. In particular, he supports the need for community and character in schools, noting “the principal’s greatest challenge and primary responsibility is to develop a caring community in the school, a place where strong character emerges from a shared purpose that allows and encourages students to be successful learners” (p. 1). He recognizes that individuality, the need for connection, and interdependence are all critical dimensions of a caring community. When they all come together, in a state where individuality is safeguarded, “civic virtue” thrives. According to Sergiovanni, “civic virtue calls on us to willingly sacrifice our self-interest for the common good” (p. 1). It is about a calling to serve, bringing all participants together, and it is through this coming together and shared purpose that a common good surfaces.

For Sergiovanni (1999), building community is not sufficient. He maintains that educators have an obligation to love their students unconditionally and accept them unconditionally. He also states that students need to love each other. Unconditional acceptance and love will lead us to a caring and respectful community and this, in turn, will create the conditions where learning will take place.

There is no inconsistency between developing a respectful and caring community characterized by unconditional love and developing an intellectually rich community with a strong academic focus that demands a great deal from students and gives them a great deal in return. (p. 3)

Sergiovanni does not stop here, as he leads the reader to consider the importance of the school's character. His writing on character is similar to that of Deal and Peterson (1999) on the subject of school culture. Sergiovanni states, "schools with character have a unique culture" (p. 3). There are four virtues that Sergiovanni aligns with culture. The first is *moral* virtue, which includes "honesty, truthfulness, decency, courage and justice" (p. 3). The second is *intellectual* virtue which includes "thoughtfulness, strength of mind and curiosity" (p. 3). The third is *communal* virtue, including "neighborliness, charity, self-support, helpfulness, cooperativeness and respect for others" (p. 3). The final one is *political* virtue. This involves "commitment to the common good, respect for law and responsible participation" (p. 3). For Sergiovanni the four "virtues provide a framework for looking ahead and providing leadership and for looking back to take stock and evaluate progress" (p. 3).

Sergiovanni (1999) links character to effectiveness. He measures character by determining "consistency of the school's purposes, values and needs, and its decisions and actions" (p. 3). Sergiovanni also gives considerable attention to academic achievement. He proposes that community comes out of connections, and connections are directly related to "academic engagement and personal commitment" (p. 4). While Sergiovanni highlights the characteristics of what he proclaims to be a successful school, he also identifies some of the obstacles educators face. "The problem with today's leadership is that principals are being called upon to succeed rather than to serve - when, in fact, the way to succeed as a leader is to serve" (p. 4). Leadership guided by the common good requires identification from within the building. Sergiovanni observes, "with ideas at the center and bureaucratic matters and personality pushed to the

periphery, school character grows and the ingredients are right for academic and social capital to do their work raising levels of civility, decency, caring, academic focus and student success” (p. 5). According to Sergiovanni, this chain of events leads to moral leadership and moral responsiveness.

The authors I have discussed to this point are all clear about their beliefs pertaining to the characteristics and necessary elements of a “good” school. Deal and Peterson (1999) contend that the culture of the school is crucial. Barth (2001) explores the mechanisms and levels of leadership. He also emphasizes the importance of a shared vision and the need for participants of the learning community to be active learners. Sergiovanni (1999) speaks of character and virtue. He supports the need to serve the common good and the need to love and accept each other unconditionally. All three promote varying degrees of caring, something that conveys the need to pay attention to our humanness. These authors all share similar paths. They are an example of the streams that merge before reaching the large body of water.

Fullan (1997) in his publication, *What's Worth Fighting for in the Principalship*, draws attention to the critical role of principals in schools. He emphasizes the positive effect conflict plays in school improvement and contends that one should embrace dissent rather than avoid it. Fullan (1997) describes an *effective school* as one that has a shared vision, a statement espoused by many authors concerned with leadership. He also favours a system where shared leadership occurs and empowerment is the goal. Fullan's statements, at times, are in line with the writings of Sergiovanni. Both writers apply the word *moral* when describing the attributes of effective schools and leaders. Fullan refers to “moral” purpose, while Sergiovanni (1992) emphasises the role of the follower,

authenticity, professional and moral authority, trust, collegiality, virtue, and servant leadership in his writings on leadership. Both Sergiovanni and Fullan warn about the pitfalls of applying business models to schools. They believe each school is unique and warrants an approach that begins with exploring the current situation. It is only after this initial investigation is complete that a desired state should be identified and a plan developed to reach that end.

While Fullan (1997) sounds like the authors I have previously mentioned, there are elements of his writing and tone that set him apart. The description of the principal as a middle manager, and words such as “entrepreneur” have a business sound to them. Fullan also refers frequently to systems and devotes an entire section in his book to guidelines for action. Hargreaves (1991) echoes a similar point of view to Fullan. When I examine my response to Fullan and Hargreaves, I find a “business” tone that does not ring true for me. I believe there is a level of caring and compassion that belongs in schools that the business world often negates or ignores. Of course, Fullan and Hargreaves share some similarities with the other authors cited, but there are many points of divergence. There are times when the entrepreneurial, business stream merges and there are times when it takes a different path.

Discussions about the role of school in society and the purpose it serves are not new. The topic has endured years of debate. Dewey (2001) and the Progressive Education movement explored the link between school and a democratic society. In this context, democracy refers to the “active participation by all citizens in social, political and economic decisions that will affect their lives” (p. 1). The supporters of Progressive Education proposed two essential rudiments: respect for diversity and “the development

of critical, socially engaged intelligence” (p. 1). The first element, respect for diversity focuses on the “abilities, interests, ideas, needs and cultural identity” of each individual (p. 1). Developing “critical, socially-engaged intelligence” aims at empowering “individuals to understand and participate effectively in the affairs of his or her community in a collaborative effort to achieve a common good” (p. 1). This element of Progressive Education centres on social reconstruction. Dewey’s view links these two elements. Dewey’s (2001) opinion did not receive overwhelming support when they were first presented; nor do they carry much influence today. Conformity and uniformity are still the enduring mainstays of public education today. We need to look no further than the mission statement posted on the Ministry of Education’s website to find that one of the guiding purposes of British Columbia’s education system in 2003 is sustaining the economy of the province.

Just as Dewey (2001) identified the overwhelming impact of schools in shaping the individual, many writers today are attempting to bring to our level of awareness the socialization process that is currently occurring under the guise of education. Kohn (1997) highlights the need for addressing moral development and relationship building. He focuses on the importance of the educator’s belief about human nature, and what drives people to behave the way they do. He worries that schools blame “all behavioural problems on what is wrong with the child” (p. 1). He suggests this view does not recognize the inter/relatedness of the experiences that occur in a school, and that the child is just one dimension located in a dynamic, moving interplay. Kohn (1997) “builds the case that coercion, punishments, and rewards might result in students’ temporary compliance but they are not effective approaches for creating a warm, caring, and

respectful learning community” (p. 1). He goes on to say that providing opportunities for students to choose between complying and suffering the consequence is not offering students an opportunity to learn about making good choices. What it does, Kohn suggests, is to instruct them on how to avoid punishment in that they often find themselves faced with choosing the lesser of two evils. Kohn (1997) is a supporter of the constructivist approach to education.

Kohn writes from the assumption that constructivist teaching is the desired approach toward fostering a caring, responsible classroom, arguing that children must experience opportunities to construct their understanding of what is morally right or wrong just as they construct their understanding of academic concepts. (p. 1)

Students should “learn how to make good choices by making choices, not by following directions” (p. 1). Kohn’s goal is to encourage educators to examine the role they play in helping students become responsible and caring citizens of the world. He proposes this is not achievable if we adopt the business agenda for schools. “When business thinks about schools, its agenda is driven by what will maximize its profitability, not necessarily by what is in the best interest of students” (Kohn, 1999, p. 15). For this reason alone, we need to be mindful of and attentive to what is happening in schools. Kohn’s message sets him apart. He adds a strong current that flows through the larger pool and encourages us to look at the forces at work under the surface.

Paying attention sounds straightforward but how do we know whose agenda is being served in the schools? When I attempt to formulate a response to this question, the work of Aoki (1989) comes to mind. He provides insights into ways of looking at the

world that “uncover the tacit and hidden assumptions and intentions held” (p. 16). In his monograph, Toward Curriculum Inquiry in a New Key, he denounces a *centres approach* and states the centres do not provide a sufficient scope or context. He advocates for a framework based on “man/world relationships,” for uncovering what it means “to be human, to become more human, and to act humanly in educational situations” (p. 6). Aoki (1989) also brings to the forefront the connection or disconnection between thought and practice and the need to pay attention to the “relatedness of the situational interpretative and the critically reflective orientations” (p. 16).

Both Kohn (1999) and Aoki (1989) discuss and bring into question the potential schools have to transform the structure of society. Neither one, however, is as radical in his point of view as Bowers or Freire. Freire (1997), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, contends human existence can only be nourished by true words and it is through these true words that humans can transform the world. The word, according to Freire, consists of two dimensions: reflection and action. Freire (1997) speaks at length about the current social conditions and the plight of the oppressed. He sees oppression as the indoctrination of human beings and views dialogue as an essential component of the transformation process. “Dialogue is the encounter between humans, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 150). For Freire, naming makes change possible.

Freire (1997) encourages educators to dialogue with people about their view of the world and to share their own. People’s worldview is a product of their situation, as revealed by the interaction of action and reflection. It is Freire’s contention that by coming together in dialogue, people generate hope for liberation. The implications for education, according to Freire, are immense. He states, “Without dialogue there is no

communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 153). Freire (1997) identifies a number of factors that must be present for dialogue to exist. Dialogue cannot be the act of one person imparting ideas to another. It cannot exist without love for the world and humankind. It requires faith that it will lead to a better human existence. It cannot exist without hope, humility or trust. To engage in dialogue is an act of courage and commitment to our humanity. Freire’s view is not one of hopelessness but a reminder of the importance of examining lived experience as one way to accomplish desired change.

Bowers (1974) provides a stark view of education. His theory is that education is primarily concerned with the socialization of young people. It encourages individuals to conform and comply with the mechanisms that maintain the status quo. To Bowers, schools are institutions “where the student can be systematically exposed to such a wide range of culture, most of which is interpreted from a middle-class point of view” (p. 36). Students are not taught that their frame of reference shapes their perception of the world. Schools provide students with a pre-packaged view of the world. “[Students] also learn to treat knowledge objectively. In effect, they learn to perceive themselves as depersonalised observers of an external world” (p. 38). Bowers describes the education system as highly political, and he opposes the socialization process where the teacher acts as a socializing agent, imparting the myths of the dominant culture. Bowers (1974) reminds me of the consideration I must give to the way I perceive, not only my view of the world but, also, the process that brings it into being.

Bowers and Freire also take my thinking deep under the surface to locate the currents that are at work there. Some invisible forces are often overlooked because they

do not receive the same attention as those aspects of education we encounter on a daily basis. They do not form part of the worldviews or personal constructs of many educators because they are not regularly observed. Kelly (1963) contends that people construct their view of the world through the development of *personal constructs*. According to Kelly, “[People] erect a structure, within the framework of which the substance takes shape or assumes meaning” (Kelly, 1963, p. 30). This statement prompts me to recall other aspects of the work of Kelly. Kelly’s *Theory of Personality* presents a model that focuses on the development of personal constructs to interpret events. They act in ways similar to a filter through which experience can be viewed and patterns identified. Kelly describes humans as scientists and applies this definition to all humankind. He claims “[man’s] ultimate aim is to predict and control” (Kelly, 1963, p. 5). His depiction of the universe is that it is a reality, in which all aspects are constantly working together, and where “time provides the ultimate bond in all relationships” (p. 11). Kelly goes on to say that people act based on their anticipation of events through the development of their personal constructs. As humans seek to predict, they rely on the ability to identify patterns that will lead to anticipated outcomes. It is through this pattern-identification process and the likelihood of replication that constructs are formed. They become the structures through which an individual organizes and develops his or her view of the world. If educators are to serve students, parents and community to the best of their ability, it is important that they understand how people arrive at their worldview.

On a number of occasions, I refer to serving students and colleagues. Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership model, coupled with the perspective van Manen (1991) provides, helps me to articulate how I view the position of principal. Similar path to Sergiovanni

(1992) and Barth (1990), Greenleaf (Spears & Lawrence, 2002, p. 20) describes the servant nature as “something that cannot be assumed, or taken away.” He tells the story of Leo, a servant accompanying a group on a journey. When Leo disappears, the group is not able to complete its journey. Years later it is discovered that Leo was, in fact, the leader of the group and fundamental to the success of those who saw him as a servant. “The story clearly says that the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness” (p. 20). Greenleaf (Spears et al, 2002) provides a sense of hope as he envisions a new society emerging from the efforts of those who are servants who, through their actions as servants, will lead us to a new social order.

Greenleaf (Spears et al, 2002) provides the following list of characteristics central to the concept of servant leadership:

Listening - the ability to communicate and decision-making skills. Listening involves paying attention to what is being said and not said. “The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and to help clarify that will” (p. 5).

Empathy - the ability to empathize with others. “One assumes the good intentions of co-workers and does not reject people, even while refusing to accept their behaviour or performance” (p. 5).

Healing - the ability to heal oneself and others. The servant leader can help make whole who that may be suffering and emotionally broken (p. 6).

Awareness – possession of a heightened self-awareness. “Awareness is not a giver of solace-it is just the opposite” (p. 6).

Persuasion - the ability to build consensus within a group. The leader does not resort to coercion but rather has the ability to convince others (p. 6).

Conceptualization - the ability to see the big picture and dream (p. 7)

Foresight – “enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons of the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of a decision of the future. It is also deeply rooted in the intuitive mind” (p. 7).

Stewardship – the attention given to each individual. “The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees” (p. 8).

Building community – this can be accomplished within the walls of large institutions in the same manner in which it is achieved in local communities (p. 8).

All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movement, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group. (p. 8)

Complementing the focus Greenleaf brings to servant leadership, Bolman and Deal (2001) provide evidence of the kind of insights that can be acquired through a leadership journey. In their book, *Leading with Soul*, Bolman and Deal (2001) say many things that at first make people uncomfortable but, in the end, cause them to claim those things are exactly what they needed to hear. The authors invite their readers to become co-authors and embark on their own journey as they chronicle the journey of Steven Camden. Bolman and Deal use narrative to highlight what occurs when one sets out on a search for meaning. This is definitely not a new undertaking. Stories have been used for centuries as a way to share experiences, yet often when the words *spirit* and *soul* surface, a feeling of unrest emerges. Bolman and Deal (2001) invite readers to ask questions and

reflect upon their beliefs, experiences and knowledge. The purpose of the narrative is to guide readers to “explore soul, spirit, and faith and why they belong at the heart of leadership” (p. 12).

Bolman and Deal (2001) promote the importance of *heart*, describing it as the spiritual centre of leadership. Conviction and humour are part of the journey, too, and fear is also present. Palmer (1998), in *The Courage to Teach*, also discusses, at length, the impact fear has on teachers, and acknowledges its crippling ability. Palmer notes that fear creates a barrier between the teacher and the student. It manifests in the attention given to subject matter and statements that speak to teaching a subject versus teaching students. Palmer (1998) states, “Cut off is our customary state of being. Nevertheless, there is within us the constant yearning for connectedness, a yearning-Ah! -to live without the slightest partition between our souls and the distant stars, between ourselves and the world’s otherness” (p. 58).

Whether it be fear of the unknown as an individual embarks upon a journey or fear of revealing too much of one’s self to others, both hinder the individual’s ability to find deeper meaning and understanding. Educators must put their fear aside if they are truly in search of meaning.

Jaworski does precisely this in his book, *Synchronicity*. Jaworski (1998) uses narrative to discuss many of the same traits to which Bolman and Deal refer. They include love and the need for connectedness. He cautions about confusing conformity with togetherness. Conformity “is a soul-crushing way to exist” (p. 46) and can lead to drugs, alcoholism or overwork. Jaworski borrows Fromm’s elements of love: “care, which is the active concern for the life and growth of the one we love; responsibility,

which is caring for one's physical needs as well as one's higher needs; and respect, which is allowing others to grow as they need on their own terms" to communicate his intent when he uses the word love (p. 46). This definition of love reflects my understanding of the term *in loco parentis*. Jaworski (1998) also speaks about "being aspects of leadership" (p. 64). He quotes John Gardner, who wrote:

If one is leading, teaching, dealing with young people or engaged in any other activity that involves influencing, directing, guiding, helping or nurturing, the whole tone of the relationship is conditioned by one's faith in human possibilities. That is the generative element, the source of the current that gives life to the relationship. (p. 66)

During Jaworski's journey, he comes across the work of David Bohm, a renowned physicist who was searching "to find a unifying concept in physics that could help heal the fragmentation in physics and society" (p. 77). Bohm's work "provides a worldview that gives a coherent understanding of physical phenomena, and it suggests that both the material world and consciousness are parts of a single unbroken totality of movement" (p. 78). "There is separation without separateness" (Bohm, as cited by Jaworski, 1998).

The journey described by Bolman and Deal (2001) involves the traveller discovering his or her gifts, and the importance of authorship. They extend the meaning of love to include finding out what matters to others. They conclude that hoarding power does not empower. Rather, "by giving power away you end up with more" (p. 96). People need to have a sense of shared ownership. "Ours, not mine" is the language that allows people to feel they play a significant role and make a noteworthy contribution. Bolman

and Deal believe love, power, authorship, and significance are all gifts that leaders can bestow upon others. Sharing and celebration are also present in an environment where story and history and meaning are sought. They add that external measures can be a prescriptive element of the workplace but if that is all that receives attention, the end-result will lack substance and foundation.

Stories and history tie the workings of a group together and form a sound foundation. Stories are vehicles that transport us to find meaning and understanding. Parker Palmer (1998) refers to the stories of the great leader, Ghandi, who “called his life ‘experiments with truth,’ and experimenting in the complex field of forces that bear upon on our lives is how we learn more about integrity” (p. 16). As we make this journey, teachers appear along the path. Some act as signposts to guide us and draw attention to specific events while others take on the role of a mentor who, for a period, walks beside us. They share their stories and their wisdom, and encourage us to reflect upon our experiences, guiding us as we seek a heightened level of self-awareness. “Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teachings’ great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor” (p. 25). For me, this captures my journey, a journey I continue to negotiate. There have been many teachers. In some instances, I have paid attention to the signposts while other times I have ignored them only to find myself doubling back to that same place and, this time, paying attention. I find myself continually shifting between the role of mentor and student.

Education is about self-discovery, an increased level of awareness. This exploration is not limited to the confines of a classroom and teachers can be found in many locations, not just the traditional school environment. Teachers appear throughout

out lives; they ask questions upon which we must reflect and move us to uncomfortable spaces that are filled with confusion. As the travellers search to make sense of their experiences, the cloud of confusion can begin to shift and a new level of understanding can emerge. This is what learning is all about. “The best thing for being sad,” replied Merlyn, “is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails” (p. 161). It is this view of learning and its connection to our humanness that makes what happens in classrooms so crucial. The poet Rumi states, “if you are here unfaithfully with us, /you’re causing terrible damage” (Rumi, as cited by Jaworski, 1998).

Jaworski (1998) believes leadership is about inspiring people to perform at full capacity. Leaders communicate that people matter and the confidence a leader has in others impacts the level of confidence they have in themselves. Listening to others can be one of the most important acts a leader can perform. By listening, the leader allows others to express themselves. Listening also helps others transform their dreams into action plans. Jaworski talks about changing the world. Bohm said, “Everything starts with you and me” (Bohm, as cited by Jaworski, 1998). The term *synchronicity* is borrowed from Jung’s definition as it refers to “a meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved” (p. 88). Hippocrates said, “there is one common breathing, all things are in sympathy” (Hippocrates, as cited by Jaworski, 1998). The whole system of the universe is in a constant state of unfolding, with everything shifting in accordance with everything else.

According to Jaworski (1998), organizations that operate based on the premise that they shape their destiny can have an overwhelming impact. Leaders of these organizations have a deep sense of purposefulness, commitment to a shared vision and

dream, and fervor for serving. Jaworski claims limits to potential are mostly imagined. Where there is a heightened sense of duty and compassion there is also a drive to help each other that is fueled by some inner drive that cannot be named or described, he contends.

In Jaworski's (1998) view, the key to effective leadership resides in developing a culture where participants strengthen their belief in themselves and develop a sense of efficacy where they rely on inner resources such as intuition and innovation. Trust, respect and teamwork are built and people reach deeply within themselves. Finally, individuals learn how to be flexible and are able to adapt to change. Jaworski explains that Bohm's view of connectedness refers to the human capacity for collective intelligence. He believes those who create barriers fail to see the "oneness." Bohm's theory of dialogue defines it as "meaning flowing through" (p. 109). Accordingly says Jaworski, if we view the world as a machine, we tend to reduce it to a series of parts operating in isolation or compartments. We deal at the superficial level, avoiding the undiscussables and, in doing so, we help maintain the status quo.

Jaworski (1998) argues that a large portion of society consists of individuals concerned with what they are going to get in return for their efforts. Quite often, when someone is asked to do something he or she responds by asking for some indication of what he or she will get. Jaworski suggests that when we start to do things for their own sake the result is profound and exceeds the imagination. The goal is not to merely gain knowledge but to begin to perceive things differently. He says, "the notion that the world and our universe are made up of separate things is an illusion and leads to endless confusion" (p. 176). We appear to have little difficulty accepting the connectedness that

the sciences propose; we need to embrace this same level of connectedness as characteristic of all aspects of our world.

It is through language that we know and create the world. We label and apply the labels as we negotiate the world. A chair is only a chair because we have named the object this way and it is through this name that we create the concept of chair. Jaworski (1998) refers to a conversation with Varela where he poses the question, “How do human beings experience the world?” (p. 177). He states that until we have some insight into this, we will not understand how we interact with the world. Varela (as cited by Jaworski, 1998) says, “our language and our nervous system combine to constantly construct our environment. Language is like another set of eyes and hands for the nervous system, through which we coordinate actions with others” (p. 177). Humans create meaning by combining language and patterns of human behaviour. “This what is called the enactive view of knowing the world; we lay it down as we walk on its path” (p. 177). “We do not describe the world we see, but we see the world we describe” (p. 178). Varela proposes that we need to view the world as a place of possibility and not a closed system, and that this shift in thinking will allow us to experience the unlimited capacity of what it is to be human.

Jaworski (1998) summarizes his understanding by beginning with a view of the world that is open, dynamic, and interconnected. The universe is in constant motion, with all particles shifting in its unfolding. The world of physics, which describes particles as they move in relationship to one another, are attracted to one another, and exist in an interconnected state, reflects the world of both the human and social condition. Just as electrons and neutrons respond to one another, so do people and social institutions.

Once we see relationships as the organizing principle of the universe, we begin to accept one another as legitimate human beings. This is when, as Martin Buber said, we begin to see ourselves and others on an *I and Thou* relationship. (p. 184)

A view of the world that focuses on relationships is encouraging. It speaks to a society full of possibilities as opposed to one where the present condition or practices must be accepted. One person can have an impact and alter the social condition. Just as one pebble can cause a series of ripples, one person can have a similar effect on the culture of a school. Jaworski, Deal, Bolman and Palmer provide some of the missing attributes of leadership not covered in the more traditional approaches presented in the literature on leadership. Their work provides a broader exploration of those forces at work under the surface. As I consider the work of all the authors this literature review includes, I am better able to identify those streams that share a similar path and those that take more solitary directions. In the end, however, I believe all of these streams combine to form a vibrant, dynamic body of water.

Methodology

“Educators are interested in life. Life, to borrow John Dewey’s metaphor, is education” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). During the initial planning stages of my project, I knew that the experience would have to be meaningful and purposeful. If those conditions were not present, I knew I would never complete it. With this in mind, I began to search for an area of study that would be applicable to my daily work as a high school principal and provide an opportunity for both professional and personal growth. After an introduction to Argyris and Schon (1974) during a leadership course, I remembered being fascinated with their writing on exploring theory in practice.

A closer examination of Argyris and Schon helped me define the focus of my project; it also provided the method with which to begin the investigation. Argyris and Schon’s (1974) book *Theory in Practice* focuses on the match between intention and action. They write at length about espoused theory, what people say they believe drives their practice, and theory-in-action, people’s day-to-day actions. I found the concept of matching actions to beliefs inspiring as I could see it would deepen my understanding of my own beliefs and it would shed light on the underlying constructs upon which my beliefs rest. It would also provide an opportunity to measure the alignment between my stated beliefs and daily practice.

One question that I keep revisiting is “Whom do I serve?” Argyris and Schon (1974) ask a similar question. “Whom does the profession serve?” (p. 140). These questions move me forward as I realize the need to be clear about my values and the impact values have on shaping a person’s view of the world. In order to engage in this study, I needed to re-examine my beliefs to ensure I had a clear understanding of what I

claim to be the beliefs that guide my practice. Argyris and Schon (1974) say, “taking one’s own values seriously requires a strong commitment to self” (p. 162). They have been influential in helping me set a course of action. I was interested in making my beliefs explicit, and testing my actions in accordance with my beliefs, I found I was able to use critical reflection as a tool to uncover deeper meaning. I began my project by keeping a journal, recording events and thoughts that I thought were significant in my role as a high school principal. This became part of my weekly plan. In addition, I intentionally set time aside at the end of the week for review. At first, I found myself concentrating on those events that stood out, the events I could quickly recall. Once I had established a schedule for gathering data, I started to re-play each day and pay closer attention to all aspects of the week. I began keeping a daily calendar which served at least two purposes. I had a record of those events that stood out to me, and a record of those events that I had previously overlooked. This provided me with an avenue to compare the events I could easily recall to those I overlooked. What would this comparison reveal about my practice?

In Van Manen’s (1990) book, *Researching Lived Experience*, I located not only a method of study but also an approach to viewing how we experience the world. Van Manen’s writing speaks directly to what I was trying to do. Hermeneutic phenomenology research is the study of lived experience. Van Manen (1990) points to the notion that it is through consciousness that we have access to the world. It is through reflection that a person can move towards an understanding of his or her lived experience. By keeping a journal and re-reading my entries, I found myself becoming more aware of my actions and found myself asking questions about my practice. I wondered why I had made certain

decisions and questioned the way I had approached others. I also found the process of writing and re-reading influencing my current practice. One day I became aware that I was becoming more thoughtful and intentional. I was now asking questions before acting whereas, previously, it was only through the process of reflection that I was able to uncover the important questions and examine my intentions.

According to Van Manen (1990), “phenomenological research is the study of essences” (p. 10) and “phenomenological text makes us think” (p. 238). Van Manen describes this type of research as an attempt to uncover the underlying structures and their meaning in order to gain a deeper meaning of the quality and significance of the experience. He says, “Phenomenology attempts to explicate meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our life world” (p. 11). It entails a systemic approach. The approach I engaged in consisted of keeping a journal. Writing became a part of my weekly schedule. After making the journal entry, I re-read my writing and engaged in reflection. During this stage of the process, I recorded my responses to my writing. At this point, I found myself asking questions that I wanted to explore further.

Phenomenology is explicit in that it attempts to articulate meanings embedded in lived experience, and this became my goal. According to Van Manen, “phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness” (p. 12). It is a search for what it means to be human.

Van Manen (1990) summarizes the structure of this research method into six themes. The themes are not compartmentalized, as the method pays attention to the dynamic interaction that occurs among them. The researcher begins by “turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests and commits [her] to the world” (p. 30). The

investigation is of lived experience, not as it is conceptualized. The researcher reflects “on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon” (p. 30). Writing and re-writing provides a description of the phenomenon. The researcher maintains a “strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon” (p. 31), and must also balance “the research in context by considering parts and whole” (p. 31).

When I first considered a starting point for my project, I contemplated telling stories about others, so that I could act as an observer. I had difficulty finding a starting place. I could not find a place to stand that I felt did justice to the stories of others. I kept coming back to my place, my perspective. I questioned who owned the story and the role of voice. I do not believe I can tell someone else’s story; I can only share my observations of their experiences or re-tell the stories they have told. This was a concern for me as I was looking for authenticity and understanding. During this period, I was reading *Flux* by Peggy Orenstein. She writes about her own research and her search for a suitable specimen for a case study on women who choose to be childless. In the end, she decides she is the best sample for the study. This influenced me to conclude I should tell my stories and attempt to make sense of my own experiences.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the process for making meaning involves re-visiting the past, stopping to take stock of the present and looking into the future, “trying to make sense of life as lived; trying to figure out the taken-for-grantedness” (p. 78). Narrative inquiry differs substantially from quantitative research methods. It differs in the methods used for gathering and representing the data to be used in the study. As one example, field texts are a means of gathering data and subsequent source of fuel for reflection. Once the text has been recorded, questions can be asked

about what is recorded and what has been left untold. The “three dimensional space,” described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), helps to move the researcher from working in the field, moving the field to the text, and moving from field text to research text (p. 60).

Positioning the text and moving in and out of the three dimensional space allows the researcher to view the text in a variety of contexts, as space directly relates to context. Where the researcher places the text also provides the researcher with an opportunity to question his/her choice. Past experiences, biases and prejudices all influence the decisions made. The criteria for narrative inquiry are under development. However, there are elements that are necessary to acknowledge. They include temporality, place and balance of theory, people, action, certainty, context and place of researcher.

Narrative is a component of my study. Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) work on narrative inquiry provides insights into the role narrative can play in research.

“Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 19). They draw attention to voice. Who should tell the story? Aoki’s (1989) process of first writing, re-writing as theming and re-writing metanarratively focuses attention on the storyteller to explore the significance of the story. Why do we remember certain stories and why do we tell and retell them?

I became interested in applying Aoki’s model of narrating as theming/theming. The process begins with journal writing or a first writing on a subject that holds important meaning to the writer. The second phase focuses on re-writing as theming. Aoki (1989) cites Heidegger to clarify the function theming plays to achieve

understanding. “Objective meanings hide lived meanings. The latter become silent and we become heedless of that silence” (p. 29). The next stage in the process involves re-writing metanarratively: Aoki (1989) describes this in a series of questions. “What made it possible for the narrative to be written in the way it was written? Within what meta-narrative (big story) was the narrative written?” (p. 6). The writing includes the text that appears and that which does not, the story told between the lines of the written word. It was the exploration of the unwritten, amongst the written, that ignited my curiosity.

As I strived to make meaning from my experiences, I was mindful of the powerful function a journal can provide.

Journals are a way of finding out where I really am.... They have to do with encounters with people who come here, who talk to me, or friends who I see, or the garden...a way to puzzle out experience. (Sarton, 1982, as cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 102).

Aoki (1989) makes the distinction between journalising experiences and diary-writing by describing the former as being “concerned with the writing of experiences that touch our being” (p. 30). The final product of this investigation consists of a series of vignettes, critical events and a reflection on the event. The critical events upon which I chose to report represent those journal entries that I found to be the most compelling, those to which I am continually drawn to re-read and re-tell. They are critical events because they carry within them a message about who I am and how I do business as high school principal. The reflections are responses to the questions generated through the process of re-reading and re-writing the events. The purpose of reflection is to go further and find a deeper understanding of experiences, and this is what I set out to accomplish.

Aoki (1989) describes this as means for gaining a deeper “sense of what it is to be human.” The themes emerging from the writing have been measured against belief statements to assess the relationship between my espoused theory and theory-in-use.

It was my intention that through this study many undiscussables would become central to the dialogue I engaged in with other educators. In addition, I strived to increase my self-awareness so I would be able to increase my capacity to serve students, staff, and community in a thoughtful and intentional manner. As I embarked on this journey, I was aware of my tendency to rush. As I slowed down my pace I was reminded of Aoki (1989) writing about dwelling in the space of ambiguity, a space full of uncertainty located between the said and the unsaid. Aoki encouraged me to stop on the bridge, a space of “*inter*”, where things are a part and also where they come together. I tried to keep this in mind as I went about my journey of self-discovery, guided by Aoki’s (1989) words:

Educators are interested in learning and teaching and how it takes place; they are interested in the leading out of different lives, the values, attitudes, beliefs, social systems, institutions, and structures and how they are linked to learning and teaching (p. xxii).

Beliefs

In the introduction to this project, I stated that my intention was to determine how my actions align with my beliefs, yet I have not provided a belief statement or a list of descriptors of my beliefs. I am fearful that if I attempt to condense my beliefs into a few short statements I will lose their essence. Some aspects of the literature review helped me to reflect upon and articulate what I value. For example, the relationships I have with students, parents, colleagues and community members are extremely important if I am to be effective as a high school principal. Van Manen (1991) states the “pedagogical moment cannot be derived technologically from methods or from theories of reading, and it cannot be inferred from approaches associated with broader perspectives on education or child-rearing” (p. 47). It is about living with children; “pedagogy is context sensitive” (p. 47). It is specific to the situation and the needs of the student. It is about being oriented to the needs of the individual and acting in a manner that is consistent with relationships based on the Latin term *in loco parentis*. As principal, all children are my children, and it is my intention to act in their best interest.

As I have attempted to uncover whom I serve, I have found myself thinking about my actions and what motivates me to act. I begin by starting with the student and gaining insight into the needs of the student, determining the student’s readiness and developing an appropriate program that will meet the needs of the individual. One way to learn about a student is to listen to the student. This sounds straightforward. However, in my experience, it is something that is often overlooked. When deciding upon an appropriate program placement for a student, transitions to move the student forward need to be

included. As well, a support system to monitor and adjust the program in response to the student's growth also needs to be put in place. There, too, are often overlooked.

Once the needs of the students have been identified, the school must provide a caring environment that celebrates diversity and respects the uniqueness of the individual. No two students are exactly same. In order for a school to be able to meet the varied needs of a diverse student population, leadership must be shared. As educators, we can accomplish a great deal if we work together. We are given an important role in society and must not take lightly the responsibility that accompanies the tasks involved. Schools have an overwhelming impact on shaping the lives of young people and, in turn, shaping our future social structure. If schools are to work towards a common good, they must take into account the needs of all facets of society. A common good does not sacrifice some members of society in order for others to benefit. Educators must be mindful of the messages and models they hold up to young people and challenge obstacles that limits an individual's range of possibilities.

I have faith in a world full of possibilities where we are all connected. I believe educators have the potential to inspire others and be purposeful in their actions. Education is a great equalizer. It has the power to can change a person's life. It can open a world of possibilities that otherwise would have been closed, or viewed as unattainable. However, in order for education to work most effectively, educators must show commitment, serve others, and believe in dreams.

All the statements I have made to communicate my beliefs in this section of the project have been used in subsequent sections to compare the alignment between my espoused theory and theory-in-action.

Environment

A full understanding of my role as a high school principal must include due consideration of environment. Chetwynd Secondary School, like every other school, is unique. I have lived in this town for the past twenty years. It is a small town, one where everyone knows everyone else, and the school staff knows a great deal about the students and their families. Events that happen outside the school environment find a way to surface inside the building. Community life and school life are inextricably interconnected.

Chetwynd Secondary School is located in School District #59, Peace River South. Chetwynd is a resource-based town with forestry, mining, oil and gas as its main industries. The average wage of individuals employed in these fields is higher than the provincial average. The workforce is generally made up of two groups: one that planning to make Chetwynd home, and one that plans to stay for only two or three years. Many workers and their families believe they are coming to the North to get the experience necessary to make them competitive in their respective fields of employment in other parts of the country.

There are five elementary schools and one high school in the town. The high school is unique in that it contains a school within school. An alternate school, located in a separate building right next to the main building, is considered by the Ministry of Education to be part of the high school. However, the school district has made a distinction between the two by funding each program separately. This was done to enable staff members of the alternate school to make decisions for its population without having

to engage the entire high school staff. The alternate school serves a group of students with unique needs that are not easily met in a regular school setting.

The alternate school and the high school have separate vice principals. One principal oversees both schools and is responsible for maintaining a complete picture of all the possibilities available to all students. In communities where there is only one high school, the school must pay attention to the diverse needs of students from a wide variety of backgrounds. School is the one location where all segments of the community come together.

The population of Chetwynd is quite diverse. A large portion of the community is involved in the forest industry. This includes individuals who harvest the trees, truckers who haul the logs and mill workers who process the logs. There are two sawmills and one pulp mill. In addition, a small commercial service sector supports the resource industries employees. Two stores sell clothing: Fields and Saans. Shopping is limited. For shopping and many other services, many people travel to Prince George, which involves a three and a half hour drive, or Grande Prairie, which is two and a half hours away. The student population is representative of small northern communities. In addition to children from families involved in the forestry, mining and oil and gas industries, there are those from two First Nations reserves located approximately twenty-five kilometres north of the town. There is also a large Métis population located within the town boundaries. The racial, ethnic and socio-economic composition of the town produces a diverse and challenging student population.

It takes time for new teachers to begin to understand some of the critical issues that surface within the school. As well as having to serve the needs of students whose

parents value education and expect their children to enter a post secondary institution following graduation, they must also develop productive relationships with students who do not know where they are living from week to week, who come to school cold and hungry, and who are heavily involved in drug and alcohol use. Many parents actively support the school and reinforce the school's expectations relating to academic performance and behaviour. Alternatively, there are those who attempt to protect their children from any consequences and fight the school's attempts to encourage choices that might lead to a healthier, more productive lifestyle.

This dichotomy tempts many teachers to take the position that they will invest their time and energy in those who want to be in school, while students who show they do not want to be there can just go away. While I can understand how teachers get to this point, it is a position I have continued to challenge. Many parents have also supported "the teach to the motivated learner approach." They have frequently expressed concern about the time and effort the school has committed to "social problems" that are outside their definition of the role of a school. However, many teachers who have stayed in Chetwynd for an extended period see past this position and realize they can make a difference. They believe school must serve the needs of all students and operate in the best interest of all students.

Over the past twenty years, I have played various roles at the school. In my position as youth worker at the alternate school, I gained insight into the diversity of the community and became aware of the range of students' home lives. When I was a youth worker, the program was located in a run-down portable at the rear of the school, out of sight. During the time when I was a teacher, a new building was constructed at the front

of the school. This was a positive change for both staff and students. However, a sense of separateness has prevailed and continues, as the program is disconnected from the regular high-school operations. It is more than just the separate building; there is an underlying message that students who have been labelled alternate do not belong in the “regular” system and are not the responsibility of the teachers in the “regular” system.

Over the course of the past twenty years, I believe I have developed a deep understanding of the community and its residents. The knowledge I have of the community provides me with a more comprehensive view of the student and enhances my ability to assess the student’s needs. I am well aware of the rules the community follows and the beliefs held by its members. I incorporate this knowledge into my practice.

Critical Events

Critical Event No. 1

School Culture and Job Action

“So how many invitations will we be able to have for grad this year?” asked the grade 12 student.

“We will need to find out how many teachers and other dignitaries are planning to attend before we can determine the exact number. An e-mail was sent out to teachers last week, and I have received responses from a number of them to indicate that some of them plan to attend,” I replied.

“Can we go around and ask the teachers if they plan on coming?”

“Sure, you can.” As I lifted my head, the students left my office, off to complete their mission. About twenty minutes later, they returned with a final count; approximately fifty percent of the staff indicated they would be attending the ceremony.

“We were told that the numbers might change. Mr. Brown told me we should wait to make a final decision because the teachers are planning to have a meeting today. He said once that happens, we may have some new information.” The wide-eyed grade 12 student sighed, “What do you think that means?”

My mind reeled with possible responses, but I kept my thoughts to myself. I carefully monitored my body language, not wanting to communicate anything other than, we will have to wait and see what happens.

With a smile, I told the students, “I will keep you posted. I have your list so I will update it if I receive any new information.”

The bell for lunch rang and I left my office to wander the halls. The usual hustle and bustle was present as I made my way from the west end hall to the student lounge. As I moved around the building, I noticed the staff room was empty and a number of staff members had gathered in one classroom. My gut told me that this was a breeding ground for negative energy. I could sense it seeping through the building. I decided to put these thoughts out of my head. “No point focussing on negativity, keep positive.” I told myself, “Keep positive.”

The bell rang to indicate the end of lunch and within minutes the e-mails started to arrive. The number of teachers attending the ceremony was plummeting. Now there were only five teachers planning to be there and two of these were parents of grade 12 students. My initial response was to get angry. Why do teachers feel they can use students to make their political statements? I decided not to share this perspective with the students.

Two enthusiastic grade twelve students bounded into the room and asked, “Hey, I heard most of the teachers won’t be coming to grad this year. Why aren’t they coming? What did we do?”

I answered slowly avoiding eye contact with the students, “There are a few who are planning to come.”

One student rolled her eyes and said, “Yeah, the ones that have kids in grade 12. I don’t understand. Don’t they want to come and see us graduate? Who will present the awards? It is grad after all and it’s different from the other stuff the teachers aren’t doing because of job action. Why? Don’t they care about us? This is our graduation you know! This sucks!”

I wanted to agree with her but I knew that would serve no purpose. I told her she needed to ask the teachers the questions she had asked me. I was not able to answer these questions; nor was it appropriate for me to comment.

I needed to share my thoughts and vent. Where is the vice principal? This was the person with whom I could be brutally honest, but this would have to wait because I had a class to teach.

The classroom was a refuge as it was an all-consuming experience. I taught a split class, Communications 11 and 12. The students were a dynamic group that required my full attention and a great deal of energy. For seventy-seven minutes, I was actively involved with students.

At the end of the day, a teacher poked her head in my office. “Well I’m off home,” she chirped. She took a few steps, returned and said, “Interesting meeting at lunch today. Remind me to tell you about it some time.”

A sinking feeling took over my body and I could feel myself falling. I attempted to show some restraint. “Yes, you will have to bring me up to speed.”

The teacher hesitated, “I have a couple of minutes so why don’t I give you a flavour of it. One individual pounded his fist on the table; another one was frothing at the mouth and a third was painting you in a very negative light. He said you were constantly on his case, and he feels under the gun. He described you as manipulative and he believes you will always find a way to get your way.”

Her manner indicated she was not comfortable with the tone of the meeting or the message given. As I started to process the information she gave me, I started to make sense of the series of e-mails I had received earlier in the day indicating teachers would

no longer be attending graduation. Part of me wanted to confront the person who had described me as manipulative, and this was my first reaction. However, my main concern was that I had been told job action was over, but I doubted that position more and more everyday.

I left the school wondering how I should deal with the information I had just been given. At home in the kitchen, as I peeled potatoes, I ran a number of scenarios through my head. At first I “jumped on the bitter bus” and decided if staff members believed the description of me that was painted in the meeting then perhaps they should experience what that would be like first hand. I could show them what a top-down environment would be like to work in. My thinking stayed there for all of five minutes. Why would I behave that way? I would just become what I was accused of being and I had no interest in using my energy in that way. I could definitely feel my level of frustration rise and I needed to find a way to release it so it did not fester inside me.

After supper, I called the vice principal and discussed at length the interactions involving teachers, the graduation ceremony and today’s meeting. This was an opportunity for me to vent and to think out loud. When the dust settled, I realized it was not the comments or responses from the teachers that concerned me the most. I was alarmed about the presence of negativity. I wondered about its size and momentum. I believed its centre consisted of five people.

These were people who I felt had bigger issues than just the job action situation of the past few months. They were behind the decision to boycott the graduation ceremony. These people had issues pertaining to their personal lives and, because of the roles they had assumed in the school, the issues in their personal and professional lives had become

intertwined. Their personal lives were being played out inside their professional lives; it was almost as if their professional roles were a vehicle for them to meet their personal needs. Personal power, competence, self-confidence and issues relating to relationships seemed to be at the centre of their actions.

I found myself unable to focus and easily distracted by the many layers involved in this situation. If this was going to be a productive use of my time, I needed to pay attention to what was important. My overriding concern was the long-term impact the events of the past few months would have on the culture of the school. Spring break started the next day and I thought that a week away would clear my head, and it would give me some time to decide how to deal with the negative energy in the school. I did not want to react because I know I do not always make the best choices and decisions when I am angry.

During the week of spring break, I found time to read *Shaping School Culture* by Deal and Peterson. I searched for examples of the situation I was currently facing. I resisted turning to the section on negativity. I decided I needed to read all of Deal and Peterson and not simply look for a quick fix. Finally, I reached the topic that dealt with negativity and the message was very clear. Address negativity head on; quickly a plan started to formulate in my head.

After consulting with the vice-principal, we decided the staff meeting scheduled for the end of the day would be an appropriate venue for us to put the issues on the table.

Presentation to Staff

This is a verbatim copy of a presentation to staff.

As I left the school for Spring break, I left with a sense of relief and I asked myself why did I feel such a sense of relief? I thought about this year and decided that I needed to re-focus. At the first staff meeting of the year I remember saying that after the dust settled, after job action, we would all need to live together. So, I asked myself some questions:

What have we become?

Are we still a welcoming school as described by the accreditation team?

How has student learning been impacted over the past few months?

Is the present environment in the school a positive one?

Is the school still the caring place it has been?

I thought about these questions at length and I have come to the following realizations.

I am refusing to be negative.

I am going to continue to focus on making student learning and supporting teachers in their endeavours to enhance student learning my main focus. This is the filter through which I will be making decisions.

In the next few months, we are going to have to make some tough decisions around budget. The ramifications of this will be immense.

Will this effect jobs? – Yes

Will this effect programs? – Yes

Will anyone be spared the impact of these changes? – No

We would like to continue along as we always have in terms of how we make decisions. We would like to work creatively with staff to come up with the best possible solutions to these budget challenges. You all have a voice and we are inviting all of you to be heard. In addition, in fact your voices, as they have in the past, cause us to examine our thinking around the decisions that we make. Your challenges to our thinking have always been welcomed and even though we might not always end up agreeing, the process is one of growth and respect.

To that end, we will be having meetings to work on how we can function given the money we have.

Do we like what is happening? No

Are we going to fight our own battles with those making the decisions around funding for schools? Yes

Are we going to make students pay? – NO! They did not vote in this government so they should not be held accountable for the decisions this government is making. I will do my best to minimize the impact to students. Is this going to be a challenge? Yes, but it is one I am prepared to take on.

Do I believe that students are being impacted? Yes.

I relay the comments made by two grade twelve students who wonder why teachers do want to attend their graduation ceremony. They ask the following questions. What did we do? Don't they want to see us graduate? Don't they want to give us our awards?

We are not prepared to enter into a battle that pits administration and teachers against one another. Our success as educators and people in this building has always

been built on respect and caring. We are going to continue to support students, teachers and programs that address student learning. If you believe we are operating outside of this stated belief, please come and talk to us.

Reflection on School Culture and Job Action

This critical event highlights many aspects of school life. It draws attention to the relationships that exist between students, teachers and administrators. Rituals are often taken-for-granted; they are part of a broad array of experiences that we accept without question. This event prompted me to stop and look for the deeper meaning of some rituals. It highlighted the impact of job action on the culture and traditions of the school community and the relationships that bind people together. The event provided insight into individual belief systems, the level of commitment to these beliefs and the roles people adopt. It also brought to light the lengths to which people will go to achieve a political agenda, or deal with personal issues. In this case, students were caught in the middle of political unrest. As I contemplated this event, I found an opportunity to get closer to uncovering the meaning behind events that, I typically, had blithely accepted and taken for granted.

The importance of celebration was evident as I reflected on the questions and comments made by the students. The interactions that occurred between staff and students indicated the students wanted the teachers to join them in their celebration. Graduation is an event that the majority of mainstream society values. It is cause for celebration that communicates not only the student's success but success on the part of the parent. After considering the comments made by students, I could see more clearly that relationships that develop in the classroom are not limited to that environment. Students and, I believe, the majority of teachers invest in one another, and students are aware of this. As the two groups work together, there is a need for both groups to share in

their accomplishments. Teachers experience a sense of accomplishment when they play a role in a student's development.

The fact the students wanted the teachers to attend graduation indicated that the students believed the teachers cared about them and were responsible for helping them reach this milestone. When the teachers announced they were not going to be there, the students had to deal with the fact that the teachers' actions were not in line with the students' belief system. The students were then in a state of ambiguity. What they predicted did not match what was happening. The students' personal constructs as described by Kelly (1963) did not align with the present situation. The students thought their teachers cared about them. When teachers chose not to attend graduation, they caused the students to question this belief. The students shared their thoughts with me, and others, in an attempt to make sense of the experience.

The relationship between staff and students is complex and not reducible to a checklist. It is a situation where humanness comes into play. For some students a teacher performs the duties of a parent. In today's society, the school is the only stable element for some children. The school environment offers a high level of predictability. For some schools, *in loco parentis* means they feed, clothe, educate and love the child. These non-discussable aspects of school life receive little attention; yet, they exist in many of the interactions that take place in the building. Some teachers are not comfortable with the breadth of responsibilities placed upon schools. They claim they are not trained social workers, and they entered the teaching profession to teach, not parent. These teachers often attempt to position the curriculum or their subject matter between themselves and

students. Palmer (1998) describes these teachers as “fearful.” They are afraid of allowing students to get too close, and this directly relates to the teacher’s level of self-confidence.

If the grade 12 students viewed their teachers the way they viewed their parents, it is no wonder they found the lack of teacher involvement at the graduation ceremony distressing. Moreover, the union position was paradoxical. Job action started with a work-to-rule policy. Teachers arrived at work five minutes before the beginning of class and left with the students at the end of the day. The action ended when the government passed legislation ordering the teachers back to work. This did not result in a smooth transition as it left many teachers bitter about the government’s heavy handedness. There was also a great deal of confusion regarding what teachers were required to do and what was voluntary. The union issued a number of position statements that indicated the union was working to improve learning conditions for students and teachers. However, when teachers withdrew from extra-curricular activities and extra academic support, students felt the brunt of these decisions. Teachers then explained to students that these decisions were not theirs so the students should not take the job action personally. Many students were sympathetic to the plight of teachers and many students supported the job action. However, after the introduction of legislation, this explanation was no longer valid. Extra-curricular and after school support were supposed to be offered at the discretion of the teacher. It took awhile for students and parents to understand the implication of the legislation. Some teachers, and I stress this reference to “some,” continued to place the responsibility for decisions relating to extra-curricular and after school support in the hands of the union.

Once it was known that teachers were able to make choices, the attitude towards teachers shifted. My attitude towards teachers was similar to that of many students and parents. The pressure for teachers to appear united and communicate a sense of solidarity was present but, I wondered, at what price? The conversation with the grade twelve students indicated to me that the loss of meaningful relationships was part of the price and, as far as I was concerned, it was too high. How long would it take to repair the damage? What lessons would students learn about integrity and honesty? It was not my place to discuss individual teacher's positions, or the union's platform for that matter. My role was to listen to students and pay attention to the changes in the culture of the school.

I decided to read Deal and Peterson (1999) to look for some insight to help me cope with the changes I was witnessing. I could not sit back and watch a caring, supportive atmosphere transform into a toxic, destructive environment. Deal and Peterson helped me to decide that I needed to confront the dynamics at work. I saw myself as the one responsible for bringing forth the concerns of the students and providing an opportunity for us all to reflect. It was my intention to paint a picture based on the issues and concerns expressed by the students and to share my observations. I found the level of discomfort in the room as I shared the stories with staff almost palpable. The silent response from the staff hung heavily in the air. However, in the days following the meeting, staff members started to openly discuss their thinking on teachers attending graduation, and job action.

Some of the conversations offered opportunities to clarify and address any misunderstanding pertaining to job action. Legislation saw the end of job action in that the union was no longer able to instruct its members to engage in behaviour deemed as

job action. However, the union did not come forward and clear up some misunderstandings that existed within the ranks of the teachers, many of whom were left to stumble along. Many found themselves pressured by their peers to enter into pacts where an entire staff would agree to engage in certain behaviours and refrain from others. Graduation was an example where the teachers agreed to refrain. I recall reviewing the language describing the conditions considered by law as harassment because I had concerns about the amount of pressure applied to some teachers. Harassment is not something decided by a third party or an onlooker. The party being harassed is the only one who can determine if harassment has occurred. I could only observe and ask questions to encourage people to think about how they were being treated by their colleagues.

Following the staff meeting, staff members actively engaged in dialogue and shared their different perspectives. What had once been non-discussable was now openly discussed. The informal conversations provided the momentum to move towards a more caring, supportive environment. The teachers were not being asked to forget how outraged they were by the legislation introduced by the Liberal government. The question that our staff had to confront was whether or not students should pay for these decisions and government policies. Were we operating in a way that kept the needs of students in the foreground? Did the term *in loco parentis* apply to how we were interacting with students. Teachers in Chetwynd began to share their feelings and express their discomfort with the impact many decisions were having on students. Many felt the students were located in the space between opposing political ideologies.

This was a difficult time. I found myself patiently waiting for things to return to “normal” and in doing so, I felt I needed to take a stand and look out for students. It was a challenge to operate in the best interest of students without publicly opposing the teacher job action. The union message included a negative portrayal of administrators and blamed them for the changes introduced by the new government. I know it was important not to debate this issue, as I could not see how that would help improve the conditions in the school. The important conversations happened without any planning or formal preparation. It was not about me convincing teachers to adopt my point of view. Many teachers strongly believed they were acting in the best interest of students, as the job action was a way to protect the education system and its ability to serve the needs of students. The one-on-one exchanges I had with an increasing number of staff members provided an opportunity to share reflections on action and move towards uncovering personal truths. Just as I was fuelled by my conviction to act in the best interest of students, many teachers felt they were acting based on their convictions. There was no simple solution to this complex issue.

In large meetings, some individuals loudly express their points of view while others stay quiet. Aspects of the school environment were examined in a large meeting setting and elements of the environment were viewed in isolation. When this occurred, I felt the interconnection that exists was lost and the various elements of the school culture too easily became objectified. It is in the process of objectifying our world that we lose the human dimensions that are crucial for people to be able to grow and develop. In *Shaping School Culture*, Deal and Peterson discuss the importance of addressing toxic elements of an environment. By putting the issues on the table, I enabled staff to begin to

share their different perspectives. This did not nullify the toxic element; however, staff members did begin to accept responsibility for their choices and stopped hiding behind the claim that the union was making decisions on their behalf.

*Critical Event No. 2**School Based Team Meeting*

I am certain the look of surprise was evident on my face. I thought my mouth was going to hit the ground. At the very least, I thought the parents would pretend to support the “system” and echo an anti-drug slogan. When their son was caught with a homemade pipe in his backpack, I thought it would be helpful for the parents to have the whole picture. The young man’s school year had consisted of a number of discipline-related issues and things did not appear to be improving. I suspected that he was coming to school stoned so one day I had an opportunity to check his bag and I found the pipe. His school day usually involved riding the bus, attending first block, then hanging out with his friends for the rest of the time. This pattern had been going on for some time and I had encountered him on a number of occasions coming into the school to retrieve “a vital piece of personal property.” His definition of “vital” did not exactly fit with my definition. Our exchanges usually ended with him leaving the building grumbling about how unreasonable I was; after all, he just wanted to grab his coat, or use the washroom.

At some point I wanted him to realize that the reason the building we refer to as *school* exists is so students can attend classes and progress towards graduation. After three years of program adjustments, I did not see this individual moving any closer to the graduation track. He was treading water in a huge stagnant pool and his ability to keep his head above water was not what it used to be. He was starting to spend more time under the surface. Yet, it was clear his parents did not share my impressions of this young man. His mother wanted him in a regular classroom, completing regular course outcomes. I heard these words and wondered how our views could be so far apart. I heard

myself saying, "His program is obviously not working for him, as his attendance for the year is about twenty-five percent." She claimed that could be addressed by placing him in "regular classes." It did not seem to matter to her that he had not completed a regular program since grade three. I was definitely becoming frustrated but I felt I had to do my best not to let it interfere with the goal of this meeting. I wanted the student to be successful, and to me that meant progressing academically and socially. I was not so certain that these were the goals the student had in mind. I asked him if he wanted to complete his program and he responded with an irritated, "I don't know."

He had already debated the purpose of the meeting for, as far as he was concerned, things were fine. He did not see the need for his parents and him to sit here with four educators to discuss his educational program. He got up and paced around the room, his head down and hands buried deep into his pockets. I felt we were not making any progress and that his parents' facial expressions were saying to me that they felt he was being ganged up on. The conversation shifted from obstacles that appear to get in the way during the school day to other habits that may get in the way. Then the pipe drew everyone's attention and I waited for a response from the parents. After a few moments, I heard his mother instruct him not to come near the school if he has been smoking pot. Yes, that was what I heard. I thought I would hear the parents express their concern and instruct their child to refrain from using illegal substances that would further damage his already ravaged brain. He shows many of the signs of a victim of fetal alcohol syndrome. When this point was made, his mother turned to one of the educators and instructed him to mind his own business. She stated that her son's out of school behaviour was none of our business and he was free to make his own choices.

I was not just shocked by these statements, I was saddened. I spent a lot of time wondering what type of life this young man would have. His parents both work. Neither graduated from school and had to rely on their own ability to support themselves, quite a different situation to the one in which this young man finds himself. Previous generations had to make their own living. They were not given large amounts of money, and they did not have their basic needs fulfilled, as was the case with this young man.

The meeting ended with the parties further apart than they had been at the beginning. I wondered if I had sounded judgemental when speaking about the need for young people to make good choices and expressing my concern about the choices this young man was making. I do not believe they left feeling I had their son's interest at heart.

I had many questions for my colleagues as I thought about this student's future. How long would we allow him to continue in the school system when he was only attending one class per day? What happens to students who are cut loose and told they no longer have an education program? What was the school's responsibility? What was my responsibility? I asked if we should cut this kid loose and let him find his own way. Then I asked, "Is he ready to hold and aim his own flashlight?" I realized I was the blind one. Was he not already doing all of these things?

Whenever I am faced with a situation where a student stops attending and "drops out" I wonder if we, meaning the school, have done everything we can. It is much too easy to say that this is a "generational problem." In most instances, students who find themselves in situations similar to this young man have parents who did not graduate. Quite often, the behaviours the school staff identifies as problematic are behaviours the

parents have modelled and continue to engage in. I have experienced this first hand with the children of former students.

There is a cycle of behaviour that families repeat. I wonder if it can be broken. As soon as these words appear on the page, I begin to examine my right to question the cycle. Once I have referred to “breaking the cycle,” I have deemed it inappropriate and something that needs to be eliminated. That sounds judgemental; I am right and this other way is wrong but, in practice, I do not believe the situation is as simple as that. My beliefs and perspective are mine and I have to be cautious about inflicting upon others my view of the world. I believe a person’s view of the world is constructed by his/her experiences and no two people share the same experiences or make the exact same meaning from similar situations. The tension between white middle-class values and other classes and cultural groups and the role the education system plays in maintaining the status quo are both problematic for me.

A month passed. I was sitting at my desk on a relatively quiet afternoon when I saw a snowball fly past my window. I quickly ran to get a better look and craned my neck to identify the culprits. As two boys entered the building, they were rubbing their hands together: I suggested they join me in my office for a brief discussion. One of the boys was the same individual I had dealt with over having a pipe in his possession. As we were walking, I noticed a pungent smell in the air. It definitely was not beer; it was more like that hard liquor sweet smell that tends to hang in the air. Once we were behind closed doors, I asked one student to breath on me. I was sure; this young man had been drinking. It was 2:45 p.m. He assured me he had not been in school all afternoon and had just

returned to gather a few things from his locker. I explained to him that, even so, this was a problem.

A number of thoughts ran through my head. I thought about school policy pertaining to students skipping classes. The message we give students is that once they leave home, the school is responsible for them until they return home. Then I found myself framing the words of warning I wanted to pass on to this young man. I wanted to say, "Do not come back to school after you have been drinking." As soon as this thought was processed, I caught myself. I sounded exactly like his parents when they told him to stay away from the school if he was stoned. I realized this approach would not address the problem at all. There was a much bigger issue for me: this was a fifteen-year-old boy spending a Wednesday afternoon drinking hard liquor. I decided to deal with him first according to school policy. He was given a five-day suspension that required him to have two appointments with a drug and alcohol counsellor.

I was unable to contact his mother but he assured me he would inform her. I was hesitant to let him leave without contacting a parent. Finally, I was able to speak to his father. He did not ask any questions about the suspension but wanted to know why his son was not on the bus. I passed the phone to the student and listened to a conversation that outlined the student's plan for the evening. The student left the office, leaving me to agonize over what would happen to him and what my responsibility should be. At that moment, I felt he would be "lost."

Reflection on School Based Team Meeting

From time to time, I think about this family and my interactions with them. When I reflect on my preparation and intention for having the meeting, I feel confused by the outcome. I had hoped we would leave the meeting with a common understanding but this did not happen. My goal was to be a member of a team and, as stated by van Manen (1991), “accompany the child and live with the child in such a way as to provide direction and care for his or her life” (p. 38). I had given a great deal of thought to how the subject of drugs should be addressed and my intention for discussing the subject. I had also wanted to enter into a dialogue with the young man, his parents and teachers about how he experiences school. I went in looking for synergy, not prescription. I wanted an opportunity for all of us to share our observations, hopes, dreams, and fears. I did this based on my belief that we could all learn something from each other. This would accomplish two things: we could establish some common ground and become a support group for the young man, and we could address any misunderstandings about our intentions while sharing the school’s definition of actions we believe are in the student’s best interest. My intention was to reclaim, “to recover and redeem, to restore value to something that has been devalued” (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1998, p. 3).

I believed, at the time, that I had engaged in thoughtful reflection before the meeting and that I was approaching the situation with “a deep sense of responsibility and of active hope in the face of prevailing crises” (van Manen, 1991, p. 123). During the first five minutes, I became aware that the meeting was not going to go in the direction I had hoped. I found myself getting defensive and did my best to monitor my body language and verbal responses. It was clear the parents felt we, the teachers, were not doing our

jobs. We were not educating their child to their satisfaction, in part because we had taken him out of the regular system. The fact that the boy was experiencing difficulty with the prescribed learning outcomes for his grade level was not a surprise for me. As his permanent record indicated he has been on an Individual Education Program since grade three. His language development continued to be described as “delayed” which means he had difficulty learning to read and was not reading at grade level. We were in a situation that Brendtro, Brokenleg, Van Bockern (1998) claim can easily become a “mutual blaming contest” (p. 14).

The parents’ anger over their child’s academic development prompted me to think more about the root of their outrage. The series of events that led up to the meeting would have been of no surprise to most teachers. It was a textbook case. Students who have trouble with language are easily frustrated and often exhibit disruptive behaviour. The behaviour, if it persists over time, results in the student being moved to an alternate program. In this instance, the parents were correct in their understanding that the young man had not developed the skills in reading and writing that would allow him to be complete the regular course outcomes. Students who have difficulty with language usually arrive at the high school discouraged, and I recall this young man was no exception. Such students often view school as an opportunity to socialize with their friends; they do not see themselves as capable learners. They attempt to camouflage their weaknesses and develop a set of behaviours that will safeguard and protect them. They may take on other roles such as class clown or bully. “If a person’s behaviour causes us distress, we are likely to assume the actions are intentional and respond negatively” (Brendtro et al, 1998, p. 20). A part from their other labels, such students may be referred

to as “students from hell.” When we assign several students with similar difficulties to the same class, it becomes the “class from hell.” Such destructive labelling occurs too frequently in alternate school settings.

I thought the meeting would be an opportunity for the parents to show their support for their child. Unfortunately, it quickly became a review of all the inappropriate and unacceptable things the school was doing to their child. There was an overwhelming tide of negativity. Instead of seeing “behaviour as a reflection of the youth’s personal needs or distress” (Brendtro et al, 1998, p. 20), the parents took the position that their son was simply defending himself against a system that was working against him. I had hoped we would unite, and develop a sense of team, but there was no indication of that occurring. In fact, quite the opposite was happening. I kept hearing blame and resentment. Soon, it was obvious we were no longer listening to each other. Perhaps I should have stopped the meeting, but I let it continue, hoping that somewhere along the way the walls would start to come down and we could begin to hear one another.

The parents’ response to the drug use was both alarming and understandable. It was alarming that this child could engage in self-destructive behaviour without any real intervention on the part of his parents. I continue to be afraid for him. I have watched others come before him and end up dead, and I have difficulty standing on the sidelines watching such events unfold.

Drug use is prevalent in our town. We are a small community and one of the consequence of that is people tend to be aware of each other’s behaviours. I remember sitting in an elementary school gym during a DARE (anti-drug) presentation by the RCMP and watching the faces of those students whose parents I knew were regular drug

users. The children quickly made eye contact with those who experienced a similar home situation, and their faces displayed a level of cynicism that far exceeded their young ages. For these kids the RCMP were saying that what they believed to be “normal” and a part of every day life was bad. What happens to children when they are told their understanding and internalisation of everyday life is incorrect?

On another occasion, I recall taking a joint from the hand of a grade ten student. I was on bus duty and I watched him take the joint from his pocket and hold it in the air in a manner that suggested it was something sacred. When I grabbed the joint from his hand, his expression crumbled and he did his best to prevent me from taking it from him. Later, when I discussed the subject with his mother, she was extremely annoyed with me and said I had no business taking it from him. She argued that school was over for the day and I had no authority over him while he was waiting for the bus. This response filled me with fear. How could parents knowingly allow their children to engage in harmful behaviours? It was not too long before my question was answered. The same parent had been discussing the issue with the First Nations liaison teacher and had said she did not understand why the school was making such a big deal about one joint. After all, she said, all the teachers at that school smoke pot. That was one of the first times I realized the generalizations that people make about their world often extend to include all others.

Was this the case for the young man and his parents with whom we were meeting? Did they experience the meeting only as a judgment session? What were their school experiences like? Neither one graduated but that does not reveal very much. However, their feelings towards their experience might definitely help explain the role they saw the school playing in their son’s life.

The meeting ended with both parties miles apart. It had done more to alienate than to bond and strengthen. Once again I was left with questions. How did their experiences of school become so negative? Where does the desire to experiment with drugs and alcohol come from? How can I help this young man find his way?

I know there was a strong lack of trust hanging over our heads. I wanted to tell these parents that their son could be successful and that we had his best interest in mind. I wanted them to see he needed something different than a regular classroom setting but his parents wanted him to be “regular,” to sit in a classroom like other kids. At some point in this young man’s school history, someone had explained away his language difficulties by labelling him a victim of *fetal alcohol syndrome*. I have never seen the purpose of such a label. It does nothing to rectify the problem and, in most cases, it is used as an excuse to explain the school’s inability to effectively meet a student’s needs. The label objectifies the student. It becomes a sorting device, reducing the student to a list of criteria.

As I went through the process of reflecting on my experience as principal in this meeting, I found I was unable to reduce my experience to something simple and straightforward. I asked more and more questions, often shifting my position to incorporate more than one interpretation of the interactions. I was overwhelmed by the complexities at work. While I found it frightening, I also found it reassuring as it confirmed my belief that the role educators play in helping young people find their way is one that cannot be taken lightly. The moral responsibility to act in the best interest of each child demands that we approach each child and situation with “thoughtfulness and tactfulness” (van Manen, 1991, p. 8).

While most decisions are made based on what educators believe will be in a student's best interest, the plan does not always lead to the desired outcome. I remember the year we moved the alternate program off-site. As a staff, we had discussed the positive and negative implications of moving the program and decided it would be worthwhile to try it for one year. The students enrolled in the program had indicated they still wanted to be part of the high school population so we anticipated this decision would cause the students some anxiety. While we had predicted a negative response from parents and students, we were surprised by the degree of displeasure that was expressed. Staff saw it as an opportunity to develop a sense of community and identity as a group. It would provide some distance between the constant comparison to kids in "regular" classes and the blaming of alternate school kids that occurred whenever anything went wrong. The students from the alternate program routinely wandered the halls of the high school during class time and this had been an ongoing issue. The situation had grown to the point where anytime students were loitering in the halls, it was assumed they belonged to the alternate program.

Many of the parents had attended the alternate school themselves and many had said they wished their child had not followed them down the same path. Some of them had told me they wanted a better life for their children and they did not want their children making the same mistakes they did. The plan to relocate the alternative school was based on what we, at the time, believed was in the best interest of the students, but after one year, we decided that we needed to rethink our decision and move towards a more integrated model. I carry this story and many others with me, and, from time to

time, a situation will occur that triggers my memory. I am mindful of the lessons these stories hold and the insights they offer me.

I can hear many voices inside my head. During the meeting, one of those voices told me I was a negative trigger for this family, someone who was holding up everything that was wrong, according to the white middle-class school system, with their son, and, indirectly, with them. Their attempt to rescue their son was also an attempt to protect themselves from what they saw as an attack on who they were and the lives they lived. I had difficulty reconciling my role as principal and my interpretation of the interaction that occurred with this family.

I felt it was only a matter of time before this young man stopped attending school. My dilemma was whether I should allow him to make that decision or do it for him. I wanted to act, in his best interests, so I needed to decide what would best serve his needs. Also I had to consider the impact he was having on his peers. When a student stops attending classes and comes to school for the sole purpose of meeting his friends, he has in effect “dropped out.” He just has not bothered to complete the paper work to make it official. Had this student dropped out?

Formally removing a student’s name from the school register is not a decision I make lightly. In an attempt to build a safety net for students, a process for addressing student and staff concerns relating to a student’s program had been implemented. All major changes to programs and the removal of student from a class list are carried out through a process involving a school-based team. The team consists of a counsellor, student support services, an administrator, the student, a parent, and classroom teacher. All present team members have an interest in the student and the purpose of the meeting

is to find a way to offer an educational program that best meets the student's needs. It is also an opportunity to address any obstacles or barriers the student is encountering. It is never disciplinary.

This process has been very effective. Students have frequently requested meetings with the team to help them deal with issues.

The young man had experienced this process a number of times but every time the discussion turned towards a change in his program, his father stopped the meeting. It was this information, together with the other outcomes of the meeting that led me to make a decision. I stated the school would make a morning program available for him, and laid out the requirements regarding his enrolment in the program. I also said we would review his progress in one month from the start of the morning program. In addition, I made it clear that the young man would not be permitted on school grounds in the afternoons and if he did appear, it would have a negative impact at the time of the review. I felt like a bully as I set out the conditions of his continued attendance.

I had gone into the meeting wanting to work collaboratively. At the end, I found myself laying down the law, and telling the family the way it would be. Even as I spoke, I felt the system had failed this young man.

I believe the school system is built on a number of assumptions that are problematic. For instance, students are grouped based on assumptions pertaining to development. The school system refers to students as individuals, yet, students are all expected to be performing skills at a prescribed level in a prescribed amount of time. Reading is a prime example of this expectation. The majority of students are expected to be reading by the end of grade one. There is some latitude given for those students who

may take a few extra months to develop. However, basic reading instruction stops at the end of grade two because all “regular students” are expected to be reading at grade level by this point. Students who are not are grouped accordingly and are often involved in “pull out programs.” Once again, the students are sorted based on a set of criteria, and it is not long before those students start to internalise this list and lose a sense of themselves as integrated beings. The students who are performing according to grade level requirements are also sorted, so they do not escape the process either. However, they are often given the message that they are “good” or “superior” because they fit the profile the system has deemed as “normal.”

Time and energy is spent on developing plans to address the needs of those students who are experiencing difficulty but those plans do not differ greatly from present classroom practice. Too often, they entail doing more of what has already been found to be ineffective. Almost all parents hold a view of what is “normal” or “regular” in schools and want their children to fit into this image. Success in school is an image that holds a powerful place in society. Success in school is viewed as a predetermining factor to success in life. This correlation is specific to humans as workers and gatherers of material possessions. It is one of the most compelling motivators in Western society. Families are judged by their ability to accumulate wealth, position and power. Perhaps when parents register their children in kindergarten they are not conscious of this motivation but it is not too long before most parents begin discussing the career paths they hope their children will follow and the income they will receive. With this in mind, we can only imagine the fear experienced by parents when told their child is not fitting the profile.

My experiences in this meeting remind me of how badly the system is flawed. It objectifies students, teachers, learning and knowledge. It communicates a sense of hopelessness and inadequacy to particular groups of people. As I have wrestled with my decision regarding this student's program, I have frequently confronted my motivation. I wanted a decision in the student's best interests and I could not accept that I was doing that by sitting back and watching him hang around outside the building. Was I being coercive? Yes. I knew I had something he wanted, access to his friends, and I wanted him to be involved in learning that would be beneficial to his growth and development as an individual. I felt this was an equitable exchange even though I knew his program would need to be monitored and reviewed. I did not believe he or his parents were clear about, or fully agreed with, the school's intentions.

As the meeting ended, I looked at the young man and saw one of my own children, and a range of emotions came over me. I still had hope for him. I wanted to help him discover his gifts, guide him along his journey and be a source of encouragement and support. I wanted to warn him about the dangers that he will certainly encounter along the way. I wanted him to enjoy learning and go through life with a keen sense of curiosity and imagination. I wanted him to ask questions and be able to identify those elements of life that are in his best interest, and in the best interest of others. I did not doubt that his parents loved him, but I was very concerned about the view of the world they were communicating to him.

Critical Event No.3

As principal of a high school, I had the privilege of being the last person to address the graduates. For three years, I was responsible for giving the closing remarks at the graduation ceremony. I saw this as an opportunity to share some of the lessons I had learned with them.

Closing Remarks 1999/2000

If I could have one wish for you, it would be for you to be happy. That may sound simple but I believe it is a challenge for most people. You see, happiness cannot be bought, or given to you. It is something that you alone must achieve. A nice home, fast car and various other possessions might be your recipe for happiness but these possessions will quickly fade and lose their lustre. If you are looking outside of yourself to reach a state of happiness, you will step onto the treadmill of life where you are always looking for someone or something to make you happy.

When King Arthur was a boy, Merlin, the Magician asked him why he wanted to be like the people in the village. He said, "They spend all their time trying to seek pleasure and avoid pain, worrying about when they will die, and living lives filled with fear and anxiety." Merlin was attempting to bring Arthur's attention to the present, this actual moment in time. He did not want to see Arthur spending his life dwelling on the past or the future. This is not to say the past and future do not have their place but the present is where we are at and it is here and now where our efforts can be best used. So, appreciate each and every moment for what it is.

The journey to happiness starts by you being true to yourself. If you lie and deceive yourself, you will lie and deceive others. This will plague your relationships and

you will go through life never understanding why the same negative experiences keep recurring. Also, be careful what you wish for. The mental images we create in our heads have a way of becoming our experiences. If you go around thinking negative thoughts, always afraid and fearful, your life will quickly become a series of events that will lead you to wondering why you are having so much bad luck. The interesting thing about luck is that we make our own luck and we all have our own definition of what luck looks like. No two people share the exact same view of the world so do not judge others based on your view. We live in an interdependent world so as we strive for our own happiness we must be mindful of the needs of others. Remember what you give is what you get. If you give attitude, you will most likely get attitude in return. If you do not like what you are getting, try giving something different. You might be surprised with the results. A wise woman once gave Peter Pan some valuable advice. She said, "Think happy thoughts, and you never know you might fly, too."

I believe that you are the guardian of your own happiness. I have faith that you can all achieve this. You are the author's of your life's story. Make it a good one.

Closing Remarks 2000/2001

Before you leave the stage tonight, I would like you to think about this ceremony you are participating in as a celebration, an opportunity for people to come together and share in the transition that occurs as you leave high school and enter adulthood. The people who sit before you are here to rejoice with you as you come to the end of one part of your journey and embark on the next, entering the adult community. They are here to welcome and receive you into your new community.

Now, before you leave the community of Chetwynd Secondary School, I would like to share a few things with you. For the past thirteen years, you have been presented with a curriculum of study that has been decided for you. Your parents and teachers have designed specific learning experiences aimed towards certain goals.

Your science teacher wants you to have an appreciation and respect for the big picture of nature. Your English teacher has had you read to learn lessons from others in the hope that you go on to write your own life's story. Your math teacher wants you to realize math is fun. Your P.E. teacher wants to impress upon you the importance of lifelong fitness. Your Social Studies teacher has provided you with experiences so that you will appreciate Canada and the role your country has played in 20th century history, and have an understanding of government. Your fine arts teacher wants you to realize all of the above can only be true as long as one has an appreciation of the arts, which includes both visual and performing.

Along the way, your achievements and successes have been measured and communicated to you, remember those trusty report cards that you rushed home to share with your parents.

Now you are moving on to a period in your life where you are responsible for writing your own curriculum. The Latin meaning of the word curriculum is 'course of life' so you are deciding your own course and writing your own report card as you go. You already have experience in deciding your course because you are responsible for being here today. That is not to say you did not receive support and guidance and some of you may have been kicked, pushed and dragged along the way. Many of you have heard those words of encouragement that may have ranged from: "good job," "I'm so proud of you," "well done," "to you're grounded," "don't think you're going anywhere this weekend," "your telephone is cut off," or "that vehicle stays parked until your marks improve."

While we acknowledge that the love and support you have received has played a role, ultimately it was the choices you made that got you here today. Regardless of what anyone else wishes and hopes for you, it is your actions that determine your path; no one else can do it for you. So, give yourself a pat on the back for being where you are today. Now that you realize the power you have, there is something else you need to keep in mind: that is, you cannot blame others, because you always have a choice. You will be faced with hard decisions; life is not easy but how you live it will create the quality of your life.

As you plan for your future, I would ask you to consider the following:

1. That you seek experiences that will provide you with a deep connection and this may be found in relationships, to yourself, to others, to nature or to a higher power.
2. That you include times for silence and solitude where you can escape the business and noise to rest and reflect.

3. That you engage in a search for purpose and meaning by being of service to your community and others. Ask some of the big questions, such as: How did I become the person I am today? Who will I be tomorrow? Does my life have a purpose?

4. That you experience joy and delight through the simple things in life such as play, celebration or gratitude.

5. That you explore your creativity so you feel the awe and mystery of creating.

6. That you fulfil the urge of transcendence which means going beyond your perceived limits, whether that be in the arts, athletics, academics or human relations.

7. That you honour the need for initiation by participating in ceremonies like this one to deal with life's transitions, changes that come with marriage, the birth of children, retirement and receiving your first old-age pension cheque.

Now before you set out in search of all these things let me share a passage with you that may offer a place to start from Gary Zukav's (2000), *Soul Stories*.

The Creator gathered all of creation and said, "I want to hide something from the humans until they are ready for it. It is the knowledge that they create their own reality."

"Give it to me," said the salmon. "I will hide it on the bottom of the ocean."

"No," said the Creator. "One day they will go to the bottom of the ocean and they will find it."

"Give it me," said the bear. "I will take it into the mountain."

"No," said the Creator. "One day they will dig into the mountains, and they will find it."

“Give it to me,” said the eagle. “I will take it to the moon. They will never find it.”

“No,” said the Creator. “One day they will go to the moon, and they will find it even there.”

Then Grandmother Mole rose. Everyone became quiet. They knew that, although she has no physical eyes, Grandmother Mole lives in the breast of Mother Earth and sees with spiritual eyes.

“Put it inside them,” she said.

“It is done!” said the Creator. (p. 46)

Closing Remarks 2001/2002

The following is a letter of reference for the Class of 2002.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of the members of Chetwynd Secondary School's Class of 2002 who are seeking admission into society as high school graduates.

I have known and worked with this group for 5 years. Individually, I have known many of them since kindergarten. (They were much cuter then.) As a matter of fact, I taught a few of them when they were in grade one, right Nikki, Alex and Paul. (By the way, I was taller than you were then.) I have played a variety of roles during my interactions with the members of this class and they include teacher, vice principal (my first year in this position was your grade 8 year, lucky you), principal and friend. Oh, come to think of it, I am also the mother of one of you. In this letter, I will share my observations of this class and this should provide a comprehensive picture of the group.

This class is an extremely focussed group and is purposeful in its actions. In fact trying to get them to change direction can be quite a challenge. The group's organizational skills are superior and the planning that has gone in to make today possible is evidence of this. They know what they want and they know how to get it regardless of any roadblocks that appear along the way. Their favourite defence is an offence and one approach they often employ when entering into battle is to ask the question, "Well isn't that logical?" (Usually, the answer to this question is, No!)

This class has demonstrated an ability to work cooperatively. A sense of community exists amongst them and I believe they truly care about one another. This will not only serve each of them well in life but it will also improve the quality of life for

those they interact with in the years to come. The support they have provided to their fellow classmates indicates they are mature, compassionate people. With this said, it does not mean that they always get along. In fact, many of them have strong beliefs, and they are not afraid to express them. I hope they continue to do this in other areas of their lives.

The Class of 2002 has shown a high level of independence and personal competence. They are truly a talented group and have the capacity to meet high expectations. Although this is not always the entire group's plan, those other individuals can be bribed. Deadlines, on the other hand, are an area I have identified for future growth for some individuals. I am not sure if the concept of having a deadline has ever been explained to them but we can work on that in the next three weeks.

In most instances, the group prides itself on producing high quality work. However, there is the odd time that their definition of work differs slightly from mine. An example of this would be those times when I have walked into room 10, the counselling area, and have observed many very thick textbooks open on the table. The room has been abuzz with conversation and this usually centres on the following phrases – last weekend, next weekend, and assorted camping stories. Whenever I have asked the question, are you working? The response is always, yes. So, we may need to fine-tune this definition before they leave.

The Class of 2002 is a diverse group. It is made up of highly talented people who have the potential to do great things. I find this reassuring, as I believe they will be able to make substantial deposits towards my generation's pension fund and that is a good thing. During their years as CSS, many have been involved in extra-curricular activities, some of which have been school-sponsored while others have been community-based.

They include Student Voice, volleyball, basketball, yearbook, figure skating, dance group, and hockey. Their hobbies and interests are quite varied. There are some who enjoy computers and video games, others who spend every weekend snowboarding (a.k.a the 788-CREW), some are talented musicians, others like to push the limits riding dirt bikes or quads and some have a preoccupation with vehicles. This class also has a keen sense of humour that will serve them well. I wonder if they know that it has been predicted they will live to be 120 years old. They had better have a sense of humour because that means they will be working until they are about eighty years old. One word of caution, they have been known to pull the odd prank. I am not at liberty to say any more on this topic, as I may incriminate them, but they know who they are.

In closing, I have a request to make to the reader of this letter. I would like you to remind each member of the class of four guiding principles that I believe will help them as they make their way through life.

- Be careful what you wish for – you just might get it.
- What you give is what you get.
- The mental pictures we create in our heads have an uncanny way of becoming our reality. Remember what you see determines what you do and that in turn determines what you get.
- If you break something, fix it. This also applies to relationships because in the end it is not about possessions and material things. It is about the relationships you have with others in your life. Relationships feed the spirit and nourish the heart.

In my opinion, the members of the Class of 2002 possess the drive and capability of fulfilling the requirements and expectations of a high school graduate. I believe this group of young adults will be productive citizens and a credit to society.

Sincerely,

Kathy Sawchuk

Principal

Reflection on Closing Remarks

Each year I spend hours contemplating my message to the graduating class. This is a very special time, and it is an honour to give the closing remarks at the graduation ceremony. It is an opportunity to address the students; they are the focus of my remarks. Each year I start with the same question. What do I want the students to think about? What insights can I share about the journey of life that will help each graduate? This is always confusing because I wonder what authority I have to speak to these young people. I question whether the insights I have discovered are appropriate to share. As I have reviewed the closing remarks for the past three years, a number of themes have emerged. I feel the need to take a closer look at the themes to help me determine if my remarks have accomplished what I set out to do.

I have never wanted to lecture the students or create a list of *do's and don't's*. I have not wanted to tell them how to live their lives or provide them with a blueprint for success, as no such thing exists. As I begin to write I think about starting out as a young person graduating from high school in a world full of possibilities. I attempt to position myself so I am “pedagogically situated.” Van Manen (1991) describes this as being “able to understand the situation from the existential perspective of the other person” (p. 72). The recurring themes that keep surfacing include the importance of relationships and developing a sense of connection with others; the need for each individual to generate his or her own definition of success; the importance of establishing a balance between independence and interdependence and the importance of traditions and celebrations.

A review of the closing remarks quickly reminds me that I am presenting a view of the world from my perspective based on my experiences. As I think about what to say

to a group of eighteen year olds, the words that roll on to the page are those that I believe would have helped me find my way through the maze of my own adolescence and young adulthood. If only I had been aware of many of these aspects of life, I would not have faced as many challenges as I did. Yet, I am reluctant to let go of these experiences as they have played a role in shaping who I am today. What am I trying to say? I want to give these students a sense of hope. I cannot tell them how to live and that is not my intention. Bolman and Peterson (2001) say we can invite and encourage people, but we are unable to tell them what will happen on their journey. Young people need to know that there are guides who can provide the encouragement and support but they alone will determine the direction and duration of their journey.

The world is full of messengers trying to sell their view of the world. As individuals wrestle to uncover their definition of success, society presents them with an array of images labelled as success. In the jumble of media images presented to them, it is not difficult to see how young people jump on the treadmill of the material world. Yet, I believe, young people do not have to be drones at the mercy of the queen bee, big business. Barlow and Robertson (1994) state, “the commercialization of the classroom and the corporate intrusion into the education system are working very well” (p. 85). We have a generation of children who are “growing up corporate.” “They are treated- and often see themselves-as consumers in training, pre-workers, future entrepreneurs” (p. 85). It is a challenge for people to resist the commercial definition of success, and the business world thrives when the majority of the population defines success as the accumulation of material possessions. It supports a competitive environment where anything goes and that includes how people treat each other. Barlow and Robertson (1994) argue this culture of

competitiveness goes unchallenged (p. 85). If young people choose to accept this image of success, many will soon find themselves searching for meaning. The material world offers an empty shell. It looks attractive and impressive from the outside but it is hollow. It cannot sustain the human need for meaning and purpose. Many people find themselves in situations where they are deeply in debt and overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness due to their desire to appear to be successful, as defined by others. This is one of the key messages I try to bring to the attention of today's youth.

Increasing a person's level of awareness can have a dramatic impact. If people are aware of their actions, they will be more able to identify the motivation behind their actions. For instance, our view of the world, and the predictions we make based on our experiences, set the stage for future experiences. The future is not predetermined as we are the creatures of our life's path. I wanted ever graduate to leave the stage with this message.

Critical Event No. 4

Implementing the British Columbia Institute of Technology Program

The advertisement read:

A .571 Mechanics 10, Woodwork 8 &10, Construction 11/12 teacher effective September 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002.

The desirable candidate:

- has training/experience suitable to teach Mechanics 10, Woodwork 8 & 10, Construction 11 &12
- has demonstrated abilities to be a good planner and highly organized
- able to teach and accommodate students with different levels of ability
- understands and cares for students at this level
- is skillful and competent in planning, instruction, criterion referenced and performance based assessment and evaluation
- has demonstrated effective teaching strategies
- has demonstrated the ability to be a team player
- has experience implementing the continuous progress model
- willing to accept the mission, beliefs and strategic directions of the school

*When drafting was included in this assignment, it was a full time position.

The advertisement, posted across Canada for at least three months, did not generate any interest. This created concern for staffing and programs because without an industrial education component, a school is limited in its ability to offer a comprehensive program that will meet the needs of all students. It is even more crucial when the school is the only school in town. I wondered how the students who were not interested in an academic program would meet the graduation requirements and how the students who planned to attend a technical school would meet the entrance requirements if we could not offer an industrial education program. I believed that we desperately needed opportunities for all students to experience success and this meant we needed an industrial education program. From experience, students who enrolled in a mechanics program could quickly exhibit an array of behaviours the most experienced teacher would

find challenging and, often, this is the only part of their school experience that recognizes the talents of this group of students.

Assigning students to classes that are not requirements for graduation is not a practice I support. The graduation program consists of a number of required courses and a number of credit hours achieved through electives. Students select electives based on interest or career paths, so limiting the range of electives offered can have a negative impact on students' final high school transcript and, ultimately, entrance into a post-secondary institution. Wherever possible, students need to select their classes and, from their selections, a school timetable is designed. This method is effective when job postings can be filled. In the situation described in this critical event, we were unable to locate an industrial education teacher, so the school district needed to be creative.

Our approach began with a meeting with each student who had indicated an interest in an industrial education program. It was important to uncover each student's intent. Did the student view this as an area of study in which he or she planned to continue? Were there other courses students would select, in place of the industrial education courses, that could be just as beneficial? The answers to these questions provided the foundation for future direction. After we had interviewed each student, we concluded there needed to be an avenue for students to develop their skills in industrial education. Many planned to enter a related field once they graduated from high school. The challenge now was to provide them with an opportunity to learn and demonstrate their understanding of the learning outcomes. If this could be accomplished, students could receive credit for the corresponding courses.

Local industry had many individuals with the expertise we were seeking. We decided to find ways to access this expertise and fit it with the structure of school. We did not try to make the learning experiences match the schedule of the school day. We were more concerned with the delivery of the information, the demonstration of the learning, and the assessment practices. Our initial conversations with representatives from industry were positive. Local businesses expressed an interest in providing students with learning opportunities. While we were pondering the development of a system to accommodate both school and student needs, we learned of an alternative. There were options available through career education initiatives and while we were excited, we quickly realized there were still some obstacles to be overcome.

I recalled hearing about the presence of the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) at the high school in the next community, located 100 km away, but I had no details of the program offered. It was time to find out more. With two colleagues, individuals interested in offering programs students wanted, I drove there for a visit. We arrived to find fifteen students gathered around a new pickup. There was a man in a shop coat pointing at various components of the chassis. The condition of the truck caught my interest and I wondered how they had access to a vehicle of this type. We met the program co-coordinator and spent the next two hours asking questions about the program and the relationship between the school district and the British Columbia Institute of Technology. It did not take long to realize that BCIT supports its programs with healthy operating budgets. This was something I would never be able to do. School budgets do not allow small schools to spend large amounts of money in areas that serve only a small portion of the school population.

The BCIT program had everything we were looking for. They provided the tools, equipment and instructors. In addition, a partnership between our school district and BCIT already existed and articulation was in place. Students registered in BCIT programs could receive dual credit, high-school course credit and post-secondary course credit. It had the potential to be the best of both worlds. We asked questions about available space in upcoming courses and received favourable responses. The shift of students from one program to another would be straightforward, with the institution providing the instruction receiving the funds enrolments generated.

As we learned more about BCIT, it was clear we needed to inform the community, parents and students. Students needed to visit the site and issues relating to transportation needed attention. This was one of the keys to this option being a viable alternative for students. We needed support from many people in a variety of district positions. It did not take long to assemble the appropriate audience to hear our proposal and help us make it a reality. It took one two-hour meeting to rough out a plan. It was apparent we were all on the same page and prepared to do what it took to make this a reality. It was decided students interested in the automotive and auto-body fields would travel to Dawson Creek for the second semester of their grade 11 year and for the first semester of their grade 12 year.

We were excited about the possibilities before us. We were quick to realize that transportation to Dawson Creek would now make the college programs accessible to students. It was time sit down with BCIT and discuss this further. During one of these conversations we realized there were other areas of program overlap that offered opportunities for further collaboration. As we learned more about the type of student who

benefit from BCIT programs, we identified another group of students who have shown little interest in the regular presentation of the curriculum. These are students who have complained they are unable to see the relevance in the classroom instruction, students who ask, “Why do I need to know this?” For them, we decided to try to implement a power-engineering program.

The existing BCIT program had only an automotive focus. We needed to expand our contacts and engage the engineering department in a similar relationship to the one we had with the automotive department. With the assistance of people in the automotive area, we arranged a meeting to examine the possibility of offering an engineering program. The response from BCIT was positive. There was some concern about the role of the local college in the community. BCIT was mindful of stepping on territory that was under the mandate of another institution. A solution proved to be straightforward. The prior year, the local college had offered a power-engineering program that proved inadequate as it lacked the practicum component, a requirement that allows students to write the provincial examination. Accordingly, the program ended. Once this information was brought forward, BCIT was willing to proceed.

It was difficult for us at Chetwynd Secondary School to contain our enthusiasm. It was April and we had just a few weeks to put this program in place for the coming school year. Students and parents needed to have a clear picture of the program and how it would complement the graduation requirements. We also needed to meet with local industry to determine their commitment to the program. We needed their participation to cover the program requirements that addressed the work-experience modules. A location had to be decided upon, and an instructor hired. These were merely the basic components

of the program. As we moved forward with the plan, many other details needed our attention. However, after many meetings, we found all the partners were enthusiastic about the introduction of a power-engineering program.

The end of summer was fast approaching. We had negotiated an agreement with BCIT and local industry. We had compiled a registration list that included high school students, recent graduates and adults. We had secured a location for the delivery of the program. It was like a puzzle, as all the interlocking pieces fit neatly into place to create the big picture we identified during the planning stage. Of course, the one component missing was an instructor. This role could not be filled by just anyone. Knowledge of the curriculum and an ability to present the material was necessary. Moreover, we needed an individual who had experience in the industry to ensure the teaching of concepts occurred within the context of their application. It was August when the telephone rang and a potential instructor expressed a keen interest in the position. It was the final piece of the plan.

On February 4, 2002, the first BCIT and school district sponsored power-engineering program began. Twelve high-school students, three recent graduates, and three adults were registered. Our plan was now a reality, and we watched it function from a distance. It was as if we had given birth to a new member of the school community and we must now allow this new entity to grow and reach a state of interdependence. The challenge was to let go and not micro-manage the situation. The time had come to start thinking about other partnerships we could establish that would utilize the resources we have at hand to best serve the needs of students.

Reflection on Implementing the BCIT Program

I continue to support students selecting courses based on their interests and entrance into post-secondary institutions. The process we engaged in provided an effective option for students. We set out to find ways of offering courses that the high school was unable to offer and to motivate those students who have difficulty sitting in class with no clear focus for graduation or the future. The process required an extensive time commitment, with many conversations with students, parents and representatives of government and industry. It definitely improved options for students. If a school exists for the purpose of serving students, it cannot shy from tasks that require more on the part of its staff members. In a number of situations, I have observed individuals resist exploring new initiatives because they are acutely aware of the demands that such efforts will place on their time and resources.

The BCIT project has had some immediate effects in the school. Students who once filled their timetable and graduation transcript with Foods and Cafeteria courses are now lining up to take physics and math courses. I am not suggesting that Foods courses have no merit but if students can take courses that will provide them with a firm foundation in a field they are considering to pursue after high school, it is a better use of their time and the resources the school has to offer. In some instances, the students will explore specific curricular areas and find they are not suited to this type of career. The work experience component of the program is also a means for students to determine their suitability to the career. Given this, I am firmly convinced the resources provided by the school and BCIT have added value to the total school program at C.S.S.

At some very basic level, my motivation as educator has always been to help increase an individual's level of self-confidence. In my experience, I have seen many students, mostly teenage boys, who find school meaningless and irrelevant. Their resistance and discouragement often leaves them viewing themselves as failures. They are reluctant to risk and this limits the range of experiences and opportunities in which they are willing participants. The cycle of failure and self-doubt becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such students often believe they are going to fail and behave in a manner that produces the predicted outcome. Students who repeatedly experience failure withdraw and become isolated. This situation has far-reaching consequences. These students frequently group together. They are often viewed by others as inferior. My purpose in pursuing programs such as the BCIT initiative is to help create an environment in which all students can have experiences that will lead to the development of a positive self-concept.

School may not be about producing a workforce. However, it can provide a series of initial hands-on experiences to broaden individual levels of understanding of what exists outside the confines of the school environment. I support exposing people to as many experiences as reasonably possible. The more the various service providers work together, the more opportunities can be offered. One organization may be able to access ten different work experience situations. However, once that group partners with two additional groups, the number of opportunities can be at least three times more than the initial situation offered.

At one time post-secondary institutions provided specific services to an identified segment of the population. Discussions with high schools have usually revolved around

the allocation of funds, and few opportunities for collaboration across institutional boundaries have ever flourished.

In our experience with BCIT, teachers quickly realized that if students were not registered in their classes the money the school might have received to provide an educational program for these students would also be leaving the school. The decision to enter into a partnership with BCIT resulted in a considerable amount of money leaving the building. It was the equivalent of one and a half full time teaching positions. In times when school budgets are undergoing massive cuts, teachers are extremely sensitive to decisions that will influence staffing. A number of teachers stated that the school should decide the courses students should be able to take, so they would continue to contribute directly to the school's budget.

Historically, students at C.S.S. have completed course selection forms. This information is then entered into a computer program and from that a profile of the number and type of course requested is produced. This process fits with the belief that the school exists to serve the needs of the student population so it only makes sense that the timetable would flow from the course selection of the students. The model promoted by some staff members to inform students of the courses available flows from the needs of the staff. In a small high school, other factors do play a role and have required an added level of creativity on the part of those individuals who are responsible for developing the timetable. One of the challenges is to assist students to identify their needs so they are selecting courses that will be beneficial to them in some way. Helping people identify their needs is a complex process requiring conversations that address multi-dimensional aspects of human development.

My discussions with staff have been ongoing. At one point I asked the staff to tell me why they went out of town to purchase items of clothing when we have a Saan's store that could meet all their basic clothing needs. For some staff members this brought home the role choice plays and the level of satisfaction we experience when our needs are met according to our personal expectations. As I consider those staff members who communicate an understanding of the importance choice can play and its connection to personal satisfaction, I realize that these individuals have had a wide range of experiences. This group supports removing barriers that allow students to complete graduation requirements outside the traditional classroom setting.

The resistance appears to be rooted in those individuals who have little interaction or experience with people outside the world of education. Most entered university straight from high school so they have basically been attending school in some capacity since they were five-years old. Repeatedly, they proclaim students need to be prepared to enter university. Statistics show that only twenty percent of students in British Columbia go on to university after high school but this does not seem to influence their belief system. The proposed changes to the graduation requirements support the need for students, staff, parents and community members to rethink the role of school. As a society, we need to acknowledge the need for knowledge in all areas and that includes the trades and service sector.

This was apparent when we first entered into conversations with parents about the BCIT program. Some expressed a deep concern that their son or daughter would not have the required courses to enter university. In a number of situations, I found it necessary to exercise a heightened level of sensitivity. It was readily apparent to me that many of the

students, given their present level of performance, would not be eligible for university without some type of upgrading component being added to their educational program. While the BCIT program was an avenue to improve a student's performance in physics and mathematics, many of the students did not have the self-confidence or the academic standing to consider post-secondary education. Certainly few of them had considered university as an option, so their parents' concerns were seriously at odds with the students' goals. While I am able to identify such factors, the parents do not always share my perspective. My challenge in this situation is to respect the views of the parents and, at the same time, bring into focus program options they may not have considered or viewed as viable possibilities for their son or daughter.

Whenever we explore educational programs that appear to be quite limited or specific we face concerns that students are being streamed into career paths, making decisions that will affect their futures at a time when they are not fully capable of making an informed decision. I did not enter university straight after high school so I am not tied to the idea that university should be the only option for high school graduates. The varied career opportunities I have pursued have contributed to my personal development and, I believe, have given me a broader perspective and greater appreciation of the role experiences play in helping people find out more about themselves and, in turn, make more appropriate career choices.

Findings

I selected this project to determine the alignment between my stated beliefs and practice. I began asking a series of questions that helped to guide me through the process of uncovering the question I wanted to ask. The initial questions played an important role in my study as they helped me remove the layers and identify what truly matters to me.

The initial list included:

- What is it like to be a principal?
- What does it mean to be a principal?
- What is my espoused theory?
- What is my theory-in-action and how does it fit with my espoused theory?
- What are my beliefs about the purpose of education?

In the end I was faced with the questions, I wanted to be ask. *Whom do I serve?* I also wanted to know if my actions align with my beliefs. In order to answer the second part of my investigation, I needed to state my beliefs and I have included these statements in the project. As I asked the questions I realized it was not enough to simply answer the question by naming those I believe I serve or stating that my actions match my beliefs. I needed to find *evidence* to help me answer the question. I wanted to take my beliefs and hold them up against my actions to see if my actions reflect my beliefs. The critical events I have included are the stories that I continue to share with others. I tell versions of these stories whenever I am asked to explain what my job entails. As I compared the critical events and reflections to my beliefs, I made a number of observations.

In the critical event that describes school culture and the affects of union job action, I found evidence of many of my beliefs. The importance of relationships with

student is evident in this critical event. I believe I acted with the best interest of the students in mind. I wanted the relationships the students and teachers had established to remain in tact and I was concerned it was starting to deteriorate. I was focusing on the needs of the students and listening to them. I did not want to see the needs of the students sacrificed in order to make a political statement. I did not want the students to be held responsible for the decisions of a government they played no part in electing. I also wanted to offer support to the teachers who felt pressured to follow the position of a few vocal staff members. I wanted to protect the culture of the school. I was witnessing a community where fragmentation was becoming prevalent. My intention was to bring my concerns to the staff and openly discuss all the issues that previously had not been discussed with the whole staff present. I wanted to share the students' perspective with the staff. I wanted the staff to hear me.

It is apparent to me that this event supports my claim that I serve students. However, it leaves me to question how much I serve teachers. In this case, I was willing to put the needs of the students before the needs of several teachers. I understood the teachers' motivation but disagreed with the approach they were taking. Teachers may have interpreted my message to say I did not care about them. This was not the case as I am well aware that if the staff does not feel cared about, the culture of the school will be negatively impacted. It could never be a caring, supportive community if the staff did not feel supported. This event also revealed to me that I have different expectations based on the group I am working with at the time. I realize I expect teachers to put the needs of the students first and find other ways to communicate issues they may have with the

government or administration. The challenge for me is that I need to communicate my expectations in a caring, supportive way.

The second critical event provided me with a great deal of information to consider. When I compare the event to my beliefs, I see evidence of the importance I place on relationships. However, what I failed to acknowledge in this instance is that I did not have a relationship with this young man or his family. I now believe it was inappropriate for me to attend this meeting. The message I was attempting to communicate needed to be delivered by someone the family trusted. I saw evidence that I wanted this young man to be aware of the possibilities available to him and of the dangers attached to the choices he was making. Once again, I was not the right person to present these ideas. I need to be aware of how I am perceived by others, and if I am not able to develop a relationship with them, then I need to find another way to get the message across.

A community where leadership is shared supports this approach. This event has prompted me to be more thoughtful about who attends meetings. The parents also made me aware that there were issues with the student's program placement. I realized at this meeting that this student's program was not working for him. As a school system, we need to pay attention to situations like this and make changes when a program is not working for the student. It reminds me that the problem does not reside with the student but with the community. In this case, my beliefs did not match my practice. I needed to find out more about the student's readiness and find other ways to support the student. I believe this is an example of operating from my own worldview, which did not match the student's or his family's worldview.

Reflecting on this event has had a profound effect on me as it has compelled me to review all alternate programs in the school district. It has made me aware of the importance of dealing with every student as an individual and finding out as much as I can about each student before decisions are made. It has also made me aware of the importance of program development and placement. I need to work from the student profiles to design programs if I am to meet the needs of the students. I have concluded the review I am describing is a huge task and can only be achieved if all community service providers come together and adopt an integrated delivery model. This model would also provide an avenue for support for families. In the past, I would not have viewed supporting the parents as something I needed to be concerned with, as I expected parents to support their children based on my definition of effective parenting. This experience has taught me that communities need to come together and develop a network of support for all their members.

Van Manen (1990) states “We have to help the child to grow and give shape to life by learning what is worthwhile knowing and becoming” (p. I kept this statement in mind when I reviewed my reflections on my Closing Remarks. Once again, I see evidence of the importance I place on relationships. I think this is the main message I am trying to communicate in this section. I want students to realize that material possessions will not fulfil their need to feel connected. This event reflects my belief that as an educator I need to help students realize that there is a world of possibilities open to them and that education is one way they can access this world. I can also see evidence of my willingness to share my worldview with others. At times, I believe I am over-zealous and do not take the time to gain an understanding of the worldview held by others.

The final critical event targets a specific group of students. It begins by identifying the needs of students and demonstrates a desire to provide a meaningful educational program. It also honours diversity and acknowledges the broad range of skills students possess. The partnership with BCIT models the positive results of collaboration. In this case, I see evidence of serving the needs of students. However, staff members may feel that the students are being served at their expense. The alternatives to the “regular” school setting make teachers fearful that enrolment will decline and cause, in turn, a reduction in the number of teaching positions. This is a real fear for some. In the past, my responses to their concerns have not always been viewed as caring. I need to be careful to be respectful to all members of the school community. If I dismiss the fears of teachers, I will not communicate the levels of caring and respect that I should.

After reviewing the four critical events, I have made following observations:

- I found evidence of the importance I place on relationships with students. However, I realize I need to work on my relationships with staff and parents.
- I found evidence that, in most cases, student needs drive my decisions. I saw that student readiness and appropriate program placement are given considerations, but they are not always explored as fully as they should be. I discovered I also need to pay attention to staff and parent readiness.
- I found evidence I usually listen to students, but not always to staff and parents.
- I found evidence that I am mindful of the messages students receive from the system and I too quickly become impatient with those who I believe are communicating messages that I do not fit with my worldview.

- I found evidence of my haste to impart my worldview to others without taking the time to understand their worldview.
- I found evidence of a desire to inspire students.
- I found evidence of commitment to students.

Based on these findings, I believe I focus on serving students. This project has made me aware of the need to consider the needs of staff, parents and community. I know in order for a school to be effective, everyone must feel valued and appreciated. In the past, I believe I have made inappropriate assumptions about the needs of staff and parents. I have expected them to be able to deal with issues and take care of their own needs. As a result of this study I have learned staff and parents are members of the learning community and their needs must be addressed. Education is the most important social institution in our society so I have to do my best to make it work for all involved. It is about connecting hearts and souls, and realizing the interconnectedness of our world.

This project has proven to be very informative. It has given me insight into my practice and has helped me identify areas where I need to continue to grow. I invite others to embark on a journey of self-discovery.

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