The Professional Portfolio for Aspiring Principals

Students in administrator training programs often value clarity in their coursework and want the facts and procedures of educational leadership presented in unequivocal terms. However, clear facts and procedures do not promote professional growth. Only through the challenging of beliefs will professional growth occur (Hitchcock, 1991). The process of portfolio development provides the catalyst for such an undertaking. Portfolio development generates questions that spark reflection and fosters professional growth, leadership skills, self-assessment skills, self-confidence, risk taking, and professional dialoguing (Brown & Irby, 1997).

Portfolio development also prepares candidates for an interview by requiring them to articulate beliefs, skills, and strengths. For example, the Education Placement Consortium (2000), composed of several major universities, conducted a nationwide survey of school executives to determine the desired traits and skills sought by decisionmakers in the selection of principals. This study found that 41% of the school executives surveyed believed that a professional portfolio was a useful tool in the selection process. In addition, 24% of the school executives surveyed indicated that their district currently request portfolios from administrator candidates, and 53 % of the school executives surveyed believed that university faculty should help candidates develop professional portfolios for the interview.

Components of the professional portfolio

The professional portfolio for aspiring administrators consists of seven segments:
1) Title page and table of contents, 2) cover letter and resume, 3) leadership framework,
4) belief (interview) matrix, 5) entry plan, 6) internship summary, and 7) artifacts.

Portfolios should succinctly communicate the intended message. Consequently, Brown and Irby (1997) suggest a portfolio of 20-30 pages.

Cover letter and resume (1-4 pages)

School executives in the selection process consider the resume useful over 90% of the time (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000). The resume should be developed to open doors to the job interview and should fit the job description as closely as work and educational history allows. The resume should always be accompanied by a cover letter that specifically details the position sought and the candidate's skills and experiences that match the job description (Kennedy, 1996).

Leadership framework (2-3 pages)

The opportunity for self-reflection may be the greatest benefit of the leadership framework. The idea of reflective practice for administrators is relatively new. However, one of the characteristics of successful principals is the ability for self-reflection (Brown & Irby, 1997, Sergiovanni, 2000). Reflection takes the aspiring administrator away from a basic level of understanding of school leadership to a level of critical examination, selfassessment, and new visions (Brown & Irby, 1997). Reflective principals "... do not accept solutions and mechanically apply them. They do not assume that the norm is the one best way to practice and they are suspicious of easy answers to complex questions" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 46).

The leadership framework is composed of eight paragraphs: 1) philosophy of education, 2) philosophy of leadership, 3) vision for learning, 4) vision for teachers 5) vision for the organization, 6) vision for curriculum, instruction and student assessment,

7) vision for professional growth, and 8) method of vision attainment (Brown & Irby, 1997, Martin-Kneip, 1999).

The **philosophy of education** concerns the candidate's basic beliefs and values about education (Martin-Kniep, 1999). Clear philosophical beliefs, sound decisionmaking, and ethical considerations are assuming a growing importance for educational leaders (Czaja & Lowe, 2000). Consequently, selection committees often seek candidates who can articulate these basic beliefs (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000, Czaja & Lowe, 2000). However, many students lack even a rudimentary starting point for this paragraph. When students are mostly concerned with simple survival in the principalship, they often find it difficult to consider that administrative practices often require reason and moral justification (Ericson, 1997). Therefore, each institution that prepares educational leaders has a responsibility to provide growth in this area (Czaja & Lowe, 2000).

The philosophy of leadership is derived primarily from the philosophy of education. This may be the most important paragraph in the leadership framework. This paragraph addresses the beliefs and values about the role of leaders in the educational community and about the relationship between the leaders and the different stakeholders (Martin-Kniep, 1999).

The **vision for teaching and learning paragraph** describes the relationship between teachers and students and the candidate's beliefs about learning (Martin-Kniep, 1999). McCowen, Arnold, Miles & Haradin (2000) found that one of the essential determiners of success for beginning principal's was the ability to effectively sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning.

The **vision for teachers** includes beliefs about teachers, characteristics of effective teachers, and the evaluation of successful teaching (Martin-Kniep, 1999). This paragraph addresses the selection and supervision of staff and describes the candidate's views on the planning of staff development to support teaching and learning.

The vision for school improvement addresses beliefs about planning for school improvement, curriculum, approaches to teaching, and the types and uses of student assessment (Martin-Kniep, 1999). This section of the leadership framework also addresses the candidate's vision for the integration of technology with teaching and learning. Districts expect new principals to supervise the implementation of technology, provide leadership, and provide vision for future technology development. For example, 67% of the school executives surveyed by the Educational Placement Consortium (2000) sought principals with the ability to supervise teacher use of technology, and 46% sought principals with the ability to develop a vision for future school technology use.

The **vision for the organization** section addresses the candidate's management style and discipline philosophy. Effective organizational skills are a basic requirement for success. In fact, Missouri superintendents perceive effective school management as a primary factor in the success of beginning principals (McCowen et. al., 2000). In addition, Indiana superintendents perceive weakness in organizational management as a primary reason for beginning principal failure (Coutts, J. 1997).

The **vision for professional growth** articulates the candidate's personal skills and a personal growth plan to improve leadership skills. This section is important because a common mistakes in the interview process is the candidate's inability to articulate personal strengths (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000). Personal technology skills

are also included in this section. The most common technology skills required of new principals include word processing (86%), Email (85%), database applications (60%), web search (58%), and spreadsheet construction (49%) (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000).

The vision for developing professional learning communities addresses the candidate's communication, community relations, and team building skills (Martin-Kniep, 1997). This paragraph includes beliefs and strategies regarding collaborative leadership and the inclusion of the community in the life and culture of the school. This paragraph addresses leadership for change, strategic planning, coalition building, and public relations skills and strategies.

Belief (interview) matrix (1 page)

The most common mistake made by principal candidates in the interview is the inability to succinctly articulate beliefs on leadership (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000). Principal candidates should know why they want a leadership position and know what qualifies them for a leadership position. More importantly, candidates should be able to clearly articulate and communicate their preparation, skills, beliefs, and goals. The belief matrix provides a mental framework that allows them to do this.

The belief matrix concept was initiated for pre-service teachers at the University of Wyoming. Pre-service teachers were asked to identify their beliefs about teaching and learning in a matrix as they prepared to enter the job market. School executives from several western states reported that the matrix set the interviewee apart from the norm

and provided a telling description of the candidate. Teacher candidates also reported that the matrix was an invaluable interview tool (Berube, Morrison, & Von Krosigk, 1998).

The belief matrix for aspiring principals is based on the leadership framework and on the questions most likely to be asked in an interview (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000). However, the matrix can be tailored to the strengths and skills of the individual candidate or tailored to a specific job description. The suggested belief matrix is divided into nine categories: 1) philosophy and guiding principles, 2) organizational manager, 3) supervision and selection of staff, 4) teaching, learning and technology, 5) leadership, 6) communication and relationships, 7) professional growth 8) school improvement, and 9) student assessment and achievement. (Table 1).

-Insert Table One-

The entry plan (2-3 pages)

The beginning principal faces two simultaneously occurring transitions: 1) the personal transition from teacher to administrator and 2) the organizational transition from one leader to another. The transition from teacher to administrator is difficult enough. However, failure to adequately manage the organizational transition can cause significant human relations issues for the new principal (Neely, Hamilton, Berube, & Wilson 2000).

The entry plan provides a framework for successfully meeting the demands and challenges that are immediate and pervasive in the new principalship. The plan has five sections: 1) goal statement, 2) objectives, 3) activities 4) timelines for completing the activities, and 5) an evaluation procedure to determine the effectiveness of the plan (Wright, 1998).

Internship summary (2-3 pages)

The candidate should include the following in a two or three page internship summary: 1) where and with whom the internship took place, 2) the times and dates of the internship, 3) a summary of the experiences during the internship, 4) a list of professional readings related to the internship, and 5) a reflection of the internship experiences and lessons learned.

Artifacts (10-20 pages)

The artifact section is organized around performance activities or experiences that demonstrate ISSLC or program standards. The artifacts can demonstrate a single standard or can demonstrate a combination of standards. For example, ISSLC Standard 3 could be demonstrated by a budget analysis, and ISSLC Standards 1 and 3 could be demonstrated by a strategic plan that includes financial, personnel, and material resources for school improvement (UCEA, 2000). Brown & Irby (1997) and The Educational Placement Consortium (2000) also suggest two or three selected letters of reference, a one page annotated list of leadership experiences, examples of parent/community communication, examples of organizational skills, and a list of personal technology skills be included in the artifacts section.

Summary

New principals are expected to be accomplished educators. Search committees expect candidates to be able to articulate instructional leadership skills, communication skills, organizational skills, supervisory skills, fiscal management skills, and technology skills. These abilities and skills are also fundamental to success as a school leader. Consequently, it is incumbent on University training programs to emphasize to aspiring

principals that mastery of these concepts are necessary for career advancement, and for success in the principalship (McCowen et. al. 2000, Educational Placement Consortium, 2000). Portfolios provide the catalyst for such an undertaking.

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