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WHO KNEW? AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A FIRST-YEAR ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

by

Gerald R. Jackman

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Education
(Curriculum and Instruction)

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Logan, Utah

2009

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ABSTRACT

Who Knew? An Autoethnography of a First-Year Assistant Principal

by

Gerald R. Jackman, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2009

Major Professor: Dr. Barry Franklin
Program: Curriculum and Instruction

Few studies have been conducted to take an in-depth look at the role and experience of a new middle school assistant principal. Advantageous timing provided the opportunity for the author to conduct this research study examining his experience as a first-year assistant principal. The guiding question for this autoethnography was "What can be learned from the experiences of a first-year assistant principal that can be used to improve the administrative certification program and training of future assistant principals"? Autoethnography is employed as a methodology to portray the experience and understanding of the participant/observer in comparison to his training and preparation to become the assistant principal of a middle-level school. Data were gathered from personal journal entries both verbally recorded and written by the author during this year and a half period. Other data sources included school discipline records, behavior files, and incident reports recorded during the experience as well as those leading up to this experience. This study describes the preparation experienced by the

author from his time as a middle school and high school classroom teacher, through the certification process, and into his acceptance of his first administrative position at a semi rural, medium size, sixth- and seventh-grade intermediate school. This study takes a critical look at the author's perceived understanding of students, discipline, and his preparation to become an educational leader. The author's own experience forced him to question his views and readiness while bringing to light needed reforms and understandings to the world of an assistant principal.

(178 pages)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, H. LaMar Jackman, a great elementary principal who passed away before he could talk me out of becoming an educator, and to my hero and mother, Jeanne D. Jackman, who taught me to love learning and convinced me to follow in the steps of my father. I am who I am because of you!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first thank my wonderful sweetheart, Christie, and our children for never letting me quit. She believed in me, encouraged me, and took care of the family all the time I was away to class, reviewing data, or writing this dissertation. I never would have even begun without her! I love you all very much!

I want to thank Dr. T. John Nielsen, my father-in-law, for his help and encouragement in completing this work. John and his wife, Lorraine, along with my sister-in-law, Amy, spent many nights unbeknownst to me transcribing voice recordings when the person hired returned this huge amount of files to him untouched, stating that they did not have the time to complete the project. These three exemplary people completed the monumental task and presented the written records to me as a gift—refusing payment. How could I ever thank you enough!

I would also like to thank Dr. Barry Franklin for sticking with me for so many years. He has been extremely patient and has encouraged me along the way. Thank you!

Gerald Jackman

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges for education is the training and retention of leaders. There is a great need for public school administrators across the country and the need is drastically increasing. Many public school principals will soon retire or leave the position for other reasons (Educational Research Services [ERS], 1999). The number of available jobs in school administrations is predicted to grow significantly over the next 5 years, creating a huge need for new administrators (Institute for Educational Leadership [IEL], 2000).

This huge turnover in administrative positions also brings many new and inexperienced school leaders. The majority of new leaders will be assistant principals. The assistant position is considered a steppingstone to the principalship (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991; National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 1991; Tripken, 2006). How successful new leaders are as they begin their career as administrators directly influences future success as a school leader. It is, therefore, critical for new administrators to have a successful first few years. These first years are critical to the success of each new administrator. Sociologists have pointed out that the first year is a crucial period in administrators' socialization, the process by which they internalize the skills, values, and dispositions of the profession (Aiken, 2002; Crow & Mathews, 1998; Normore, 2003). "The first year of the Assistant principalship is critical

in setting the stage for a successful administrative career" (Tripken, p. 6). Training, support, and retention of new assistant principals are, therefore, critical to the rising need for educational leadership.

In July 2001, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that California was producing 2,000 to 3,500 newly licensed administrators each year; yet only 38% assume leadership positions in California schools. Most opt to remain in the classroom or change careers entirely (Association of California Schools Administrators, 2000). One reason for this dropout rate is the stress of changing responsibilities. Lashway (2003) stated, "If experienced principals find their jobs to be exhausting and stressful (and most surveys indicate they do), then what is it like for newcomers? Not surprisingly, words such as 'lost,' 'overwhelmed,' and 'shell-shocked' pervade the literature on first-year principals" (p. 1). The assistant principalship has been referred to as the most demanding position in the school system (Calabrese, 1991). The amount of stress and difficulty of this position is a key factor contributing to the turnover and shortage of assistant principals.

One factor contributing to the stress and difficulty of the position is the method of preparing new administrators. Most new administrators are required to complete a certification program, generally completed at the university. This training is necessary and important, although often too general. The administrative certificate program attempts to prepare candidates for any and all types of administrative positions. Most states, however, do not have separate certification programs or requirements for assistant principals (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991; Tripken, 2006). Few state certification programs even mention the assistant principal in the listing of positions by administrative

certification (Gorton, 1987; Marshall, 1992). A review of 80 graduate catalogues done by Marshall revealed no courses on the assistant principal although this may simply be due to the naming of the courses (Marshall). Certification programs are usually very general, focusing on becoming an educational leader, with little or no emphasis on the assistant principal. Most courses in educational administration focus on leadership philosophies, educational history or administrative theories (Marshall; Olson, Chan, & Pool, 2000).

There are many administrative positions, but each falls under the general umbrella of educational administration. This includes the roles of elementary and secondary principal, elementary, middle school and high school assistant principals, and even district office specialists and director positions. Each of these positions is very different and often a new administrator is put into a position as a novice with little or no experience. The generic training program is helpful, but lacking in specifics for the various positions especially the assistant principalship. Universities and colleges have not tried to teach the important differences between the principal and assistant principal, which are distinctly different positions (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995). Therefore, what the new assistant principal has been presented and taught does not completely describe or prepare him or her for the new position. There needs to be a greater understanding of the vital position of assistant principal. According to Parkay and Rhodes (1992), “By all accounts, new administrators (which are predominantly assistant principals) experience intense, unrelenting stress as they try to adjust their textbook understanding of leadership to the real world of practice” (p. 104). Several studies agree that many new assistant principals begin their career with inappropriate training, and

graduate school does little to alleviate these concerns (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Hartzell et al.; Marshall, 1992). Educational leadership training programs tend to focus on preparing new administrators to become "building leaders," but few ever have the chance to perform "building leader" functions (Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall).

In a recent study, only 7% of California's superintendent's viewed principal preparation programs as "excellent." Only one forth of these superintendents described the preparation of existing candidates as adequate (Association of California Schools Administrators, 2000). Some research suggested that not only are assistant principals not prepared for their position, but also the tasks they perform do little to prepare them to become a principal (Chan et al., 2003; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2000). According to the landmark study by Austin and Brown (1970), there were over 65 distinct tasks that the assistant principal was responsible for in 1970. Much more has been added to the position since then. Of the 65 tasks mentioned, assistant principals were not trained to perform any of them (Austin & Brown). Most of what an assistant principal learns takes place on the job (Marshall, 1992). New assistant principals are often shocked at how unprepared they are for the duties they are responsible to perform (Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall, 1992; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Tripken (2006) stated, "The assistant principal is the forgotten step-child as far as administrative study and research are concerned" (p. 6).

Most new administrators will fill an assistant principal position in the middle or high school level. The remaining new administrators will accept positions as elementary school principals. The duties of these two types of administrators are extremely different.

Preparation programs seldom distinguish between the two, or alter their training to accommodate the different jobs and responsibilities (Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2000).

In summary, new leaders are needed but simply completing the certification program does not insure the person will be adequately trained. Nor will the new leader be given the necessary support to be successful in their job as a new administrator. "While a great deal has been written about principals…comparatively little has been written about the assistant principal" (Mertz & McNeely, 1999). The assistant principal is the "neglected actor in practitioner literature" (Hartzell, 1993). The assistant principalship is a stepping-stone into an administrative career (Austin & Brown, 1970; Marshall, 1992; Schmidt, Kosmoski, & Pollack, 1998). It is intended to be the training ground for the principalship but falls short (Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999). In general, the assistant is perceived to be in training to become principal; therefore, the emphasis is on the principalship. However, this leaves the assistant ill prepared to fulfill his role for the several years before becoming a principal. Many assistants will never become principals; thus, there exists a great need for individualized training and specialized support programs to help retain these new administrators.

Purpose and Objective

Due to the huge turnover in leadership, and the general administrative programs lack of training specific to the assistant principalship, further understanding of the role of assistant principal is needed to help individualize training and support programs in order to retain and help new administrators to be successful.

Sociologists have pointed out that the first year is a crucial period in administrators' socialization, the process by which they internalize the skills, values, and dispositions of the profession (Aiken, 2002; Crow & Mathews, 1998; Normore, 2003). The objective of this study was, therefore, to examine closely the lived experiences of the first-year assistant principal. This examination provided insight and understanding as to the role of an assistant principal. This information is critical to preparing and retaining new administrators, which was the overall purpose of this study, This study brought greater understanding to this role and provided insight for others starting into the position. We cannot hope to retain nor improve the effectiveness of new assistant principals without this greater understanding of their role and duties.

This study was not a traditional hypothesis-based quantitative study. The intent was not simply to log a specific number of events or to say an assistant principal spends 60% of their time doing discipline items or 10% of their time working with teachers. This study was not driven by statistics or calculations. Although this information may provide useful insight and understanding into the routine of an administrator, it was only part of the overall explanation.

This study was a personal narrative, an autoethnography, as previously defined, and as such, had value in providing meaning simultaneously to the author and the reader. Therefore, by definition this was "a study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future…. It is a way of making meaning of our lives as we continue with the daily grind" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). This study will aid others assistant

principals in understanding their role and bring meaning to situations they experience.

It was not the intent of this method of research to have a hypothesis that was accepted or rejected. It was an open, evolving work of research, whose value will change with time and each individual reader. It will provide personal and unique understanding for each person whom reads it. This study will provide the needed reflection of professional practices and understanding of experiences that are needed by new administrators to be successful (Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988),

> For each of us the more we understand ourselves and can articulate reasons why we are what we are, do what we do, and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our (experience) will be. The process of making sense and meaning…of the narratives of our experience is both difficult and rewarding. (p. 11)

Current literature touches on the assistant principal, but generally from a third-party perspective. This fails to achieve the depth and reflective insights needed. A more personal, reflective viewpoint is needed to increase our understanding of the assistant principalship. By using a narrative, autoethnographic format, this personal insight can be attained. This study focused on my experiences but was not limited to my experiences alone. It related my experiences as a new administrator in a middle school. It encompassed a year and a half of experiences dealing with students, parents, faculty, and other groups and individuals. Such a study will inevitably be influenced by the experiences of other administrators I came in contact with, who shared their insights, struggles, and opinions. It was more than just my account; "…all stories are potentially about more than our own experience" (Ellis, 2004, p. 37).

My primary intent was to bring out areas in need of reform in the administrative training process, but the study went beyond this. By studying my lived account, others will find value and understanding in their own experiences. This reflective process will help prepare and retain new administrators. It will aid instructors and mentors in understanding the frustrations and stress of the job. It will enable those struggling through similar situations to avoid pitfalls and build upon my insights. It will help others and myself to understand why we make certain decisions, and do the things we do.

Many of these experiences were unique to my situation, while others were common to all people working with youth. However, whether unique or commonplace, my experiences helped give understanding and meaning to others preparing to become assistant principals. The experiences were extensive enough that all who read this will be able to relate to it and gain understanding in some way.

In short, the purposes and objectives were to improve training for new assistant principals and to provide a better understanding of the position of middle-level assistant principals and help those in similar situations make sense of their position. It answered the following questions.

1. Where can we improve administrative training?
2. What support is needed?
3. How do we balance school wide discipline with leadership?
4. How can the transition from teacher to assistant principal be made easier?
5. Are current training practices working?

Each of these questions will be addressed in this narrative in order to better train

and retain new administrators. In the end, as is the intent of any narrative, each reader will discover what meaning or understanding is gained by them personally from this study.

"Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations"

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 27).

Who Am I? Positionality

According to Creswell (1998) in his book on qualitative design, all good qualitative studies begin with assumptions that "guide the design" (p. 74). These assumptions were a good basis for setting up the framework of this study and provided a medium to discuss and delve into ideologies and perspectives influencing this study and how it was developed and understood.

The first assumption given by Creswell was "the multiple nature of reality," or what he calls the "ontology issue." "The ontological issue addresses the nature of reality for the qualitative researcher; reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research situation. Thus multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, those of the individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or audience interpreting a study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 76).

In this study, the epistemological assumption was that the researcher and subject are one in the same. As an autoethnographer, I physically step into the role as the assistant principal. However, I find a disconnect between what I believed to be the role of the assistant principal, my reality, and the experiences I encountered. Therefore, I

assumed in this study that by reflecting on events from my personal experience I would be able to "minimize the distance or objective separateness." My reflections enabled me to move from being an "outsider," someone looking in on the position of the assistant principal, to becoming "and insider," someone accepted in the field who has an understanding of the participants or in this case myself (Creswell, 1998, p. 76). Becoming both researcher, and subject I gained great freedom to speak as a player in the project. To become part of the whole, able to mingle my experiences with those of students, faculty, community, and all others who play a part in defining the role of the assistant principal is "precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge further along," placing my voice and thoughts into the text makes the study more than "a mere summary and interpretation of the works of others, with nothing new added" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

It is critical to understand and acknowledge that as I related experiences, evaluated situations, and made inferences throughout this study, my situation in life, my beliefs, and past experiences influenced the reality I see. Being raised in rural Utah, in a farming community, and being the seventh of eight children, has undoubtedly influenced my judgments and views of the world I saw and understood. It should be noted here that there were seven boys counting myself, and only one girl. This created a unique dynamic in the home, adding one more thing to the many that influenced my "unique," but what I considered "normal" understanding. My father was an educator, a public school administrator, and a religious and civic leader. My mother, although never being employed outside the home, was my father's equal in every way. She was an experienced

educator and teacher, a strong community leader, and role model. She was an advocate for education, and continues to this day, to work to improve her community. My parent's success and ideals undoubtedly influenced what I grew up to view as "normal" family life. My father's unexpected death when I was a high school teen may have given me a brief look at life in a single-parent home. This situation was, however, unique and not equitable to today's stereotypical single-parent situation in any way. My youth was very, what I would consider "stable," "normal," and in most ways very privileged although I did not ever recognize it as such. I grew up in a homogeneous, low to middle class, white, rural, and very conservative small community. Education was valued, expected, and never questioned in my home. This reality and educational ideal of my childhood was first put in question when I became a teacher. Until that time, I had considered what I knew and experiences to be "average," the "status quo." I had never considered that perhaps my understanding and personal reality was unique or different from those students who I taught. I discuss this awakening more in the background section of my narrative. However, for all intents and purposes, as I married, finished my university degree, began teaching, and ultimately moved into administration, I became in most respects my father. The community in which I took the position of assistant principal was very similar to the one I had grown up in, or so I thought as I took the position. Statistically, it is a rural, middle class, and perhaps not totally but nearly homogeneous community with less than 20% of the population being of minority descent. Agriculture was not the primary source of income but was still a major part of the community. My father was never a farmer, nor am I, although we both settled in "farming communities"

to raise our families.

Throughout this study, as my personal reality comes in contact with contrasting situations and views, this reality ironically serves to exacerbate my shock and unpreparedness for the position. I had not experienced, acknowledged, or been exposed to alternate realities, perhaps a crucial flaw in my preparation. I therefore, take a postmodernistic view to move our knowledge of the assistant principal within the conditions of the world today. A postmodernist view is needed to bring to the surface the inconsistencies and contradictions in the certification process for new administrators as compared to actual lived experiences.

There must also be an "axiological" assumption in this study that will take into account the "value-laden nature" of my experience (Creswell, 1998, p. 76). My situation, experiences, values, ideals, and view of reality undoubtedly impacted the gathering and recording of data throughout this study. Interactions with students, parents and teachers brought questions to my views. They challenged my sense and definition of "successful", "at risk," and even "dysfunctional." These are all classification I perceived and qualified based on my biased beliefs and values. How I define education, learning, school, or even "good behavior" is all biased, based on personal experience. My biases cannot be ignored or stifled in this study. They are part of who I am and need to be acknowledged and accounted for as you the reader seek to find meaning and value in this study. Who better situated to tell my story, who better to explain my feelings, which would be meaningless without my personal biases, thoughts and background? "The studied world can be captured only from the perspective of the researcher" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As

researcher and individual, I am best situated to describe my experiences more accurately than anyone else does (Ellis, 1991).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Current literature reveals the growing problems associated with becoming a school administrator, as well a need to provide more information and support for beginning administrators; specifically, assistant administrators.

According to the ERS (1999), an estimated 40% of all public school principals will retire or leave their position for one reason or another before the year 2010. Available jobs in school administration will grow 10 to 20% over the next 5 years as estimated by The Bureau of Labor Statistics (Lovely, 2004). Lovely summarized the finding of the ERS stating that, "with the average age of a principal being 50 years or older, compounded by fewer people pursuing advancement opportunities leading to a principalship, many districts are scrambling to find strong leaders" (Lovely, p. 1). These statistics show that there will be a drastic influx of new administrator positions, which is estimated to continue to grow exponentially.

This shortage of administrators would normally not be a problem if there were an adequate pool of candidates to fill the positions. However, what does the available pool look like? Information compiled by Suzette Lovely reports, "during the late 1970s, an urban school district could expect as many as 40 applicants for every principal opening." Today that average is merely 10 (Lovely, 2004). In a study by Archer (2002), it was stated that nearly half of the 1,100 public schools in 2001 in New York City were

managed by principals with less than 3 years experience. In 2002-2003, the state of Washington summoned 34 retired principals back to work to fill in, as districts desperately sought new prospects (Association of Washington School Principals, 2003). Current research, therefore, points to a growing shortage of administrators. It also validates the concern that there are many veteran administrators leaving the profession. The majority of new administrators will begin their careers as an assistant principal (Marshall, 1992; Tripkin, 2006). Although coursework in educational administration tends to concentrate on preparing the principal, few new administrators will start out in the position of principal (Matthews & Crow, 2003). The assistant principal is the initial step into administration, a steppingstone to the principalship (Marshal & Mitchell, 1991; NASSP, 1991; Tripkin; Winter, 2002). It is, therefore, prudent to focus on of the assistant principal position and the related literature.

Background into the Assistant Principal

"Although by all accounts there exists little in the way of substantial information regarding the assistant principal, the literature suggests that the position first appeared early in the 20th century" (Tripkin, 2006). According to Panyako and Rorie (1987), the original purpose of the assistant principal was to relieve the principal of some of the administrative and management duties that could be accomplished by someone other than the principal. This sentiment was echoed by Shockley and Smith (1981) by stating that the purpose of the assistant principal position was to assist the post World War II principal with the increasing demands of the job. They further stated that by having an

assistant the principal would more effectively fulfill their duties and be able to meet the demands of their job. They noted, however, that the assistant principal was usually assigned those tasks that the principal found undesirable. According to Kelly (1987), the assistant principal has performed the same set of tasks since its creation. The duties and responsibilities have remained the same in spite of educational reform and societal change. In the landmark study by Austin and Brown (1970), it was concluded that the assistant principal position was essentially one of helping the principal by sharing the load and freeing them up to be the instructional leader. Historically, however, the role of the assistant principal has been one that has remained in the background. The position was created to assist the principal, and is therefore a behind-the-scenes type of job. It has not been a defined position. In their review of previous literature, Reed and Conners (1982) summarized that since 1926 most of the existing research asked the same or similar questions "What is the role of the vice principal? What is the relationship of this role to other site administrators, and how is it related to the organization as a whole?"

The assistant principal is a position that is heavily influenced and often defined by the principal. The relationship of the assistant principal to the site principal is important to understand (McIntyre, 1988). Manatt (1989) stated that much of what the assistant principal does depends on the principal and not on a job description.

In general, the current research states that historically the duties, successes, failures, and even their future success as an assistant administrator depends upon the individual principal. The assistant principal's success depends upon the principal's willingness to share responsibilities, to mentor and assist and provide opportunities

essential as an educational leader (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Gorton, 1987; Manatt, 1989; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991; McIntyre, 1988). "National studies and reports can be helpful, but no other entity has a greater impact on the fortunes of an assistant principal in a specific school than the principal of that school" (Gorton, p. 3). It is the individual, unique, match-up of the assistant principal and the principal that makes such a difference in the success of an administrator. It is important for the principal and the assistant principal to complement each other and become a stronger team (LaRose, 1987). However, according to Scoggins and Bishop (1993), the assistant principal receives "little or no recognition, prestige, or authority in the school. He or she may be considered invisible and this might create problems for those in assistant principal positions." In order to understand the relationship between the principal and assistant principal, and to better understand and define the role of the assistant principal, both Panyako and Rorie (1987) and Reed and Connors (1982) recommended the need for further research in these areas.

Duties and Responsibilities

In 1970, the NASSP sponsored a study by Austin and Brown. This is still considered one of the landmark studies looking into the role of the assistant principal. In 2006, Tripkin stated that the Austin and Brown study is "the most significant piece of research produced thus far regarding the assistant principalship" (Tripkin, p. 43). The study by Austin and Brown surveyed 1,000 principals and 1,000 assistant principals. The participants were given a questionnaire, which, when compiled, revealed the following

results.

1. The assistant principal is involved in almost every aspect of the school.
2. The assistant principal is rarely given full responsibility for any task.
3. The principals questioned understood that the tasks assigned to the assistant principal did not provide for high level discretionary behavior.
4. More principals than assistant principals hold positive perceptions of the assistant principalship.

This study also brought out the fact that detailed job descriptions for the assistant principalship were nearly nonexistent. This was echoed in studies by Austin (1972) and Greenfield (1985). The Austin and Brown (1970) study identified 21 common duties among assistant principals. It also identified as many as 65 duties that were key responsibilities of the assistant principal, but that they were not trained to perform. The two most common duties were dealing with discipline and attendance. This study by Austin and Brown was followed up approximately 20 years later by two other notable studies on the assistant principalship, one by Hartzell (1990) and the other by Marshall (1992). Both of these studies confirmed that attendance and discipline continued to be the two main duties of the assistant principal (Hartzell; Marshall). In an extensive review of literature by Scoggins and Bishop directed at identifying the duties of the assistant principal, 26 authors identify 20 common duties of the assistant principal. These duties include maintaining student discipline, tracking attendance, supervision of student activities and athletics, meeting with community agencies, developing the master schedule, calendar and budget, completing reports and even substituting for the principal,

(Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). These seminal studies have served to identify a few of the primary duties of the assistant principal. However, they also show how extensive the list of duties can be and how ill prepared they are for many of these duties. For example, a key responsibility of the assistant principal is to interview participants in an altercation. Yet they typically receive no formal training on how to do this (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1994). Marshall concluded that most of what an assistant principal learns is learned on the job.

Although the literature identifies several common duties, the list of possible duties is extensive and continues to grow and increase over time (Panyako & Rorie, 1987; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991). Current literature, therefore, reveals the absence of, and need for, a clearly defined description of the role of the assistant principal. As Black (1980), Marshall (1992), and Reed and Connors (1982) have stated, there is not a consistent, well-defined, job description or list of duties for the assistant principalship. "It is imperative that there be a concrete job definition of the assistant principalship otherwise efforts to prepare assistant principals and to study current problems will be ineffective" (Mustafa, 2001). This reaffirms the need for a more defined description of the role of the assistant principal.

There is currently a great need for understanding the various duties and responsibilities performed by the assistant principal (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). The assistant principalship is a "critical position in educational organizations" (Marshall, 1992). It is therefore an important area of inquiry and deserves addition attention (Greenfield, 1985; Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall; Tripkin, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002).

Kaplan and Owings (1999) completed an intense review of educational articles published during the 1990s. They found that only 1% of the nearly 800 articles reviewed had the assistant principal as the focus of the article. There are also more assistant principals than any other administrative position in the United States (Bartholomew & Fusarelli, 2003). It is, therefore, astounding that the assistant principal has not been the subject of much more discussion and research. The need for further research into the role and understanding of the assistant principal is obvious.

The Beginning

Where does it all begin? As previously stated, most administrators begin their career as assistant principals. To become an administrator, applicants generally must have a teaching certificate, teaching experience, and complete a certification program or master's degree at a college or university. These, however, are not the requirements in every state. Some states require only a teaching certificate, while other states require only completion of an administrative certification program (Marshall, 1992). Entry requirements are not standardized across the educational system. This fact alone adds to the confusion about the role of the beginning assistant administrator. Even where certification programs are more rigorous, training for assistant principals is seen as inadequate (Hartzell et al., 1994).

Chan stated that 77% of all new assistant principals start with the intention of becoming a principal (Chan et al., 2003). According to a study by Petzko (2002), in which a questionnaire was sent to approximately 1,400 principals, 58% reported being an

assistant principal before becoming a principal. This foreseen opportunity to move into a principalship or other "upward" position is considered the greatest motivator for accepting an assistant principalship (Marshall, 1992; Newstrom & Davis, 1997). Whether this upward movement takes place or not, the first year as an assistant principal affects the person's future success in other positions. "The first year of the assistant principalship is critical in setting the stage for a successful administrative career. It is here that the attitudes that will influence commitment and performance for one's entire career are formed" (Hartzell et al., 1994).

Socialization is an important but often unexpected obstacle of many first year administrators. "Every school is a unique organization, with its own history, environment, and cast of characters…They [assistant principals] must go from 'stranger' to 'insider,' quickly discerning the unwritten rules and identifying the real movers and shakers" (Lashway, 2003, p.1). "Many beginners report a strong sense of isolation. The isolation can be magnified when they receive little feedback from supervisors" (Lashway, p. 1). Most new administrators were previously classroom teachers. The difficulty in making the transition from classroom teacher to administrator is often unexpected.

New assistants are often shocked by time demands and expectations. Although actual duties may vary there is a "uniform consistent element of surprise amongst assistant principals" (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). This statement was questioned in a study by Mertz (2000). She focused her study on eight assistant principals and their personal experiences. She found in initial interviews the assistant principals stated that their job had turned out, as expected. Throughout the interviews, however, each referred

to specific duties or events that were a surprise. The first year is a time of uncertainty despite graduate courses and preparation that may have occurred. “Every day mixes opportunities, problems, joys, and anxieties in unpredictable ways” (Hartzell et al., 1994).

Once appointed the new assistant principal is greatly influenced by the principal. “The principal is the key to improving the assistant principalship” (Gorton, 1987). Studies by Manatt (1989), Marshall and Mitchell (1991), McIntyre (1988), and Rodrick (1986) all addressed the importance of the principal to the assistant. The literature shows that from the beginning, this interaction with the principal dictates duties, responsibilities and ultimately the experiences of the assistant principal. “Indeed, the entire structural formation of assistant principals’ position rests in the hands of principals” (Tripkin, 2006, p. 4). In general, the duties of the assistant principal center around student supervision and discipline (Austin & Brown, 1970; Kelly, 1987; Marshall, 1992; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Rodrick, 1986). However, as previously stated, there is not a highly defined job description available for the assistant principal. Research shows that the assistant principal will be given tasks that they have not been trained to do, and these assigned tasks will not prepare them for further administrative positions (Browne-Ferrigno, 2002; Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall). The assistant is often not given the opportunity to perform important duties and tasks designated as the principal’s. For example, developing a school wide budget, supervising the development of curriculum or improving classroom instruction are duties important to an educational leader but are handled primarily by the principal. These types of duties are seldom assigned to the assistant principal, but he or she will be expected to effectively perform these duties once

they are promoted to the principalship. Unless there is a conscious effort made by the principal to include and involve the assistant in such duties, they will lack the necessary experience to perform such duties later in their career.

Principals need to understand their influence in molding the new assistant principal. In the study by Austin and Brown (1970), it was shown that in 1970, 80% of assistant principals moved into other administrative positions. Further studies express concern that principals are not helpful in preparing assistant principals for other positions (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Greenfield, 1985; Rodrick, 1986). It should be noted that there are assistant principals who do not move into another administrative position. They remain as an assistant principal throughout their career. A decade after Austin and Brown completed their seminal study, Gross, Shapiro, and Meehan (1980) investigated the career assistant principal. They found that statistically, a significant number of assistant principals were remaining longer in their positions. This is a possible refutation the claim that the assistant principalship is a steppingstone into other administrative positions. However, this increase according to Gross and colleagues, was suspected to be due to the closing of school in the district studied, which limited opportunities for mobility. It was suspected that given the opportunity, many more assistant principals would have made a move to a principalship or other position sooner (Gross et al.). Therefore, whether sooner or later, the literature indicates the vast majority of assistant principals accepted the position with the expectation of moving into another leadership position, and most will. However, the idea that the assistant principalship is “a steppingstone” is overshadowed by the research showing that it is not a good training ground for these other positions

(Kelly, 1987; Wells et al., 1999).

In general, the research shows that an assistant principal's first few years on the job are the most critical to his or her overall success as administrators. The new assistant principals complete a nonstandardized set of requirements to become and administrator. They are often quickly assigned duties by the principal that ultimately define their role and position. Due to generalized requirements or lack of preparation they are often surprised, ill prepared, and have had little training to accomplish the duties assigned to them. Their success often depends on the support and interaction with the principal. They have usually accepted the position as assistant principal with the intent of becoming a principal. Duties assigned to them however, seldom prepare them for positions outside of the assistantship.

To put it plainly, they are placed into a position they are not prepared for, given responsibilities that do not transfer to the principalship, and the first few years are the most critical to their success. More research and understanding of the role of the assistant principal and their interaction with the principal is needed. They need to know what to expect.

Educational Leadership and the Assistant Principal

There are many theories on leadership currently influencing education today. Reeves (2006) summed it up best in his introduction stating, "Of all the books available on Amazon.com right now 16,971 address leadership and 3,199 address leadership in education" (p. xvii). Current literature overwhelmingly shows the importance of good

leadership to the success of students and schools (Glickman, 2002; Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005; Reeves). Leadership is essential; therefore, current practices for preparing new administrators should focuses on developing educational leaders. Many authors approach leadership from a general perspective, providing guidelines, practices, and "a framework for success" for any educational leader (Reeves). Most authors writing on the topic of leadership agree there is not a single magical method for leadership that answers all of the complex questions and situations encountered as a leader. Sergiovanni (2001) stated:

> Today's leadership theories are too rational and too scripted to fit the messy world in which schooling actually takes place. The theories sound great, but do not work well in the real world of practice. Dealing with the complexities of this world requires that teachers and administrators practice a leadership based less and less on their personalities, less and less on their positions, less and less on mandates, and more and more on ideas. (p. x)

It is this search for understanding and ideas that falls in line with this study. Although there are many great ideas and theories about leadership, and especially educational leadership, none are presented through the eyes of the assistant principal. Most literature and authors, as with the previously cited book, present their findings and their focus through the position of the principal (McEwan, 2003; Reeves, 2006; Sergiovanni, 1991, 2001). Although their findings are intended to be general to all positions of leadership they use the vehicle of the principalship to present their ideas, methods, and proposals for change.

Currently, there is a great need to approach educational leadership through the eyes of the assistant principal. Current literature lacks this viewpoint. This lens will aid assistant principals in understanding how they too become more effective leaders. This

study; while not intending to detract from current literature on leadership and the importance of training educational leaders; will be a different approach. This work will address the need for a greater focus on the assistant principal and what is gained through reflection. What each reader gains will vary but the approach will not be a general consideration of leadership from various views and especially not through the eyes of the principal. This study addresses the need to focus more on the position of assistant as it pertains to leadership.

Autoethnography/Narrative Inquiry

The question guiding this research asked, "What experiences do I encounter as a first year assistant principal, and what meaning do I derive from these experiences"? How could I have been better prepared? What was I ready for and where were the surprises? When did I find myself needing more support or training? What experiences have contributed to my success or failure? How has my perception of the assistant principalship changed since receiving my certification, and what does it mean to me now? This study will identify the responsibilities assigned to me as a new assistant principal, and question if and how well I was prepared to fulfill them. How could I have been better prepared, and how has this experience prepared me for other leadership positions? How does the assistant principal become an educational leader and what does this mean? In short, this study is "about how looking at the world from a specific, perspective, and limited vantage point can tell, teach, and put people in motion. It is about…creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change"

(Reinelt, 1998, p. 286). This is a statement to autoethnography in general, but applies to this study in specific regards the world of education and the assistant principal. This study uses the vehicle of autoethnography to create the necessary dialogue to bring about reform in preparing new administrators through looking at the entire gamete of experiences.

The selected methodology of autoethnography or is narrative inquiry, is based in qualitative research. The two terms are often used synonymously or as a subgroup in ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Narrative inquiry in itself has various approaches each having similarities and differences depending on the situation, interests or assumptions of the researcher. Chase (2002) categorized narrative inquiry into five approaches or lenses, which she stresses, are interconnected. One lens, according to Chase, is termed narrative ethnography and, another autoethnography. This study although indeed a form of narrative inquiry, may also be considered an example of autoethnography. According to Ellis and Bochner, there were over 60 terms in the literature associated with autoethnography including personal narratives, personal essays, reflexive ethnography, narrative ethnography and many more (Ellis & Bochner).

Autoethnography is a genre in which the researcher richly tells of their personal experiences in order to explain or bring meaning to a greater cultural context. Autoethnography is "research writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection…." (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Autoethnography is not limited to a written form and may be expressed through poetry or

even through song (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Jones (2002) stated that after what she described as her first encounter with autoethnography, Ronai's (1995) "multiple reflections," she realized that "I had been experiencing autoethnography all my life—in Reymond Carver's short stories, Silvia Plath's poetry, Milan Kundera's novels, and Billie Holiday's singing" (p. 764). Again showing the extensive mediums used and classified as autoethnography. Stemming from autobiographical research, autoethnography is still very fluid and evolving including many different genres. In whole, although many give viewpoints, assistance and examples of auethnographical research, "autoethnography does not proceed linearly" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 119) taking many forms as numerous as the situations, and researchers, leaving many questions regarding the method (Wall, 2006).

In this study, autoethnography took the form of a personal narrative in which the researcher and reader shares a sort of collaborative journey. Autoethnography is "a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with other in social contexts" (Spry, 2001, p. 710). The researcher or author shares compelling, heartfelt experiences in order to bring the reader into the account and help them to make connections from their own lived experiences. "Readers and audiences are invited to share in the emotional experiences of an author" (Jones, 2002, p. 764). Bochner, very appropriately, calls this form of narrative an "evocative narrative" with the "reader as a co-participant in dialogue" (Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p. 744).

Such accounts are usually written in a first person voice including dialogue, emotions, and personal observations that help the author convey their feelings to the

reader. Ellis and Bochner (2002) explained, "Each is a first-person account written as a story that expresses vivid details about the author's own experience…. The author privileges stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations" (p. 744). Ellis and Bochner asked the readers to "feel the truth of the stories and to become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (p. 745). Jones (2002) stated, "Autoethnography is setting the scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation…and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives" (p. 765).

The formats for these kinds of studies vary. Each narrative is as different as each personality and desire. Autoethnography can be a soul wrenching account of struggles faced by individuals or a humorous, insightful account of one's experiences. Wall (2006) demonstrated this diversity in the methodology of autoethnography. She reviewed several studies and narratives displaying this diversity. In "A Choice for K'aila," Paulette tells about a life changing rare experience, her decision not to permit her infant son to go through a life saving liver transplant. This study is a highly emotional narrative about faith and beliefs and "informed understanding of the anticipated life course of a liver transplant recipient" Wall uses this example to show how highly personal and evocative one side of the spectrum can be with autoethnography. She contrasted this with a humorous article by Pelias about his observation of "the daily habits and demands of academic life." This is a short, humorous, and honest look into an everyday situation for

many students at the university. Both studies are based solely upon personal experience, yet each is written to stimulate different emotions, reactions, and thoughts from the reader. It is not enough to feel the emotions however. Autoethnography in essence is eliciting feelings that move the reader to action. "Autoethnographic tests focus on creating a palpable emotional experience as it connects to and separates from, other ways of knowing, being, and acting in/on the world" (Jago, 2002; Spray, 2001).

Two other studies introduced by Wall (2006) fit in between the previous two on the emotional scale. First is Sparkes, an account of his battle with inflammatory back disease and the change brought into his life from being an elite athlete to struggling with ordinary daily life. The second less emotional was Holt telling his story of becoming a graduate teaching assistant. Wall used these articles to show further degrees of emotion as well as how authors use outside information. Sparks used "other data sources such as medical diagnostic test reports, reconstructions of conversations, selections from newspapers about previous athletic accomplishments, and excerpts from a personal diary. Holt on the other hand basses his study on a 2-year reflective log book. After several more reviews (Duncan, Clark and Ellis), Wall concluded, "These examples attest, the range of autoethnographic writings is vast and includes everything from the conservative, methodologically rigorous study,…the personal but theoretically supported,…and the highly literary and evocative" (Wall, p. 2).

The use of narrative inquiry or autoethnography is suitable to this study in that it pulls together the study of personal experience within the larger context of understanding and bringing meaning to the assistant principalship. Jones (2002) described it best when

she told of her first encounter with autoethnography. It was a work by Ronai, an autoethnography about her experience and reflection on child sex abuse. Jones stated:

> Ronai's story has a powerful effect on me. My thinking—about writing and scholarship, about the power of texts—shifted. Her language and story accomplished something that, up until that point, I had believed to be the business of music, novels, and film; they invited me into a lived felt experience. I could not stand outside of her words at a safe remove. Ronai's story demanded that I respond and react. (p. 764)

This methodology is validated by Pratt (1995) when he stated, "We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life… Stories give theory flesh and breath" (p. 22).

This is a study of not just one event or experience, or even of a bounded time sequence of events. It is a study that is intended to bring a deeper understanding and meaning to the ongoing position of assistant principal.

Literature Review Summary

A review of the literature has shown a growing need for new administrators in education. The majority of new administrators will begin their career as an assistant principal with the goal of moving into a principalship someday. The question then being asked is what will be their role as assistant principals and what can be done to improve training and support for this growing population of administrators.

From the literature, the assistant principal position was created in the early 20th century to aid the principal with managerial duties. The duties of the principal became too extensive for one person to handle. The assistant was therefore, given charge over several of these duties to relieve the burden off the principal. Generally, they were

assigned those duties and tasks considered undesirable by the principal. The principal therefore, played an important part in defining the role of the assistant. The principal continues to have a tremendous impact on the success of the assistant according to current research. This implies a need to understand their relationship as well and the principalship for which there is an abundant amount of research. The majority of current research focuses on the principal or educational leader but seems to ignore the assistant principal. This is not to say there has not been research done on the assistant. There have been several studies that have focused on identifying the role of the assistant principal. The three most prominent studies were the Austin and Brown (1970), Marshall (1992), and the Hartzel and colleagues (1995). These studies identified numerous duties that assistant principals were required to perform. None of these studies were able to strictly define the assistant principal position. Each concluded that there was not an available job description for the position and that further research was needed into the role of the assistant. These studies concluded that the assistant principal is a vital position, often left behind the scene with inadequate training. Scoggins and Bishop (1993) conducted an in-depth review of the 26 most notable studies on the assistant principalship and came to the same general conclusions. Again it was concluded that there are similar duties required of all assistant principals including behavior and student supervision, but that there was not a strict definition of the position. In each of the three core studies along with the review by Scoggins and Bishop it was brought out that not only was the position of assistant principal very important, but that the first year was the most critical. The first year set the stage of future success as an administrator. Further understanding of the job

requirements, better training specific to the assistant principal, and more support and interaction from the principal would increase the success of the new assistant principal.

This review has identified a need for further research into the role of the assistant principal. It has shown that there have been several large studies performed, none of which have touched on the personal lived experiences of assistant principals. There is a great need for more qualitative research on the subject of the assistant principal. A narrative inquiry/autoethnography into the assistant principalship is needed to provide a different viewpoint into the vital role of assistant principal. A view is needed that has not been seen from the existing literature. Autoethnography will provide a view and account to evoke emotion, foster understanding and bring about action and change in the certification program.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life."

(Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p. 737).

Introduction

This study was guided by the question, "What experiences are encountered as a first year assistant principal, and what can be learned from these experiences to better support and prepare other first year assistant principals?" I chose autoethnography or narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study. There is some disagreement regarding which aspects deserve greater emphasis in an autoethnography. Should the research process be given first priority; is the culture in which the study is embedded of primary importance; or is it oneself and ideas (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). Should the greatest emphasis be placed on how information was recorded and remembered? Is it necessary for this narrative to devote extensive effort to helping the reader understand the community and culture in which the researcher is involved? On the other hand, should the researcher give the greatest devotion to personal feelings, attitudes, and reflection? Autoethnography is not a very strictly defined method. I therefore, used the guidelines provided in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. In the handbook, Ellis and Bochner outlined the important features of autoethnography, which is considered interchangeable with narrative inquiry. They stated that an autoethnography should be written in first person voice in which "concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and

self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectally reveled through action, feeling, thought, and language" (p. 739). My procedures for this study separate into three parts: data collection, data analysis, and written narrative. Data collection and analysis, along with the final written narrative, need to be done with the previously stated characteristics in mind.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study consisted of any and all records that contributed to the "telling" of the story. Paramount among the records collected were the personal documentations of events and feelings. A journal was kept of my day-to-day experiences beginning with my acceptance of the position in May 2004. I kept the journal regularly until November of 2006 nearly 18 months later. I continued to record some experiences my second year but much less frequently until the end of the school year on June 2, 2006. This study related only the events of my first year but was influenced by my reflections of the second year as well. The record was paramount in capturing concrete action, dialogue, emotion, and so forth, as was necessary for this study. "The spontaneous, intimate diary is the personal document par excellence" (Allport, 1942, p. 95). The method found to be most effective was to digitally record my experiences during the half hour drive to and from school each day using a hand-held digital recorder. I was able to preserve thoughts, feelings, and emotions along with events of each day or at least every 2 days as I traveled to and from school. Nearly everything that happened was recorded.

The second year's entries, however, were not nearly as comprehensive. I recorded only the most notable events of the week or those events that had a significant impact on me personally. I did not feel it necessary to record the normal day-to-day routine events during the second year. The first year was sufficient to establish the "routine."

Throughout the 2 years, I was engaged full-time on site for 8 to 10 hours each contract day. The amount of time chosen was to maximize the quality and rigor of the study. A narrative inquiry, as with other qualitative studies, requires a large amount of time in the field to establish the genuine behaviors of those involved in the study (Glesne & Peshkin. 1992). The time spent in the field was adequate to experience the full range of events in a school year, and then validate the experiences with the second year of data.

Along with the personal journal entries, other official documents were referenced. Calendars, meeting agendas, memos, letters, and the detailed behavior reports from both years were used as additional data sources. These sources were used to triangulate the data in the journal. Triangulation of data is a measure of validity for qualitative research (Lather, 1986). Although the journal entries constituted the majority of the needed data, these other records were needed to increase the validity of the study. Each form of data were useful in producing the necessary "emotional recall" spoken of by Ellis and Bochner (2002) for a narrative inquiry.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data journal entries were transcribed. The journals and other documents were reviewed and categorized. The data were then separated into

common events or areas for improvement in the administrative certification program. The categories were not set in advance to insure that my experiences determined the results and not a predetermination or expectation of results. “The qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data. The categories that emerge from field notes, documents, and interviews are not imposed prior to data collection” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 389). Once separated and categorized, the data was used to provide the physical details, events, thoughts, descriptions, and even dialogue to help in the process of “emotional recall.” This is a process in which the researcher engages in an intense reflection on a specific event or memory (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). This emotional reflection is an important aspect of the data analysis. It is necessary to the selection of which events will be retold in the narrative, and which will be deemed unnecessary. It should be noted that out of respect for student privacy, the names of students and staff were changed in the narrative.

How it All Came Together

I began this study just as I completed the administrative certification program. I had been contemplating a study on remediation for at-risk students when I was offered the position as an assistant principal. I was approached by Dr. Franklin and asked if I had ever considered the possibility of capitalizing on the situation and doing some sort of personal narrative of my experience as a new middle-level assistant principal. The prospect was intriguing. I was new and saw a great deal of value in doing just such a reflective process. In everything I had learned throughout the certification process, the

reflection and evaluation process was critical to learning. My motives in the beginning were perhaps selfish but I wanted to improve my effectiveness as an administrator and this seemed like a perfect way to do it.

As the process progressed, I became even more aware of the need for something outside of the normal statistical realm. I had all the statistics about my position or at least what had transpired over the previous 6 years before I came to the school. I could look up the number of fights, the number of students sent out of class, and even the number of students who came late to school. I had the numbers but no understanding. I wanted more, and as time progressed, I wanted deeper understanding. Each day I was faced with new situations that caught me off guard. Often I would wonder if my experience was normal for a new assistant principal. I soon began to realize that I was not so abnormal and that there were probably thousands of other new administrators going through the same experience. Therefore, what started out as a personal desire to be better, grew into a desire to share my experiences with other new administrators. It was a way to help others avoid some of the pitfalls, and more important a way to insure that the work I accomplished would not be forgotten when I moved to another school or took another position. I knew I would not be in this position forever, but I did not want everything I had worked for and accomplished to be lost when I left. I wanted the next person to know about my struggles, my accomplishments and most of all I wanted this person to have more than the one page job description that I received when I arrived. I knew that I needed a way to reflect and share deeper feelings and insights.

Therefore, I chose to use autoethnography as the vehicle to accomplish my

desires. I wanted to tell my story and although I knew that others might question whether this was truly an autoethnography, a narrative inquiry, or other similar work, my intent was focused on relating the experience and not so focused on keeping with protocol. I never intended this study to become an example of how to do an autoethnography. The purpose was really to convey my thoughts and insights to other administrators. The method was simply the best fit for the experience I wanted to share.

The reflection was my focus. What I gained personally and what could be passed on to others was my main concern. It was "my story" and the narrative became the focus of the study. It was much more important to me or the new administrator audience I was writing to then the literature review or discussion on how to do an autoethnography. These were the thoughts and experiences I wanted them to remember and know about before they were confronted with similar experiences.

As I progressed through the reflection, different sections and areas began to emerge. The Narrative was divided into three sections to help bring about my purposes; setting the stage, at-risk students, and faculty and staff. There was so much information I could not possibly relate all of it. The sections selected were each for a specific purpose.

The setting the stage section helped to give and understanding of my situation; where I was coming from. It would not be possible to understand my feelings or what I was experiencing without first knowing where I had come from. The reader needed to know a little about who I was. I wanted to bring out the fact that I was just like the majority of new administrators. I did not want it to be another extreme account. I did not want the reader to see this account as another inner city, high poverty, low-performing,

slum school that the average new administrator thinks will never apply to his situation. I wanted the reader to know I was just like them. The reader needed to know my perception as a teacher, what I had taught, and where my understanding had developed. Why did I perceive students as I did? Setting the stage gave the reader and myself a place to gauge my understanding from and measure the change in myself.

The at-risk section was the focus of my narrative. In the beginning, I thought I had an adequate understanding of at risk issues. I had a picture in my mind of who these students were and what they needed. I had made a personal model as a teacher of what to expect and whom to qualify as at-risk. Through this reflection, my definition of at-risk expanded greatly. My ideas were not wrong they just were not complete. At-risk is not a simple definition, which is why I used four different accounts of students. I knew it would not be possible to discuss all the topics that are related with this area so I focused on just four that I believed would be of the most value to new administrators. This became the focus of the narrative. It was what I did every day.

The section on staff and faculty simply covered the rest of everything that impacted my understanding of the role of assistant principal. It showed the need to work with the community and people. This section identified others who were impacting students such as cooks, aids, and custodians. It also discussed the need to look outside the box for ways to support and help students.

Why Autoethnography

The recording of my personal experiences has truly been and continues to be a

remarkable journey. To use ethnography as the vehicle to explain my thoughts and gained understanding was very valuable, but difficult and often painful. A little like my New Year's resolution to start jogging. At first, it makes everything ache and even the simplest movements painful, but the excitement and resolve keep you trudging along. I reviewed everything, read through every account, and then second-guessed my motives and actions. Had I accomplished anything? Was I effective in spite of the obvious mistakes and pitfalls of that first year? As my psychological self-esteem muscles ached at every student I remembered suspending or saw involved with the police, I wondered if I really wanted to remember it all.

Sure, when you are out jogging everything loosens up and you do not feel all the aching. Just like each morning that I showed up for work and went about my duties without much hesitation. Now when I look back through more seasoned eyes at the vast amount of experience I gained in such a short time, and then I try to give order and purpose to it all; it hurts!

Then slowly, as I continued the struggle, I trudged along, after stopping and starting who knows how many times. Then little by little, I began to gain understanding to my actions and decisions. I began to see ways to improve situations I had previously thought out of my control. It became valuable, an experience that changed me deep down. I just wish the New Year's resolution had worked out as well.

The memories I share are but a few. These events are specific and represent only a small yet critical part of my experiences as an assistant principal. Occasional I am asked why I chose to share these very personal thoughts and take the risk associated with

sharing thoughts and feelings with the world. Why use autoethnography; why not use a case study model or statistical analysis? At times, I have asked the same questions, and wondered if another methodology would have been simpler, quicker, or at least less painful. Looking back however, the choice was sound and I have gained many things from writing this personal narrative that would not have been realized through other research methods. Autoethnography was the means to tell my story, to explain and untangle my thoughts, something I perceived as unattainable through other methodology. I have a voice, and I have knowledge to share. I had more to contribute then the knowledge of others. My voice was important and breaking from traditional writing and research conventions opened doors and opportunities for greater learning and meaning. By separating from convention, some may believe I weaken my stance, lesson the strength of my claims. Sara Wall quoted and abbreviated Richardson in challenging the use of traditional research conventions by using autoethnography. She quoted, "How we are expected to write affects what we can write about…. The conventions hold tremendous material and symbolic power over [researchers]. Using them increases the probability of [acceptance] but they are not…evidence of greater—or lesser—truth value…than writing using other conventions." She went on to summarize that "conventions create only the illusion that knowledge produced is more legitimate" (Richardson, 2000, p. 7, as cited in Wall, 2006, p. 4). Sharing my voice to the world is "simply an acknowledgement that [I] have something to say" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 423).

When I began recording my day-to-day experiences using the digital recorder, I

had no idea where this would lead. I enjoyed the time and found it to be a great tool to help plan for the following day. I had no idea of the sheer volume of information that was being accumulated. They were just voice files downloaded onto my computer every other week or so. Once compiled, the amount of information it made my jaw drop. Wow! I had over 50, 30- to 45-minute digital voice recordings; a detailed behavior summary compiled from nearly 2,000 individual behavior incidents; several personal files full of handwritten notes and accounts I did not have a chance to digitally record, as well as files containing witness reports to fights and other similar problems. The realization hit me like freight train; a complete account of my life that first year would fill volumes. The amount of data I had to work with was formidable—daunting to say the least. I would never have been able to accumulate a similar mountain of data using another qualitative method nor would I have tried. I was both pleased and unnerved by the wide range of experiences and activities I had to work with. It proved to be an unforeseen advantage of the methodology. At first, it was simply overwhelming, and it was not until much later that the true value of this extensive data was realized. I began to compile the various events and daily accounts and compare them with my present experience. It was more than just information. It was more than numbers, facts or figures. The data brought back memories but in the context of a better understanding. At times it made me laugh, or ponder, and on occasion sorrow. It was not just data now, it would stir emotions, it was experience. The events had names and faces—thoughts and feelings, forcing me to try to understand and reflect. For example, each year a discipline record is kept and printed out at the year's conclusion. Nothing fancy, just a hard copy of events in case there are ever

questions. When I started at Young intermediate, there in my office was the complete discipline record from the past 5 years. I looked through probably the most recent two years, but the events had little meaning. It told me how many fights there had been, how many students were sent out of class for disrupting; from this data, I could even figure out how many students had been given detention at lunchtime for running in the halls. I reviewed over 3,000 incidents that happened the previous year. I knew the names of whom had been in fights, who had been suspended, and which students had been sent to the in school suspension the most. I had all the data but it did not change one idea or personal opinion. It did not inform my reality or understanding. It did not challenge beliefs or ideal. I had all the data, but none of the meaning.

Had I wanted to compile a list of discipline issues that an assistant principal dealt with I could have used this data to create an extensive list. I had the numbers, the facts, and even brief descriptions of what had happened. It was good, solid, and very accurate quantitative data. Other studies have done just that, they have compiled the facts and numbers from various school and assistant principals, and have created a statistical report of what assistant principals do; or so they claim. I admit in reviewing the records I was amazed, but only by the number of incidents recorded. I could not grasp how I was going to keep track of all those incidents. I called my mentor and he explained how his In School Suspension teacher entered all incidents. I was relieved. The weight taken off my shoulders was not because I had solved the obvious problem of there being 3,000 behavior incidents in a school with only 1,000 students. No, I was relieved because the recording of incidents would get done. The concern was for the data, not for what the

data meant. The data were meaningless without the experience. When I would ask one of the counselors or the principal that first summer about an incident or a student's name, it was obvious that these names and accounts were much more valuable to them. The events held great value and meaning to them but not to me. They could tell me about the student, who their friends were, and even about their family—but to me they were just names on a page.

As I reflected upon the events of my first year, as I read my personal account of situations and incidents, I was able to go beyond the numbers. When I looked through the year-end report of discipline incidents that first year they had meaning. I knew the situations, the feeling, the story, and like it or not it was a part of me. When I read an account of a fight back before the Thanksgiving holiday, I remembered the students. I remember the parent's reaction when I called to inform them of the fight. I remember why I suspended the students for only 1 day and not more. I pictured the one young man trying to explain his actions while his chest heaved with sobs and the tears ran down his cheeks. I remembered it was his first time in trouble, and I could remember if the problem had resolved it's self or if it continued. I remember not only that it happened, but how it affected the students, their friends, and most of all me. I looked back with experience and some understanding of how it changed my actions and altered my view of life. I could not help but reflect if decisions I had made at the time were appropriate, or how they could be better in the future. By using autoethnography as the method in this study, I have stepped beyond the statistics, and hope I have helped others to understand the emotions, the effects and difficulty of making decisions, and perhaps to find meaning

in the data I left behind. I wanted what I experienced and accomplished to be more than just numbers to the next new assistant principal, as well as the thousands of new assistant principals who might read my account.

Autoethnography afforded a unique perspective. Different from reviewing a case study or analyzing the dialog from interviews, this method allowed me to see incidents and events in the personal, individual context in which they happened. As mentioned in the example of the fight before Thanksgiving, I knew the background and the events that followed. The record was really quite brief. I had said there was a fight and who it was between, but it was enough to bring back a flood of memories. The experiences that year were my own and not subject to the interpretation of anyone other than myself. As I compiled and read the many incidents and experiences, I was able to make connections, and put events in perspective. True, I saw them through my 35-year-old, white, middle-class, and somewhat sheltered lens, but still it was my lens, my eyes. This would not have been as effective with other qualitative methods because the experiences would not have been my own. No matter how extensive an interview may be, the data gathered is taken out of context and then related to a second party through someone else's lens. That is not what I wanted! I understand I was selfish, but the first person I wanted to help, to teach, to change, was myself. This is not to say that the method of autoethnography is without weakness. Every methodology has both strengths and weaknesses. This study and method is no exception, but in light of my purposes, I embraced autoethnography. A case study or interview process possibly has the advantage of different viewpoints based on the different subjects interviewed, but the information will never be as comprehensive and

meaning full to the researcher. With the events I selected I have a more comprehensive knowledge. I have, because it was my personal experience, greater understanding of the feelings, situations, personalities, and events related to the chosen experience. The knowledge I gained from these experiences and the meaning I derived is, therefore, taken in context within the whole environment. Greater meaning and understanding was created personally.

For those who read my account, my thoughts and feelings will be placed within the contest of their experience. What they gain and create from this becomes just as unique to the individual reader as it was to me. This is not to say my experiences are nontransferable or not applicable to other new assistant principals. Every new assistant steps into a new and unique situation. No two situations are the same, just as no two individuals are the same. However, I have chosen events that through my experience, although unique, I know others will find very similar and valuable to experiences they will encounter as an assistant principal. I choose events that when placed in context were the most valuable to my understanding although they may not have been the most extreme, or surprising. I chose to leave out events that were certainly exciting, or extraordinary, because in seeing the whole picture I recognized them as separate or only related to a specific circumstance. These experiences will happen to every assistant principal, but there is not a class or training that could be expected to prepare someone for them. Everyone will have the times when students come running in yelling, “Mr. Jackman, Mr. Jackman, come quick! Jake is hurt!” You know instinctively the problem is serious by the number of students and the fact that one of them is pale and almost in

shock herself. Jake had been sliding down a slope behind our school in the newly fallen snow. Like a typical 12-year-old boy, he had no coat, and did not hear the announcement we had already made to stay off the hill because we did not want anyone to get hurt. Maybe he heard the announcement, but obviously did not think he was going to get hurt just sliding down a hill. The temptation was too great so off he went. He got in a couple of good turns along with a few other boys. However, courage quickly improved; they were running faster, trying to slide farther, and the snow was wearing away off the grass. Then it happened, as he slid his final time he caught his knee on a lawn sprinkler previously buried under the snow. I rushed out to help and there he was, lying on his back, head pointing down the hill, flat on his back in the snow. The experience was branded into my memory in an instant. There was surprisingly not a lot of blood, probably due to his legs being above his head on the hill and the extreme cold of the snow he was laying in. He was undoubtedly numb because he was not in much pain, but the skin had been torn back to expose his kneecap. It made me quite squeamish, and I now understood why the little girl who had come for help looked so pale. An ambulance was called, a parent was notified, his jeans were cut open from ankle to hip by the paramedics, and we treated him and another student for shock. It was a very memorable experience, no doubt about it, and I learned quite a bit about first aid procedures and dealing with students in shock. Still it was not something to be addressed in the certification program. I am sure every administrator will deal with injured students many times in their career, but the event did not change my philosophy of education or my ability to be an assistant principal. It did not change the way I thought or acted with

students or staff. It was definitely an event that I would relate if someone asked me what things I remembered about my first year. However, when placed in context with everything else I learned and did each day, the event was insignificant. These types of events happen, but through my personal experiences, I can put it in context of all my other experiences. As an individual event it was quite memorable, in perspective however, insignificant. Autoethnography allowed me to choose events that were the most significant when viewed from my perspective. Other methodologies would not have given this insight to me. Some may argue, the perspective is skewed or even biased based on my personal lens, but remember as selfish as it may seem, the person I wanted to change the most, was the one I see in the mirror each day.

This brings me to the third advantage of using autoethnography. It provided a means of reflection. From the onset of this study, there has always been the desire to improve myself and become a more effective administrator. I have gained great knowledge and insight into my life and abilities. Although I cannot identify the individuals who may profit from my experiences, I am sure I have benefited more from this study than anyone else has. Covey, Glickman, Glatthorn, Reeves, Fullen, McEwan, and many others have all emphasized the importance of reflection and evaluation in bringing about change and improvement. Reflection is a critical part of leadership. This method has caused me to reflect and contemplate. It has made me look beyond the day-to-day events. I have gained understanding that could not have been achieved in any other way. I have looked back at my experiences and my reactions and have begun to understand my actions. I am able to see why I acted as I did and how to improve myself

in the future. I now understand the importance of reflection in bringing about change and growth. In essence, no other method could have brought about as much personal growth as did autoethnography.

CHAPTER IV

MY STORY

Setting the Stage

"Why would anyone ever want to be a vice principal?" That is not a new question. It seems I have been asked the same question about every week. Usually people ask not truly expecting an answer; it is just their way of questioning your sanity without outright saying they think you lost your mind. I cannot say I blame them, after all, do any of us really have fond memories of our vice principals. When someone mentions the vice principle, names come to mind like the enforcer, the Gestapo, the "bad guy," so usually when someone asks why I wanted to become a vice principal I just smile and chuckle, but this time the woman paused and waited. She really wanted an explanation. She was serious. We had been talking and she was just leaving as she asked. All the answers I had given the past year to teachers, parents, family, and friends raced through my mind. "Let's us see," I thought, "do I tell her the easy-to-believe, 'it's because of the money' answer, or should I go with a more intellectual desire to change the world response?" I quickly answered that it was a genetic defect on my father's side; she laughed and walked out of the office. I did not have the time or the desire to discuss personal matters with her. I knew it was just a quick answer to a much deeper question but was perhaps true to a certain extent. My father was an elementary principal, as was my uncle. The importance of education was instilled within me at an early age. Of course, I had never actually got to know any assistant principals growing up. He was the guy you went to see when you had

done something that had the potential of shortening your life span if your parents found out. My father being a principal and all, I was extremely carful never to get to know or be caught anywhere near the assistant principals office. The reality is that most people in education have probably had the same experience. Although I had not planned to become a teacher, or the "Gestapo" for that matter, I had no real experience with the In School Suspension Program, school discipline, or being in actual trouble. I did not understand those students who were always in trouble. I knew who they were and stayed away because I was good at playing the school game and they were not and I did not put any more thought into it. If I had I might have realize and noticed I had advantages and support others did not. I played the game well because I was dealt a better hand, but I never noticed. I was not going to be a teacher anyway, in fact, by the time I reached high school I had resolved never to even get into education. It seemed like a thankless job, with terrible pay. I am not sure why I had that opinion though; education had always served my father and family very well. Whether the opinion was grounded on sound reasoning or not, my teenage mind was set; I intended to pursue a degree in engineering and "make a difference in the world." Off to change the world, that was me, the average 18 year old idealists. Friends would say, "Hey Jerry, what you going to do when you get out of high school?" "I'm going into engineering, somewhere I can really make a difference." I wanted to do something that stood out, something that put my name in the history books; something years later my children could brag about when they gave their class report in school. It was not very well thought out, but somehow remained my goal even after realizing that I did not enjoy engineering. I did well in class, and loved

learning, but what really scared me off was the prospect of sitting at a desk. That is a little ironic looking back since it is also what I hate the most about being an administrator. It was not the only reason, however; I also wanted to remain close to family and where I grew up. I have never been a traveler, someone who could move from place to place. I am actually quite a homebody, and could not see being able to stay close to home and make a career out of being an engineer. I spent 4 years trying to avoid it, trying to convince myself to just be an engineer, but as life would have it, the genetic flaw kicked in and I changed my major in the middle of my second senior year (that's right, it took me 5 years not 4) at the university, and with the encouragement of my wonderful wife, set out to become a physics teacher with a minor in mathematics. I still did not have a clue what I was getting into, but I loved the idea of teaching, and could not stand the thought of sitting in an office doing tests on aluminum samples or something similar.

After graduation, I interviewed with several districts and schools. Generally sitting with a group or panel of people who did not know really anything about you. They had never watched me teach or even observed me talking to students, but they supposedly could recognize if I was a good teacher by the piece of paper in front of them. At least they were "fair and equitable" to every applicant. What about fair to students, equitable to parents, this is probably a discussion for another study. Does equality mean fair?

Then something happened. Wow! I was sent to meet with a principal at a middle school. I was looking more for a high school situation though; middle school did not sound too thrilling. You never see movies about middle school teachers changing the world. In fact, I think most people try to forget their middle school experience. It is an

extremely awkward time for most adolescents, full of embarrassing moments and clumsy actions just trying to make it to high school. That is why you never hear of middle school reunions. Nevertheless, I was excited for the interview and impressed by the district, or maybe my wife and I were just poor enough that we just desperately wanted a job. I met the principal in his office with the assistant principal and they asked some general questions. Then he did the unexpected, the revolutionary, he took me on a walk around the school and we talked. I do not know if I was the only one who applied for the job or if this was just his amazing, inspired, common sense way of getting to know me better, but it made a lasting impact. I felt like he actually came to know me a little, understood my personality a little, at least more than other interviewers had even attempted. In today's world with all of the precautions, hiring committees, and regulations to ensure everyone has a fair and equitable interview, this type of interview would never happen. It is sad state of affairs, but I still remember that interview even when so many other interviews are long forgotten. Better yet, I have tried not to forget to do the same. You see, that is what this story is all about, learning, remembering, and changing!

He called me later that evening at home. After the phone call I yelled into the other room "guess what dear, I got the job!" and off I went full speed into public education. That one nontraditional interview had indeed changed my world much more than I realized at the time.

I taught math at the middle school and loved it for 5 years. Some would say I needed my head examined. Remember, most people are trying to forget their middle school experience. In my new little world, I taught everything from pre-algebra to

geometry. I had many new challenging opportunities and experiences such as team-teaching an “at risk” class with our school behavior specialist. That was a true adventure to say the least. I do not know why he picked me to team with, maybe it was because I was the new guy and did not know better, or because the principal had told him I needed help with classroom management, who knows. Looking back though, I would not recommend anyone else trying it. It was a little like the middle school experience, something you learn a great deal from but would not do again for any amount of money. I gained a new perspective on the world of “at risk” students. At that time “at risk” to me were the students who did not play the school game well. I thought they did not care, were lazy, did not want to hand in homework, and in essence did not want to try. They were “at risk” of failing my class not receiving credit for advancing to the next class. It was a hand-selected class of all the troubled students in the school; at least it seemed like all of them. I did not know what “at risk” meant or even what to expect. I thought it just meant they had behavior problems and with some extra discipline, everything would be fine. We both thought that with the two of us we could make it work. Two highly educated adults to keep an eye on them, two dedicated professionals to motivate and constantly look for positive reward strategies. We knew what to do! Famous last words to every disaster, “It will work if we try hard enough.” We were wrong! I still get a twitch just thinking about it. Perhaps we made a little headway academically, but it was minimal. I was the one who learned from this experience and afterwards my world and personal reality and definition of “at risk” would never be the same. My understanding and outlook of teaching had been changed. My personal beliefs and understanding of

students had been shaken. I did not even comprehended how much it had affected my teaching. It opened my eyes to another world of students I did not understand or know how to work with and help. The experience left questions in my mind that came back to me, demanding answers when I became an assistant principal. Why would they not listen, why do they not care, can they not see the trouble they are headed for? The question I wanted to scream from the top of the mountains, how can these people or person, most often a single parent, remotely call themselves parents?

The next year was another learning experience. I taught beginning German for two periods of the day. It was not really my choice, but again, I thought I could make it work. Again, those famous last words, and again I was wrong! I was not an effective German teacher. Honestly, I was terrible and I publicly apologize to all of my poor students who had to live through that experience. I was truly trying, but I was not ever cut out to teach a language, and I quickly realized I did not have any idea how to do it. Luckily student success is seldom gauged by the student's German teacher; so hopefully, I did not scar anyone beyond recovery. Since I was teaching German, the combined "at risk" class was disbanded. The students were still tracked by the behavior specialist, but they were diversified throughout the various classes. We were not given the chance to get better, to really help those students who did not have the means or support to play the school game well. Change did not happen! Everything went right back to how it was, and sad to say I fell back into thinking and perceiving things just as I had previous to our adventure. I did not have a choice; we were not given the chance. My eyes were beginning to be opened to the reality that decisions were being made daily effecting my

little classroom world, and I had very little input into these decisions. This was crippling to the false sense of control I had about my classroom. I tried to ignore it, but this realization stayed with me, it was always in the back of my mind. Who was making the difference? I might have been the best math teacher in the world, but due to someone else's decision, I was teaching German. I was not the only person affecting change in my classroom. Someone else was changing policies, setting goals, deciding who was in my class and what I had to work with. I knew a good teacher could make a huge difference in the lives of each student in his or her class. I knew that at the start of each trimester, I would start out with a new set of students, and if I was a good teacher, I would be able to take those students and help them understand. I could use what resources I was given and mold their minds to love learning, but someone else was deciding what I had to work with. Someone else was deciding what training I was given, what classes I would teach, and what help I could access. Someone else was making decisions that impacted not only the students in my class but throughout the school. Someone else was affecting a student's learning in all of his or her classes and not just in math. I had never really looked beyond my own little world of math, until I was forced to teach those German classes. Again, to those students, please accept this sincere apology.

During my time at the middle school reality set in. Yep, I had the job but my wife and I with our four children were still living below the poverty line according to the government. I could have qualified for free lunch if adults were allowed to apply. I knew that to support my growing family I needed to do something different. Get out of education, go into business and make more money that was what I was told. I went back

to school and earned a master's degree in business administration but could never bring myself to leave education. Like I said, it is genetic, it is in my blood. I did, however, start a side business to supplement my income. I include this little bit of history to show that the wheels were turning to open my view to other realities, to see things from another perspective outside of the classroom world. Perspectives I had not seen before and yet at the same time to limit my time and resources by injecting a second job into the mix.

The next year I took a position teaching math at the nearby high school. I needed a change. It seems I have never been able to stay in one school or place very long. (Again a little ironic considering that moving around was one reason for getting out of engineering.) Moving to the high school was a good change. I enjoyed teaching at the high school. Students were more mature. I could interact and talk with them easier, see them at the grocery store and say hi. It was new and the change was like a breath of fresh air. I now dealt with graduation credits, college credit and sport eligibility requirements. The problems were different, but I continued to gain new experiences that made me a better teacher. However, in the back of my mind remained the query, who had the power to "make a difference"; to create a desire to learn; to help students progress beyond the classroom? I had not forgotten my "at risk" class attempt.

Administration perhaps? Greater influence, more impact on student learning outside the class. I pondered these questions. What did I really know about administration? I had a little leadership experience; it had worked for my father, but most of all that was where decisions were being made. I knew I did not know an extreme amount about being an administrator, but I did have that great master's degree in business

administration and had confidence in the administrative certification program doing a fine job in preparing me for what I needed to accomplish. Why not, it was a shot. Maybe I could make a greater impact as an administrator and I would not be out of work for 3 months each summer. My family had become accustomed to eating, so before I was out of the "habit" of school, I entered the administrative certification program. I had just finished the MBA program and moved right into more school.

So what insights and understanding did I gain? Why did I want to be an assistant principal? Was it really a genetic flaw, perhaps? I included this part of my life in hopes to answer this question for you my reader. Some may question why I include so much of my history and personal life before I became an assistant principal or even started the certification process. It is critical however to understand what led up to my desire and decision to begin the program. Ultimately, it was my desire to effect students, be in control of decisions I felt were important, but it would be inaccurate to omit family, financial, and perhaps a lack of informed judgment at times into the decision. I was not an anomaly in the education field. In fact, I was very much your ordinary teacher, father, and student. Administrators come from all walks of life and backgrounds, all with varying stories and reasons for becoming administrators. All with ideals and experiences that they feel qualify them for the position. I thought I was ready, I thought my experiences had prepared me to step into an average, everyday, common, "normal" assistant principal position.

My classroom experience was not enough! Let me reiterate this statement, being a classroom teacher, and a good one at that, did not prepare me adequately for the role as

an assistant principal. It was valuable, necessary, and cannot be discounted in the least but was not enough to prepare me to work with students who did not share my concept of reality. My “normal” very blessed and privileged life experience did not teach me to help, support, and understand the “at risk” students, “dysfunctional” home situations, or what this unique set of students saw as their reality or what they considered important. Being involved with these students in the classroom served as a means to spark understanding, what it did was help me realize there was more to be done. Knowing why I started the journey provides insight into the preparation, or lack of, which accompanies each and every person starting into the administrative program. Each has a unique story, but each has similar needs that many like me do not realize they are even lacking.

Assignment and Demographics

My time in the administrative certification program flew by. Classes focused on so many topics; leadership, human resources, action research, special education, public school law, and even a little on budgets and funding. The program was broad and seemed to dive into everything we would need to know to be a principal. The cohort of teachers in the certification program was from all backgrounds in education, kindergarten through high school. The diversity was invaluable. We were given a taste of different viewpoints and situations. We worked together developing ideas and personal philosophies. We helped each other become better and developed friendships with classmates as well as with many of the university instructors who were former principals. The business world calls it networking. The education world calls it collaboration. We were drilled on

becoming school leaders, improving curriculum based on research, and bringing about positive change. The program was good and several of us from the same district finished together in December of 2003. There were six of us doing internships that year, more than ever before in our small district. The timing was right and we knew there would be several administrative openings the next year.

One of my colleagues asked, "Are you going to apply for a position this year?"

"Probably" I said, "but I'm not sure I'm ready to leave the classroom, I really enjoy the high school. What about you, you ready to leave the elementary?"

"I don't know, I think I might teach a few more years, but I hear several administrators are retiring, so there will be a lot of openings this year."

Conversations were all similar, "I want to keep teaching but will there be a better chance to move into administration later?" That was the question and eventually everyone started the application and interview process. Official openings were posted in March and everyone was surprised to see four positions opening up the coming year. The posting said four openings, but did not say where. We were all excited, confident, and we all started to speculate where the opening would be. "I hear John is retiring at Bunderson, as well as Swenson at the high school." "Well I know Mrs. Cook decided to go back to the classroom so that will leave an opening as well at her school." Rumors and speculation intensified as the weeks moved on, closer and closer to the end of school. We were all reasonably sure that there would be two elementary principal positions, along with a high school and middle school assistant positions opening up but there was no official announcement. It was absolutely nerve racking as each of us tried to determine

where openings would be as well as what we would do if we were given one of the openings. It was hard to concentrate on teaching and I am afraid I became even less effective each day the process drug on.

The district held a general interview process including persons representing each of the affected schools. Some on the interviewing panel were teachers, some were PTA presidents, and one was the district personnel director. They all introduced themselves, but I was so nervous I did not hear a word they said. The process was very general and each of us were asked the same questions by the panel and then interviewed separately by the superintendent and assistant superintendent. Where was my first principal, and his revolutionary casual stroll through the school interview method? The calm relaxed, get to know you interview. It was less than an hour but seemed like it took the whole day. Like all things it came to an end and I thought it all went very well. Now, I thought, they will announce the appointments right away and we will all get on with our lives. It will be quick and painless.

As a side note: relating this experience is becoming quite damaging to my self-esteem as I am noticing how often through my life I have been very wrong.

Each of us waited, and waited, and waited!

The days dragged on like the week before Christmas when we were children. I had not heard anything, nothing, not a word! I began to think perhaps the positions were filled and they just did not want to give me the bad news, but surely they would at least send a letter. “Have you heard anything yet?” The teacher across the hall would ask. “Which spot are you hoping for?” She could tell my mind was somewhere else as we

stood out in the hall during class break. “The assistant position here would be nice,” I said, “I already know the faculty here, but I don’t know if I could handle all the after school events. It would really be awkward moving from teaching to being the vice principal in the same building.” “I thought they would have made a decision by now” I said. “Have you heard anything yet about the interviews or where all the opening will be?” she asked. I did not even acknowledge her question. Thinking aloud I said, “School is almost out, and they said they wanted to make the announcement by board meeting which is tonight.”

It was Wednesday, about 2 weeks before school would be out for the summer. It was 3:15pm and I was just finishing preparations for the next day. I had been fretting about the positions all day and had finally resolved that I must not have been chosen or I would know by now. I was disappointed, but a little relieved. At least now I could get on with my life and cease worrying about whether or not I was moving to a different school. Just when I was about to leave and call it a day the superintendent stepped into my room. “Well hello, how are you?” I stuttered. It is unnerving to say the least, whenever your boss enters your classroom, but today was especially bad. After the emotional rollercoaster that day of wanting, and hoping for a position, not knowing what was happening, and then resolving I had not got the position and would just continue teaching. Honestly, I was slipping out a little early and I felt a little like the child caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

As we exchanged greetings, I noticed he was smiling a little. He did not say much really, he simply got right to the point. “Jerry, we would like to offer you the position of

assistant principal at Adele C. Young Intermediate School." Then in the same breath before I could even answer he said, "It will be a challenge. It is one of the largest schools in the district and they have had more than their share of problems this past year." It was like the legal disclaimer at the end of a radio commercial.

I was so surprised and caught off guard I just stood there and did not say anything. Young Intermediate was not even one of the positions I thought was opening. I knew the superintendant fairly well and knew he had a sense of humor, but he would not joke about this, would he? He waited a few seconds that seemed like forever and I realized he was serious. "I'll take it" I said, heart pounding, "when do I start?" He explained a few details and asked me to be to board meeting that night for the official appointment by the school board.

I had never been to Young Intermediate School; in truth, I did not know anything about the school having always taught on the north end of the district. How hard could it be? After all this was not some inner city school in Chicago. It is just your average semi rural school for sixth and seventh graders. I knew there would be challenges but I was confident everything would work out fine. I was prepared, or at least felt prepared.

Having been appointed to the new position, I arranged, with the principal, to meet the faculty a few days later in a special faculty meeting. There were many new faces, and some I recognized. I briefly introduced myself and asked if there were questions. "Do you play basketball? We like to play a little after school a couple of times a week." "Where did you say you taught? Is this your first time in the intermediate school?" "Have you considered filing you teeth to a point? You don't look mean enough." I did

not know what to say, the last question caught me off guard. Everyone lightly chuckled at the question, but it was obvious that the question was not completely light hearted. There was a definite concern by this teacher and others whether or not I would be firm enough. There was an expectation that I would be the enforcer (the stereotypical vice principal). They were not asking for an educational leader, they wanted someone to be the "Gestapo."

Young intermediate is a school at the south end of Brigham City, a city known for its fruit stands and "Peach Days" celebration. The intermediate school is one of two in the district. Each elementary school on the south end of the district feeds students into Young Intermediate School. Each student leaving Young Intermediate then moves to Box Elder Middle School for eight and ninth grades, and eventually ends up at Box Elder High School. Young Intermediate School has a student body of roughly a thousand students and that fluctuates year to year based on the size of the incoming sixth grade. The concept of an intermediate school to accommodate sixth and seventh grades had been in place about 10 years when I arrived at the school. The school is nestled in a subdivision about four blocks away from Wal-Mart and the only large business district away from Main Street. It is still a quiet neighborhood. Most of the students, however, were bused to Young from as far away as Bear River City on the north to Willard on the south. Some came from inside Brigham City while many others came from small farming communities outside the city limits. The school was not extremely diverse, but had a small but growing Hispanic population of perhaps 15%. Most students were white, and came from an average two-income family. There were two Title I elementary schools that

fee into Young Intermediate but the overall percentage of students on free and reduced lunch never really exceeded 40%. In general, it was one of the largest schools in the district but not nearly as large as many others in the state. It had an average population and socioeconomic status.

There were about 47 certified teachers and three counselors at Young Intermediate School. A few teachers, like the band and orchestra teachers, were shared with the middle school and high school. One of the counselors also spent 2 days a week at the other intermediate school on the north end of the district boundaries. With the principal and assistant principal, there were about 38 other members of the staff including secretaries, cooks, custodial staff, and various paraprofessionals. In total, the staff was just under 90 individuals. The average class size was about 30 students. The school housed an In School Suspension room, and a room for what was called the PRIDE program. It even has a special education behavior unit and a functional skills classroom for the more severely disabled students. It is a standard, very ordinary and average middle level school, similar to any number of schools across the state. This made it a good control group for a study in middle-level education.

So what insights and understanding did I gain? The stage was set and the subtle warnings were there, but I did not pay close enough attention. The manner in which the positions were filled seemed standard to me at the time except that they took so long. This period was perhaps the first of several indicators. The superintendent and others were not simply filling the openings. Having completed the certification program was not the sole requisite for these openings and great deliberation went into the decision as to

who was placed where. The surprise opening created at Young Intermediate and the shuffle of other administrative positions behind the scenes testified to the reality that all positions were not equal. It was obviously not an easy decision, yet those of us having just completed the program had really no understanding of the complexity.

The brief description of the position at Young Intermediate by the Superintendant should have been a warning to me that what I thought of administration was perhaps unrealistic. Why was it a challenging position, what was the "normal" share of problems and why had they at Young had more than their share? His description included nothing about leadership, curriculum, budgets, or teachers. I was too confident in my reality to ask more questions, to probe deeper into what to prepare for.

Now the final, blatantly obvious, word of warning that I somehow overlooked should have been the teachers question. Have I filed my teeth down? What kind of question was that? Was this teacher just some radical, extremely punitive, disgruntled individual? If so, why had the rest of the faculty not reacted accordingly? I knew this description was unique to my position, and that the other three colleagues taking positions at elementary schools definitely had not received the same warning. Why did I not ask, probe, and try to understand more. The answer is simple, I felt prepared, ready for becoming the administrator "principal" I had been training to be. Nothing at this semi-rural school jumped out at me as unusual, and indeed it was not in comparison to other middle level schools. Had this been an "inner city," "low achieving" school perhaps I would have asked more questions. I perceived my position as equal to the other administrative positions, and why not, there had not been any separation or distinctions

ever made during the certification program.

Summer Preparation

I set the box of stuff on the ground and looked around. It was nothing spectacular, but it was an office. It had a window, computer, two filing cabinets, a few bookshelves and a desk with a note from the previous assistant principal. My job description was the title. It was a neat, one-page, bulleted list of the daily routine. It included when lunch was, how discipline slips were filed, and what she had been attempting to do with students coming late to class.

Now what, I thought? My contract officially started the last six days of July. It was June and I had come in early to set up my office, which took about 2 minutes. I am not much of a decorator.

As I looked around my new office, I quickly realized I "wasn't in Kansas anymore." The bottom bookshelf was filled with the past 6 years of discipline records. Each year's record was conveniently stuffed into a bulging four-inch magazine holder. They were formidable records of every incident or discipline slip processed through that office. Each record contained over three thousand individual discipline issues handled during a specific year. I was shocked! Where did they all come from? Is this the way it is in every middle school? I could see it was going to be a new experience, and I wondered what the other new administrators were finding in their offices.

I walked over and opened each of the two filing cabinets. They contained files on every student, teacher, and staff member. I briefly glanced over the staff files, but did not

really spend much time. I would get to know them later. I was not sure what to do with the student files. Half of those students would not even be at my school next year. It is only a sixth and seventh grade school. I thumbed through some of the thickest files, but I was not really interested. The slips inside the files read, "fighting, bullying, running in the hall, tardy, disrupting class, disrespect," and many more. However, the slip that caught my eye simply said, "signed the log on level 6."

Signed the log? What was that suppose to mean? I would not have worried, but I kept seeing it over and over again on slips. I figured someone would explain it later. I had never herd of a classroom log. Where I had taught and done my internship they used a point system for discipline. Coming late was worth 5 points, disrupting class was worth anywhere from 15 to 30 points and fighting was 30 to 50 points. What I did not see on any slips, anywhere, were points. I needed some explanation and asked the principal

"Do you use a point system here for discipline?" I asked.

"No, that's something the middle school developed on their own years ago. Why? Did you like the system?"

We talked a little about their discipline philosophy and he explained that several years ago the faculty was trained on the Burt Simmons model, but most teachers had revised it to fit their classroom needs.

"Many of the teachers feel it is too complicated," he said, "and I'm not really sure how it all works either to tell you the truth. That will be one of your challenges. You might want to work on that this summer." Work on? I did not even know where to start. I was not even sure what he was really talking about. I did not have any experience with

school-wide behavior models, or discipline systems.

We talked a little longer and I went back to my office. I did not intend to stay long, but wanted to go through a few more things in the office. There were several forms on a back shelf: tobacco citations, juvenile referral forms, voluntary witness statements, and safe school violation forms. Were these really used? You have got to be kidding me; these are sixth and seventh graders. The previous assistant must have been very strict, but things would be different now. I was caught off guard to say the least but not because of the various forms necessarily. I knew these things happened. After all, I did teach at a high school, but this was not high school, it was sixth and seventh grade. This was only one of the first surprises. There would be many more as the year progressed.

Before I left, Gary (the principal) gave me my first summer assignment. It was not to redesign the science curriculum, or work with staff to improve reading instruction. In fact it, was not related to leadership at all. To my surprise, he asked me to work with the custodian in purchasing and designing a system of security cameras.

Security cameras? Why? Were we concerned about someone breaking in or with vandalism? I knew nearly nothing about cameras, but luckily our custodian did and it became the most important and effective project I helped with that summer.

I went to the administrative in-service every Tuesday in June and was assigned a mentor. He was the assistant principal at the other middle school in Brigham for the eighth and ninth grades.

“If you need anything just call,” he said.

“Thanks, I will.” Moreover, I did many times that year. He was a great help.

These administrative trainings covered everything from enrollment to testing. They spoke of classes being offered for teachers, certification requirements and changes in the core. The business department reviewed requisitions and pay vouchers. Human resources discussed hiring practices and fair labor laws. The special education department reviewed qualification procedures and response to intervention. The school nurses even checked our blood pressure and presented ways for lowering stress. There was so much information it made my head swim.

So much was new and unexpected. As a teacher, I had not been exposed to this side of education. I had entered a new world.

August

"What should I be doing?" I asked. "I feel like I'm just wandering around not knowing what to do." It was the end of July and I had officially started. I had been there off and on through the summer and had already cleaned out the already clean office. The security cameras were installed and I had found and read an explanation of the Burt Simmons discipline model several times.

"Don't worry," Gary said, "Once August hits there will be plenty to do." He was right, but where was the educational leadership role?

It started with simple things like helping deliver supplies to the teachers' rooms. The principal and I met to discuss goals, schedules and his expectations. Registration was also coming up and I helped assemble information to be sent out to students.

Next we were stamping and delivering new textbooks. The district had adopted

new language arts books and we had to switch out the books in each class. These were not really part of my duties but it was helpful to the secretary and I was looking for things to do. I had to do something! I could not sit in my office any longer counting the bricks in the wall. I really had no idea what to do, so I made myself useful.

Then registration came and everything changed. I never thought registration could be so complicated. With registration comes scheduling, which in 6th grade is as complicated as rocket science.

"My daughter decided she wants to play the flute and wants to take band instead of art so we need to change her schedule," requested the mother.

"That's great," I said. "Learning to play an instrument is good for kids. Let me go talk to Ruth. She does the scheduling and we'll see what we can do."

"It will change her whole schedule," Ruth said. "Does she mind who her core teachers are?"

"I don't know, I didn't ask," I said. "We share our band teachers with the middle and high schools. If she is a sixth grader, she will have to take band in the morning, which moves her to an afternoon core. That is when she has science, so that will have to move; she would not be able to have music. Band is for two trimesters and art is just one. It is really a fine arts block not just art."

As Ruth went on trying to help me understand the student's schedule, it was obvious I did not have a clue about the schedule or how it was developed. Core blocks, sharing not only two band teachers but an orchestra teacher; fine arts block not just art; it was all new to me. I thought I had a fairly good understanding of the intermediate school

schedule. No one had ever told me about it or even discussed different forms of scheduling, but I figured that since my son had just registered at our sister school on the north end, I could figure it out. It turned out that their schedule was not even the same as ours. Can you believe that? The only two intermediate schools in the district, and they do not even have the same schedule. Why not?

I later asked Gary to explain the schedule to me.

"I'm not sure I can," he said, "It has taken me seven years and I'm just getting a hold on it." The concerns and requests for changes continued to come through August and even into September.

"Hi, my daughter had Mrs. Nielsen and loved her class so I want my son in her class too. Can you do that?"

"My daughter needs math first thing in the morning. Can I change her schedule?"

"I don't want my son in the same class as our neighbor; he gets in too much trouble! I need his schedule changed!"

I did the best I could to resolve concerns and warn parents that it was not as easy as they thought to change a schedule. I tried to explain the difficulty knowing that they generally would not listen and I could not tell them to just get a life. When my efforts failed, and usually they did, I referred them to Ruth.

Intermediate School is a transitional period between elementary and middle school. Students move from having one teacher all day to having a different teacher every hour. In sixth grade, students are blocked into a 4-hour core taught by a two-teacher team. The other 2 hours of the day are taken up by science, health and two electives such as art,

orchestra and band. Seventh grade is similar but with a three-hour core block and three separate teachers. This creates more separation of classes and elective choices.

This mix between core blocks and electives creates a very complicated schedule. Registration becomes much more than just choosing classes. If a parent wants one class changed, it inevitably changes the student's entire schedule. If a student wants to take band or orchestra, it determines the rest of their schedule. Parents simply did not understand this. How could they? I did not understand it and I was supposed to be the one with the answers.

To complicate the registration process further, seventh grade is the first time students are required to pay student fees or to qualify for a fee waiver. I had never been involved with fee waivers but Gary asked me to meet with the parents requesting fee waivers since one of us had to authorize all waivers. In turn he met with those wanting to express frustrations with teachers and wanting class changes. He was obviously much more qualified to discuss schedules than I was. (Nearly everybody was in fact!)

Once again, I thought I was prepared, but realized I knew very little about school fees, so I asked a great many questions and made it through. Some requests for waivers were necessary and legitimate. Others were the result of what I believed were falsified records. Several couples claimed only one meager income although both parents wrote down work phone numbers on the student information card. Some parents claimed hardships based on a disability, divorce, or family tragedy, but there was no way to verify their story; no proof outside of their word. Students should be required to work off fees that were waived.

It should not be so easy, I thought. I asked Gary and he wisely explained the time, effort and ultimately the cost of supervision of such reimbursement.

"Someone would need to supervise them at all times. Their age prohibits them from doing many of the needed tasks, and ultimately is it fair to penalize the student? Was it really their responsibility to come up with the money to pay their fees?"

He was right. A 13-year-old student could not be left alone or expected to have enough money for student fees. I had never thought about it because we had never discussed it in the certification program. It was, perhaps, the first time I had realized that these were 12- and 13-year-old boys and girls. It took many more of these moments before it really sank in.

With registration also came the realization of having a split staff. Half the staff (sixth grade) has an elementary certification, with the other half certified in specific secondary areas. This presented itself when two of our teachers decided that they would not be returning because they were moving. I remembered discussing the importance of hiring teachers.

I remembered the instructor's words, "Hiring teachers is perhaps the most important administrator duty." This choice would affect years of classroom instruction. Yet, we only had 2 weeks to find two teachers, and the pool was small. Simply finding a teacher was not enough. They had to have the exact certification to be able to teach the same classes as the teacher they were replacing.

We needed a sixth grade core teacher, which meant an elementary certified teacher. That part was not too difficult. However, this teacher would also need to teach a

social dance elective. Our second teacher was even more difficult to find. We needed a seventh grade teacher certified to teach science who could also teach creative writing.

I learned that day, that as important as hiring is, sometimes reality dictates that we do the best with whom we get. In our case, we hired one extraordinary sixth grade core teacher who also loved to teach line dancing. We let go of the other new teacher two years later. As difficult as it may seem to hire someone; and we had to hire *someone*. It is much more difficult to work with, support, and help them for two years and still have to let them go. Two years later, we were left with the same difficult position to fill.

The discussions on hiring personnel that we had during the certification program were important, but they fell far short of adequately preparing me to be a crucial part of the process. Perhaps it is just one of those things you have to learn on the job. Whatever the case may be, I was unprepared for this important task and was extremely glad to have Gary there to take the leading role. It was not that I did not understand how important the process was. That had been discussed in full. What caught me so off-guard was the reality of needing to hire a specifically qualified person, right now, with a very limited pool of people. I had not realized that often hiring takes place at the last minute and the applicants may all be unqualified. Sometimes you have to take what you can get.

Once again, the perfect world talked about in class, fell apart and I was faced with some unforeseen exception. These exceptions happened every year. In fact, I quickly realized that hiring someone under favorable circumstances was the exception.

During this chaotic time, teachers began to come in to prepare rooms and concerns began to arise like “I don’t have enough books,” “my computer is not working”

or “I ordered rulers but got protractors.” Parents called to request specific teachers, complain about fees, and want to register early.

We had a sweeper resign and I was asked to take care of hiring someone. I had never been involved with hiring. Now I was involved with hiring teachers and was left on my own to hire a sweeper. I asked the two custodians to be on the committee with me and I called the HR director to find out the procedures necessary. He sent me a list of things to do along with a folder of applicants.

This time I was in charge but the stakes were not so high. We interviewed several times for sweepers that first year. If we hired someone who did a good job, they would find a different higher paying job, often elsewhere in the district, and you would start the process over. If they were poor at the job, then we started the process over. No matter what, it is a continual process. I do not believe it can be avoided.

I was also put in charge of hiring a new In-School Suspension (ISS) Aid, since I would be working closely with that person. I believe ISS is unique to middle schools. In fact, the high level of school-wide discipline in general is unique to middle schools.

It was obvious that I would be in charge of discipline. The vice principal is always in charge of discipline. I was not surprised, having taught in the middle school. When I talked to friends and family about my new job they would “ooh and ahh” and say “you get to be the ‘mean guy,’ ‘the heavy,’ ‘the one all the students are afraid of.’” I knew that school discipline would fall to me. It’s the way it has been for all time. What surprised me was how much of my time would be consumed with discipline.

Even before school began, discipline was a consuming aspect. The person we

hired had been working for us as our student tracker. She moved into the ISS position and together we immediately began determining how the program was going to be set up. The school-wide discipline plan was based on ISS as the primary consequence for poor behavior. It was the central element affecting every class. How should it run? When should students be sent there, and what should they be required to do? What was the rationale and purpose for this huge part of the middle school environment? This was a critical element of the school and my position, but it was never discussed in the certification process.

Discipline would be my primary responsibility, and my challenge was to reform the process and make it better. This subject was never discussed in my training. I was on my own, but I was not too concerned. Looking back now I see that I was so new I did not know enough to be worried and concerned, although I had every reason in the world to be overwhelmed.

What were the insights and understanding I gained here? It seemed as if everything began to happen in August. The race was on and I was inundated by everything that needed to be done for the beginning of school. It was a humbling time as I tried to understand the scheduling, fee structure, immunization criteria, and policies pertaining to registration. The learning curve was steep. I had to fill positions and establish discipline procedures. It was a completely new experience of mixed emotions that caught me off guard. What was I doing here? Was this school so unique that nobody could have warned me about any of this? I can understand not being prepared to help install a security system; that is just one of the oddball things that happens. However,

where was the explanation of why something like that might be needed and the warning that it was more for discipline then vandalism? Where was the explanation of how to set up a school-wide discipline system?

I know that these were not some abstract ideas just for Young Intermediate School. Middle school philosophy and transitional methods for students moving from elementary to high school would have been great discussion topics for one of those classes in the certification program. Why were they never mentioned? Even just a hint or idea of what was going to happen when August hit would have been nice because having been a teacher was not adequate training for what happened. How did this all fit into the scheme of being an educational leader?

The confidence took a severe blow in August. I was starting to understand that my view of reality was skewed. My ideas of the position were flawed and that there was a lot I was simply not prepared for. I could not help but wonder, "Were the other newly appointed administrators experiencing similar challenges and frustrations?"

The First Day

I was up early, too nervous to sleep. Today is the day, the "BIG" day—Monday morning, the first day of school. It was my first day as the new assistant principal, an administrator, "somebody in charge!" Nobody even cared! It was chaos at my house that morning as it always is the first day of school. The children had laid their new school clothes out days and even weeks before, but someone still could not find their shoe. The girls wanted their hair done just right and my wife was trying to convince the preschooler

that they did not need their backpack because they were not going to school today. Really, we should start selling tickets. It would be a hit. It is really quite an amazing event that happens each year. When I left, the chaos was in full swing. My wife kissed me good-bye and told me I would do great.

It takes almost exactly 30 minutes to reach the intermediate school. A longer commute than I was accustomed to, but it became an important time. It was not exactly yoga but the traveling to and from school was time to reflect and think. You can do this in rural areas where there is not traffic or "road rage." Driving can, believe it or not, be relaxing. To those readers living in the city I'm sorry, your commute is probably anything but relaxing. Reflection, reviewing, evaluating: they are all important parts to leadership and learning. They were also a critical step towards understanding. However, this all came later. That first morning drive was just a blur.

I arrived early and made a few more labels for some files. I went over information for the ISS program along with other programs. Nothing I did was too important. I was really just killing time in anticipation of the first bus arriving. I wanted to be out in the halls meeting students. Therefore, I was waiting.

"Good morning Gary!" I said as I walked past his office.

"Good morning!" he called back. He was on the phone, probably with a parent.

"Good morning Sandy. Hi Shannon, are we ready for this?" The secretaries were busy answering phones. There were a few early students walking around and it looked like the line at the office was beginning to form. The office opens at 7:30 am, not a minute before. There were already some parents and students in the counseling office.

Ruth was busy rearranging last minute schedules and the counselors were already setting up appointments with students. Shannon opened the first door and the marathon began.

It is impossible to truly describe everything that happens that first day of school in the office. It is quite the experience, another one that should be filmed and put on reality TV. Students, parents, teachers, and even delivery people all flood into the office. They are trying to register (late), pay lunch money and student fees, change schedules, show proof of immunization, fill out information cards, buy P.E. clothes and yearbooks, receive locker combinations and class schedules, not to mention drop off deliveries and talk to a counselor about their student. Everyone needs help. They want their questions answered and I did not have any answers. I signed what the secretary told me to sign, directed students and parents to the secretaries and counselors and got out of the way. I went out to greet the students, and for the second time that day, as I left the chaos was in full swing. This time, however, there was no mistaking who the "someone in charge" was: it was the secretary.

I stood by the rear doors where the students were coming in from the first few buses. "Good morning, how are you!" "Welcome back. Did you have a great summer?" "Young man we don't allow extreme hair styles, you'll have to flatten out the Mohawk." "That skirt is too short, those pants are too low, sleeveless shirts are against the dress code…"

"Who are you?" they would ask.

"I'm Mr. Jackman, the new assistant principal."

I was interacting with students, helping to open lockers, directing them to classes

when I could. Teaching at the middle school had provided me some experience with helping students with the chaos of the first day in a new school. Everything went well and it was much the way I had expected it to be. That is not to say there were not students who were lost, or could not open their lockers. Some were even in tears. I often tell people that the hardest part of sixth grade is opening the locker, which for some, is not far from the truth. It was a positive, exciting experience. It is not a good representation of what really happens, however, and is in many ways misleading. Ask any veteran teacher about the first day or two of school and they will tell you "just wait." It was the calm before the storm.

I did many things right that first day, some completely by accident. The most important: I left the office. I felt awkward and out of place. I wanted to help, but felt really stupid not being able to answer even the simplest questions. "What time does second period start?" "Let me see, where is a schedule? Sandy, what time does second period start?" "Excuse me, where is Mr. Orme's room? What time do the busses arrive? How do I qualify for free lunch? How much are gym shorts?" The questions went on and on, each time ending in, "Sandy do you know…. Irlanda when is…. Shannon could you…" I wasn't helping anyone and it was obvious so I got out of the way. I walked across the commons just as the first bus was arriving. I held the door for the first few students coming in off the bus, and it was the best thing I could have done. I met them for the first time, talked with them, and introduced myself. I interacted with students who would not have normally said anything to me. Sixth graders are not like high school students. They do not initiate conversation with adults, and most avoid eye contact when

possible. Greeting them broke the ice, and when I met them later in class or in the hall, many returned my greeting though I did not even know their name.

The buses arrived one after another without a break, often two and three at a time. This was their first stop and they moved on carrying students to the high school and middle school. Twenty-two busses altogether came that day and every day thereafter. I stood just inside the large set of aluminum doors greeting as many students as I could. In reality, I met less than one student in five. They were entering in waves, but in a small way, I influenced every student who walked through those doors. It was entertaining to hear them stop mid-giggle, because that is what sixth grade girls do, and ask their friend, "Who's that?"

"Good morning, welcome back to school!" I said, as the boy's head jerked up. He was obviously startled and had been sleeping on the bus. He just kept walking with that glazed look in his eye that said his mind was not awake enough to formulate a response. He might have even said hello back as he moved down the hall, it just took a few seconds for his sleepy brain to respond.

"Who are you?" a voice asked me from behind. Instantly I recognized this young boy was an exception. I have come to realize that in general 12- to 13-year-old boys will not initiate conversation with an adult, at least not simply for the sake of conversation or to be polite. There are exceptions however. It may be a way to show off to the gang of buddies and prove their bravery, or perhaps they are a little awkward socially and have built up so much to tell but lack the friends to tell it to. This boy was the latter. The initial greeting and questions were not totally spontaneous. They were roughly calculated to

lead, be it awkwardly, into a conversation about the end of school and summer experiences. It was a rushed conversation. Speaking to me still made him nervous and once he had satisfied the need to tell someone about his experiences, he quickly ended the conversation and moved off down the hall.

I surprised a large number of students, and I probably made many feel very uncomfortable that morning, but that is why I was there. I was there for students; to talk to them, listen to them, to interact and make a difference to them.

As the day progressed I dropped into classes to get a feel for what was going on. I'm sure I was a distraction and interrupted each class I entered at least a little. No matter, it was mostly just introductions and classroom procedures, but it gave me a feel for where teachers were. Amazingly, I found the band room along with the TLC Facts room, both computer labs and all the various special education rooms.

I did not realize it at the moment, and it was some time before I truly understood the importance of my decision to leave the office that morning. My misunderstanding was evident by the effort I made to be more useful in the office. As the week progressed I became accustomed to the routine and started to feel helpful in the office. Although it was not as busy as the first day, there was still a line-up each morning. Each question I could answer was a small achievement. I was catching on, learning fast, being more helpful to colleagues, and all the while interacting less with students. Soon my mornings and days would be filled interacting with students, but this would be different from the initial greeting. Later interactions would be totally separate and apart from what I experienced that first day.

I learned a great lesson from that first day. I made an impact on students that day strictly by coincidence. Not understanding or realizing the effects of my actions, I consequently quit doing what was most positive and influential to students. Being unfamiliar with the office and the routine worked to my favor, but I gained experience with the office routine and soon abandoned my efforts to greet the students. My first inclination, as with most adults, was to help the other adults/ colleagues in the middle of the most chaotic spot, the office.

I have come to understand that each year the first day will happen, the confusion will settle, and school will continue. My place, however, was with the students! My role as the assistant principal was to work with students, but it took me nearly a year of extensive reflection to understand this seminal ideal. My greetings and interactions with students affected their performance at school. Talking to the students I saw in my office in the morning influenced their behavior in class, the decisions they made at lunch, and helped keep communication lines open for the day. Understanding student behavior made it possible to create early positive interactions with students to help identify possible problems or concerns. Checking with students and acknowledging their presence each day improved attendance, helped dispel anxieties, settle down disturbances from the bus ride or the previous evening's antics with friends. I got to see which students interacted together, and I began to understand the difference between inappropriate and possible situational or age appropriate behavior. You cannot effectively influence and support the student you do not know or understand. The nuances of student interaction were vital. Its importance easily rivaled, if not surpassed, the discussions on budgets and funding during

the certification program, yet it was never the topic of discussion. The assistant principal needs to be the expert on positive interaction with students; it cannot be left to chance or trial and error methods.

The Day-to-Day Routine

It would be misleading to say, “this was my daily routine in my new position” and list a schedule of events. It is more appropriate to say there were certain duties I tried to do each day, or during certain times of the day. Whether or not I was able to keep to this schedule was really up in the air. As much as I believed it was important and wanted to plan ahead and be prepared, most days were spent simply “fighting fires” that sprang up.

Each morning as I came in I would check my box. It was filled with the usual junk mail as well as “pink slips” from the day before. Pink slips were given to students for breaking school or class rules, but not to the extent that they were sent out of class or brought to the office. “Pink slips” were part of our school behavior plan and could be for just about anything from running in the halls to being defiant in class. A record of events was kept using the behavior piece of the district grading program, as well as a hard copy of each slip that was filed in the students file along with any necessary notes. Keeping a record alone was a monumental task that I never could have done alone. As it was the in school suspension paraprofessional recorded the incidents in the computer. This required that she and I constantly communicate about incidents and students. This turned out to be a critical aspect of each day.

From these slips and any other unfinished business of the day before, I would

make a list of students I needed to talk to and the secretary would call them down one or two at a time during the first advisory period of the day. “Alex,” I would say, “you want to tell me why I have this slip here on my desk from Mrs. Smith.” Then I would give them a chance to explain the situation. Their story might fall right in line with what I thought, or they might completely deny the claim. I really never knew what to expect. After they had a chance to explain, I would give my viewpoint and we would talk about consequences. Consequences depended on the severity of the incident, and if the student had been in my office before. These meetings might take only a few minutes, or they might take the entire morning. When finished, I would have the student call a parent and explain what had happened and the consequences. I would then briefly talk to the parent and answer any questions or give any clarifications. This was something I learned from the middle school vice principal that was invaluable. It opened communication between the parents, and myself and made sure the first report they heard was accurate and not misleading. Calling home each time was one of the best things I ever did as an assistant principal. I think the call home is often used as one of the last discipline measures. I have heard other say, “If you don’t change your behavior the next time I am going to call your parents.” I quickly learned that I wanted to control the first report the parents received. I wanted them to get the story strait the first time and become involved right from the start. After all, whose responsibility is it any way? If a student was misbehaving I wanted the parents to take care of the problem, not me. Were they not the ones responsible for teaching discipline to their child? I wanted the parents, who would, to step in right from the beginning and take charge of disciplining their child. Given the chance, many parents

accepted this responsibility. Still there were some who would not step up to the plate, but for the most part parents wanted to be involved and it made a very significant difference.

Recorded incidents that first year went from over 3,500 the year before to under 1500. Part of the decline I am sure is due to the change in personalities from the previous assistant to me, and what we focused on, but the biggest change was simply that call home every time a student came into the office. It was a simple thing really, that I had seen someone else do. It had never been discussed in any college classes or training, but turned out to be one of the most effective practices for discipline.

It was early Friday morning and the buses would be coming soon. I walked out of the office to go and be by the back doors and watch the students entering. This way I could catch some problems before they sprang up. I watched for dress code problems, skateboards, CD players; just things that would become a problem later. It is such a pain to have a student sent down 5th hour by one of our stricter teachers because they have on a sleeveless shirt. I can hear the phone conversation with the mother already. "What's wrong with that shirt? I paid good money for that shirt! How come none of her other teachers said anything about it? That teacher just doesn't like my daughter." The excuses could go on for hours but the fact was that sleeveless shirts were against school policy and the girl knew it. She had probably been wearing her jacket over it all morning, but if not, why had not any one else during the day said anything to her. This is why I liked to be at the doors as students came in. I could address problems right off the bat before they got out of hand. I watched the first of 22 buses come in and the radio went off. "Mr. Jackman, there is a parent here to see you."

"Thanks' tell them I'll be right there" and I was headed back to the office. Walking through the commons, I passed Greg. He was suspended for the first of the week and was supposed to check in with me along with his mother.

"Greg, where's your mom, did she come in with you?"

"I dunno, I came with my cousin today."

"Come with me, we need to talk before things start today, just to make sure everything is as it should be." He shrugs his shoulders and follows me at a snail's pace. He does not seem like he is even awake, which is probably a good thing. I do not have time for problems this morning; I have a parent waiting. Greg waits at the couch and I go in my office with the waiting parent.

"Good morning, I'm Mr. Jackman, what can I do for you?" "My daughter is being harassed by two other girls" and she pulls out a bunch of papers and puts them on my desk. "I'm tired of all the phone calls and trash talk. My daughter is so upset she doesn't want to come to school, and now they are spreading rumors that my daughter is sleeping with her boy friend."

"When did this all start?" I ask.

"They have been picking on her since fourth grade, and I want it to stop!" She goes on to tell of all the things these other girls are doing; the phone calls, instant messages, and rumors they are spreading about her daughter. I know her daughter! She is one who is always in the middle stirring the pot. The other girls are no angels either and the group of them have gone from being best friends to hating each other dozens of times since the fourth grade. The papers she put on my desk are a list of instant messages and

emails that she has printed off. They include one side of several conversations; just the incoming messages from these other girls. It is hard to make sense of the conversations because half of it is missing. It is obvious that her daughter was replying and sending just as many messages back to the other girls and may have even instigated the conversation.

"I will look into the problem and do what I can, but as for the rumors you need to understand it is nearly impossible for me to stop what has already started. As much as we want them to stop the more I call kids in and talk to them about it the more they, in turn, talk to their friends about the problem and it just continues to grow. It is impossible to find or prove who started the rumor or how it was started. The only solution is to just ignore what people say and let it die out. I know that does not really help but there is not much more I can do. As far as the emails and messages, they were done away from school and schools cannot control what students do when they are at home. Have you talked to the other parents?" "I've called them before," she says, "and they won't do anything, they say it is my daughters fault." She then explains the details between the conflicts she has with the other mother and has had over the years. Honestly, it sounds like the mothers are not any better than the daughters. "I have a few suggestions that you could try, that I know will help. But it is up to you. First, I would change the email account and get rid of the current MSN account. If you do not give out the email address or send messages to these girls, they cannot send anything to you. Your daughter doesn't need these accounts and chances are you don't even use them." We discussed several other ideas and suggestions but the mother was not very receptive. She just wanted me to fix the problem she had helped create. We talked for about an hour and then she left with

my assurance that I would do what I could.

This was not a unique situation. I could put any number of names to the situation and it would still fit the bill. Students can be very cruel and girls are often the worst. I never realized how much time would be spent trying to stop the name-calling and rumors. I also never dreamed how often parents would expect me to solve the problems happening at home or away from school. Parents provide the computers, email and MSN accounts, allow their children to spend hours on My Space or chatting on line and talking or texting on their personal cell phones. Then, they want me to somehow regulate what is said and transmitted at all hours of the day and night, so that no one is being mean to their angel son or daughter. The reality is that these conversations go both ways. Whatever rude, vulgar, or obscene messages they receive, they most often reply to it in a similar or more aggressive way.

As I leave my office, I remember Greg. Luckily, Gary has sent him to class so he has not spent the last hour waiting for me. There are a few students, however, sitting on the couch waiting to speak to me. The first two are from my list that I gave the secretary to call down and the third has been sent out of class. I spent the next hour and a half talking to three students and having them call their parents. It is nothing too serious, just the usual discipline problems, many of which really could have been prevented or addressed by the classroom teacher. Is it really administrations job to discipline a student who did not bring a pencil or book, or came late to class? It is a fine balance it seems, to show your support for the teacher without taking on their responsibilities. This was different from what had been talked about over and over in the administrative course

work. Often we discussed the need for shared leadership. That a leader needed to share responsibilities with teachers, thereby increasing "buy in," generating greater ideas and making it possible to accomplish the overwhelming list of tasks required of an educational leader. We never, however, discussed the need to give responsibilities back to the teacher. Somewhere along the line, discipline became the primary responsibility of the assistant principal. This has come to include many tasks that are and should be kept as classroom decisions. Tasks and decisions that are best handled in class by the teacher. How do we as educators decide which tasks these are, is the question. This is probably an important part of what we should have been discussing in our training.

After the last student leaves, I step out of my office and watch him walk out of the office. "Are you here today?" The counselor jokingly asks. "I thought you took the day off because I haven't seen you all day. I guess you've just been hiding out." She was standing across the hall in the door of her office obviously just coming up for air like I was. "Very funny, I've been here all day! It's you who's been hiding." I said, pointing out that she had been stuck in her office all day as well. "Didn't you bring your magic wand," I said, "and fix all their problems, isn't that your job?" We talked a little and I mentioned the mother who had come in that morning. The counselor knew the girls as well. She agreed with my suggestions stating that she was tired of all the arguments and fights that were started online lately. "You're right though," she said, "we could call students in all day and talk to them about the rumors and try to figure out what had happened, but you never get a straight answer." "I just don't think it would do any good" I said. 'I've got an idea," the counselor says, "We could just call the whole group in and

talk to them all at once like we did with that group of girls at the first of the year. Tell them to let it drop or we'll put the whole group in ISS for the next two months!"

"Just bring your magic wand tomorrow and do your job," I said, "it will be easier that way!"

These hallway conversations were often what kept us going. Whether it was with the counselors or with Gary, having someone to talk to and share some humor with, was really what made the job doable. It also gave another perspective to situations that I often did not see or get from a parent or student. This support network was vital to my success and effectiveness. The district had assigned me a mentor when I started the job. He had been a lot of help, but the day-to-day interaction and support of the principal and counselors was really what helped me to succeed and make it through the year.

The bell rang and I realized lunch had started. I quickly left the office, not to go to lunch, but to start monitoring the halls. It was mid-year and I could count on one hand, the times I had taken or sat down to eat lunch. It just was not possible. Lunch was a time when about five hundred teenage students were all packed inside one small cafeteria, while all the rational adults went to eat lunch in the faculty room. Is it any wonder that most problems happened at lunch? There was one teacher who monitored the first 10 minutes and then two others came the last 10 minutes but in between it was just Gary and I along with an off duty officer who we paid to come just at lunch time. It was not much but it was the best we could do.

Today was a little different because it was snowing. This makes matters a little worse and more chaotic since the students are not able to go outside. Within the first 10

minutes of lunch some students found a chair that had been left out in the hall. One of the young men got on the chair, while the other two were trying to push him down the hall. They did not even make it more than 10 feet, before a teacher going to lunch grabbed them. Part of me thinks that he actually grabbed them. He brought them down to where I was standing, at the end of the hall, and he just got in their faces, yelling that they could hurt someone by doing that. One of the young men, who I had already got to know, has a tendency to shrug things off and smile. This did not go well with the teacher, who really laid it on him saying, "What, you think this is funny?" I had to step in and talk to the students. I believe they did need to be disciplined but not yelled and screamed at. The teacher left and I talked with the students. They had already eaten so I had them sit quietly in the office until the end of lunch as their consequence.

Not too long after I got a call from the custodian, "Jerry, you had better come in to the cafeteria, we have had a problem." As I came in I noticed the two custodians over at a table with a few boys. There was food all over the table and several of the boys. I knew what had happened, but I asked anyway. "So what happened here?" I directed the question at the boys who had obviously been involved with the food fight. No one said anything and I had them follow me to the office. I spent the next couple of hours talking to students, getting statements, and looking at the security camera footage, which showed the fight fairly well. During this time there was a problem with students acting out down in ISS, a student cut his head open in gym on one of the bleachers, several more students were sent out of class for misbehavior, and a teacher came in saying that some students were talking about a fight happening after school. All in all nothing too critical or terrible

happened that day. It was in all respects an average day, yet I still managed to not accomplish anything I had intended.

When the day started, I had planned to go in and observe the new choir teacher, perhaps work on the fixed asset report, then work on attendance letters. As usual what I had planned to do was nothing like what I actually spent my day doing. This was the case more often than not. Much of what I did or dealt with each day simply happened; unplanned, and unscheduled. This was such a change from teaching. Often I would make a list of things I needed to get done only to have the same list the following day or through the week. I could easily spend each day just fighting fires and dealing with whatever "walked in off the street." This consumed time but rarely accomplished anything that made much of an impact. Managing time and prioritizing was not something I had received much training in. I bought a pocket PC right at first thinking I just needed to schedule things better. It took more than that. It took prioritizing and understanding how to get the most out of interactions and knowing what things to let go and not worry about. I really never became good at this the first year.

The lessons learned from the day-to-day routine were great. I made some good choices almost by accident and listened to some good advice that first year. Often these choices seemed small, but in looking back they made a great difference. The choice to have students call home for instance, each time he or she came to the office was very effective. Previously they sent a pink slip home to be signed by a parent. Initially this avoided conflict and reserved the calling of parents as another step on the consequence ladder. However, it required someone to follow up on slips being returned. Someone had

to assign consequences for those who chose not to bring the slip back, and by not calling home it increased the number of upset parents calling, wanting an explanation of what had happened, or they were upset because the student had not told them the whole story. Calling home saved valuable time and decreased incidents. Later I learned that helping teachers develop good classroom behavior plans and practices helped minimize time wasted dealing with small classroom disturbances. Training teachers to pull students aside and talk with them about things like running in the hall, name calling, or kissing a girlfriend, instead of writing them up on a pink slip and sending it to me to deal with. The teachers often had a better relationship with the student and talking with them had a greater influence than the referral to the office.

At first when teachers would say they were having problems with a student I would say, “Send them down and I’ll take care of them.” I later learned that this was just increasing the problem. The teacher did not become any better at working with the student and the student just got sent down more and more to me. This approach, I thought, showed my support for the teacher but in reality it did not work. Over time I learned to say, “Let me come and work with the student in your class.” I would give the teacher suggestions on how to help the student in the classroom. I helped them find a way to address the problem and solve it without sending the student to the office. This showed more support and I believe it decreased the number of times I would see the student in my office.

Much of my days were still filled with the unexpected events, but these small changes in procedure and practice made a significant difference. They were ideas that

came through experience, trial and error, but could have been taught and developed earlier during the endorsement program. They are indeed methods and ways of becoming an instructional leader, but focus on discipline and the assistant principal. Experience can be a great teacher, but why should every new assistant have to reinvent the wheel. So much of my first year was wasted trying to fight fires and feeling extremely busy and overwhelmed. We were never trained on strategies to prevent bullying, especially cyber bullying, yet the state is setting requirements for schools to develop policies on bullying. Why was there not a discussion on counseling students and parents in matters of discipline and academics? How many new administrators are still trying to just fight the fires each day and not ever getting beyond the management issues of discipline? There must be training on how to handle the day-to-day struggles. Through mastery of the day-to-day and discipline strategies, the assistant may move out of the role as the disciplinarian into the position of educational leader. Again, this is too vital not to at least discuss, model, and spend time on during the certification program. Leaving each new administrator to discover these ideas and strategies on their own through trial and error is equal to placing new teachers into the classroom without ever training them on teaching methods.

CHAPTER V

AT-RISK: WHO ARE THEY REALLY?

Casey

At first my wife would ask, “What happened today?” Eventually it became, “How was your day? I don’t want to know the details.”

Every school has its own climate and unique situation. Still, every school has a population of students who are, for one reason or another, at-risk. This is a broad classification with many definitions and sub-groups. I had seen these students in my class as a teacher. Some I had recognized, some I had not. They are there in every class, in every school. The certification program had included a class on at-risk students, which was very well done and expanded my knowledge and expectations. At-risk students are a very real part of education. I knew this and felt I had had considerable experience working with these students in the classroom. I had been asked about my experience with at-risk students in my interview and chances are that I got the job partly because of my experience. I was comfortable with my abilities to work with students and expected that as an assistant principal, at-risk students would be an important part of my responsibilities. I was like the man who applied for a construction job based upon his experience building storage sheds. He boasts of experience using various power tools and equipment only to be hired and put in charge of building a mansion. To say the least, I was not as prepared as I thought.

“Mr. Jackman, there are two students here in the office for you, they were sent

down by their teacher. Do you want to talk to them now or should I send them down to ISS?"

That is how it usually started; we called it a classroom referral. Classroom referrals were to only be used in extreme cases, but actually happened fairly often. The behavior system was set up to accommodate all types of infractions both in and out of class time. Generally when a rule was broken outside of class time the student would be issued a "ticket" or "pink-slip" by the teacher. This was a way of recording what had happened and a copy would be sent to the office and home with the student to have a parent sign it and return it to the office. These were for things like running in the hall, pushing in the lunch line, being late to class too many times, etc.

In class, each teacher had his or her own behavior system. The entire school had received training several years previously in a system called the Burt Simmons Model. However, most of the teachers had revised it to fit their individual class. This generally included a leveled system of consequences building up to a classroom referral. If the infraction was severe enough and/or kept the teacher from teaching, the student would immediately be given a classroom referral and be sent to the office. As designed, it was not too bad of a system. I had reviewed it with the faculty at our first faculty meeting. However, like everything that involves teens and personalities, it had its flaws.

"I'll be right there," I would say. I wanted to talk to the students before they went to ISS. It was the 10th of September, 2 weeks since school started, and I already knew several students by name. I had a hunch who the two students might be, and if I was right it was John and Casey. Two students I definitely already knew too well. Both had Choir

together, an elective in the seventh grade. The teacher was new and still trying to get a handle on classroom discipline. These two, along with several others in the class were not helping the situation. The incident was not too critical, the slip said they were talking and goofing off, but it was something they were repeatedly doing.

"Come on back John, you can be first," I told him as I came into the office. In just 2 weeks I had begun to develop my own way of dealing with students sent to the office. I did not like just sending a slip home for the parent to sign. I wanted to talk to them personally and then have them call home while I was with them. It was a little advice I had received from the assistant principal at the middle school during my internship. It was a simple thing but turned out to be one of the best things I could ever have done.

"So John, what's going on?"

"I don't know, we were being bad I guess."

"You want to be a little more specific about that? You're not down here for nothing."

"Well, I was sitting by Casey and he said…"

He went on to explain how the two of them had been talking when they should have been participating. They were not just talking, but laughing aloud, giggling between themselves, and horsing around in class while the teacher was trying to instruct. He explained how the teacher had told them, as well as several others to quit on several occasions. It was as I had expected. I had him call his mother at work and explain to her why he was sent out of class and that he would be in ISS for the rest of the day and part of the next. The conversation was pretty typical starting with "Hello, mom, I'm in Mr.

Jackman's office, I got in trouble in class." Then there was a lot of "I know mom, OK mom, alright mom, yes mom, he's right here." Then the phone would be passed to me and I would explain what had happened in plain English. Sixth and seventh graders do not articulate well when they are nervous or upset and he was both. The conversation would end with the parent apologizing for their student and assuring me they would handle it at home. This was how it was supposed to work. I then sent him down to ISS. He knew where it was. He had been there before.

I followed John out of my office and watched him walk past Casey. I heard him mumble something like, "My dad's going to kill me!" and he headed to the ISS room.

"OK Casey, your turn. Come on in." I said. "You want to tell me what happened?"

"I don't know, she just got mad at us for no reason."

"You're here for no reason? I don't think so, try again."

"Really, I wasn't doing anything."

"Were you talking?"

"Everyone else was talking more than me, how come she didn't get mad at them?"

"How many times did the teacher tell you to be quiet?"

"Listen, this is what happened, I was just standing there by John and he asked me a question, so I answered and she yelled at us and said if we didn't quit talking she would send us to the office. She hates me and just started wigging out and…"

The discussion went on like this for quite a while. It was the teacher's fault; it was

John's fault; it was everyone else's fault in the room; just not Casey's. We talked for some time. He gave me every excuse, and I continued to try to reason with him. He had learned to play the game and was good at it.

"Here's the phone, do you want to call your mom or your dad? It's your choice."

"My dad's asleep because he works nights and won't answer the phone; my mom's at work."

"So call her at work."

"I don't know the number, and she says if I call her any more at work she will get fired."

"I guess I'll have to call," I said and I pulled up the contact information on the computer. I called home and no one answered. I called the cell number and it was no longer in service. The work number rang a warehouse and they did not recognize the name or know the person I was asking about. I tried the emergency contact and reach the aunt on a cell phone but she did not know how to get a hold of either parent. I tried home again and still no one answered, not even a mailbox to leave a message.

"Well I guess I'll need to call them later, when is the best time," I asked.

"Well my mom won't get off till about 9:00 tonight and I don't know when my dad will be awake."

It did not take long to realize that not all at-risk students fit the same mold. John and Casey would both be in my office on many more occasions. For John, however, each time his parents were involved. They took steps to solve the problem and help their son. On one occasion after being sent out of this same class, he was brought in by his mother

and apologized to the teacher. Yes, his behavior made him a pain to teachers, but he was progressing, completing work, and on track to succeed in school or at least get by. John really was not at-risk at all. He was a handful when it came to behavior, but his parents would make sure he made it through school.

Casey however was a different story. Casey was not as noticeable in class as John was. He was more mature, and not likely to act out in class simply for the attention of friends. He was not the class clown in any way. He was a follower by choice I believe because he did not want the attention. He had an average IQ and was bright when it came to music, skateboards, and the latest cell phone. He lacked some academic skills, which is typical of at-risk students. He had a narrow vocabulary, limited academic background knowledge, struggled with reading comprehension a little, but most of all somewhere along the line he and his parents had given up on school. Casey was at-risk. As a new assistant my frustration was evident in the journal entries each day. One such entry coveys my frustration in working specifically with Casey. In my own words it reads,

> Recently I have been working with Casey. Several times last week he was sent out of his core classes for misbehavior (acting out in class). He has also been having trouble in his choir class. He and several others in a group were refusing to sing and acting out. They were kept out of class for several days last week.
>
> Tuesday, after school he told me that he had walked out of his choir class (6th hour). I found this out accidentally, Mrs. Hupp had called him down because he had left a candy bar in the lunch detention room. Casey assumed that he was in trouble. As he approached her he said, "Ya, I know. I walked out of class, I shouldn't have done that." She then sent him to me so that we could talk about what had happened. He confessed that he doesn't do anything in choir anyway so what was the point of sitting in the class? Apparently he did not get home until late that day and his mother was very upset thinking I had kept him after and caused him to miss his bus. That was not the case. I talked with his mom and evaluated his status in school. He currently had a C- and an N in choir, that is as low as it goes in our school. We have A, B, C, and I for incomplete, we don't give D's or F's. If we pulled him out of the class it would be an automatic "I" and then

a U for citizenship. There were only five days left in the trimester. We looked at his other grades and he did have an "I" in language arts, which would require him to take summer school. We had proposed pulling him out of choir and let him use the ISS room for a study hall to make up the language arts credit.

Later that same week, Thursday, while sitting in my office, a teacher sent Casey and Ron into my office. This was during their 3rd hour, which was TLC- Business Facts. In the class she divides them up into groups where they form a company. He and Ron were not doing anything; they figured that they were already "bombing" the class so why try, so they were kicked out. The idea of the activity was that they would be fired from their job if they did nothing and they didn't care, so the teacher gave them the option of going to ISS and they chose to come and talk to me. I brought them down and we talked about the "I's" that they were getting in business already and they decided that they wanted to be pulled out of there as well.

Now we have a problem. What do you do with a student who is already failing a class? It is his own fault, not anyone else's. They are failing the class because they have not wanted to do the required work. Now you have a week and a half left and they say "what's the point?" Their misbehavior starts to escalate. They do not have the parental support hounding them at home to get things done, so it gets down to the end of the trimester and we start having trouble.

I spoke with both of their parents. Casey's parents' response was "here we go again!" They seemed pretty supportive, but they had not been watching his grades as they should have. They want to change his schedules because they think his friend Ron is getting him in all the trouble in choir too. They want to help but do not know how.

So now Casey will have ISS for 3rd and 6th hour. He and Ron start out for Math after lunch; they have the same math class also. They got kicked out again, the second time in the day. At this point I could see the chain of events happening. I called the parents and had them come pick them up. I made it a ½ day suspension. Casey came in the next day with his parents and we talked about his behavior. Now he would be in ISS for the rest of the week. In that time he would have to do the work packet for ISS and he would also have the time to focus on his language arts class. (That wasn't the only class he was failing, but we thought that we might be able to salvage that grade. I explained that it is a tough time for Casey, and I feel he is making some poor choices. His parents agree and they are worried.

Casey wanted to be at school, but only for the social aspect. His parents wanted him to do well, but lacked the time and understanding to know how to keep him going.

Casey is not the extreme case. What I came to realize was, that Casey was the typical at-risk student. He was just like many other students. He was at-risk not because of a learning disability or single parent home. It was not because his parents were doing drugs or were alcoholics. He was not in a gang (at least not yet) or living in extreme poverty in some inner city. Casey knew his parents were not home to help with homework projects or to help him read. It had been that way all through school. He was not self-motivated and was more interested in music, skateboards, girls and hanging out with friends then he was in science, English or math. Casey started out each term doing the basic things that took place in class. However, as the term progressed he would fall behind and then give up. "What's the point," he would say, "I'm already failing the class." It did not usually take long, he would miss a couple of assignments, or not hand in that one project they were supposed to take home and get help on. With the usual grading system it only took one or two zeros to drop your grade below 60%. At about three weeks into the term, teachers print off the first progress report for students to take home to parents. Casey never brought it back, and it just became another zero on his report. Teachers would call home but not reach a parent. Behavior would become worse at this point and I would begin to see more of Casey because he simply did not see the point of being in class. "I'm already failing, why try?"

Casey was not the only one, there are thousands; perhaps tens of thousands, just like him out there in schools across the country. As a new assistant principal, I did not know what to do. I dealt with the Casey's of the world nearly every day. I did not recognize them at first. They were just those kids like John who did not know how to

behave. If we sent home progress reports the parents would ground them until their work was done, or not let them go out with friends over the weekend and all their work would be turned in on Monday. Alternatively, so I thought. If I took away their social time with ISS or lunch detention others would straighten up and start trying, but they did not. The reasoning was if one day in ISS did not fix the problem, two days surely would. At least it fixed the problem for the teacher; they were not in class disrupting. It made it easier for other students to learn and I had to do what was best for the whole class, or so I thought. That's what I had done as a teacher and no one had ever told me different or helped me understand. What other options were there? "If you get sent down one more time I'll be forced to call your parents and you'll be suspended." He did not even flinch, and I would think, "Don't you even care?"

What did I learn from Casey? I learned that I was wrong. I see that now. As a teacher, I was wrong. As a new assistant, I was wrong. I did not understand! No one had ever explained to me how terribly wrong I was. It took working with Casey and others like him every day for those first few years to begin to understand. Casey did care! He cared; he just did not think it was possible. He knew he could not do it alone, and frankly, he did not want to try it alone. He was not worried, he knew his parents would not be available when we called; they never had been before. ISS was not so bad, at least he would be able to get some work done, and there would be someone there to help him. Then, when mom and dad were reached, he could show them he was getting things done. They would go off to work again, pacified that he was getting caught up. He would have plenty of time after school to hang out with friends. After all, he was on his own most of

the time with mom and dad gone to work in the evenings. This was nothing new to Casey; it has been this way for years. The harsh reality was that Casey understood the situation better than anyone else did.

Perhaps if I had understood sooner, I could have altered the situation. Perhaps, I could have made a difference to Casey and others just like him. Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. In reflection, I see that Casey needed support not discipline. The discipline system did not work for Casey. Casey needed a teacher who understood that he did not have help at home and was not self-motivated. Casey could succeed; he could learn; what he could not do was make himself love school or look far enough ahead to motivate himself to try harder. He needed a time to study and get help and support more than he needed choir. He needed someone to check up on him and his progress, but it needed to be positive not punitive. Casey needed to see that it was possible to succeed. He needed someone to show him how and help motivate him. Giving him poor grades never motivated him to do better. Often as educators we think that by threatening students with low grades they will be more apt to try harder. This is not the case for most students. By the time I began to understand Casey however, it was too late for him. The knowledge I gained from Casey benefited other students later on down the road but I often wish I had known about the Casey's in the world before I actually met him. I believe it would have made a real difference to Casey.

As an educational leader, it became my responsibility to provide this support and to help teachers understand and work with the Casey's in their class. Teachers need to know how to recognize these students. They need training on how to support and

motivate these students. Schools need more than a discipline plan they need a student support plan. The two work hand in hand. This concept that had been neglected in my training but now that I have begun to see the connection it is too late to help Casey.

Greg

I could hear the yelling from across the commons and knew there was trouble. The voices had moved into the office but even behind the closed doors, I recognized both voices. I recognized the teacher's voice immediately. He had a short fuse, and a loud voice. Gary had talked with him on several occasions about the problem but he still did not have a handle on it. I could not blame him however, because I also recognized the student's voice and there could not have been a worse combination.

It was October 22nd, less than 2 months since the start of school, and I had already lost count of the number of times Greg had been in my office.

"Don't touch me!" Greg said. "I didn't do anything! Leave me alone!" he continued. "I was just walking down the hall, what's wrong with that?" He continued punctuating every sentence with several foul and inappropriate expletives.

"Don't talk to me like that!" the teacher retorted. "You had better learn how to act!"

Both teacher and student were yelling before they even arrived at the office. The verbal battle continued once inside the office doors and even intensified.

We had at this time an administrative intern working with us. He was the first to approach the teacher and student. He brought the student back to the principal's office.

It was unoccupied at the time and the intern began to talk to him about what had happened. I entered the room shortly after questioning had started. Things were escalating quickly. Fortunately, the office was in the far back corner of the overall office area. This allowed us to separate the teacher and student by a good distance. This was good because Greg continued to use every four-letter word he knew to describe the teacher and was not trying to be discrete. The teacher, however, had left the office and would not hear Greg's ranting.

Greg came from a very difficult situation; single parent home, not really a poverty situation, but defiantly low income. There was probably some substance abuse, but what affected him most was the instability at home. Greg's mother was not by any means the person in charge in their home. It was obvious from day one that Greg did what he wanted, whenever he wanted.

I met many parents like Greg's; single, working more than usual, wishing their child would behave, but not knowing how to manage it. Some would yell and scream like Greg's, and some would just sit quietly and do nothing. The result was the same, however; in the end the child got what they wanted and the parent left saying, "I don't know what to do, he won't listen to me."

This was the saddest part of all the parent had given up. I quickly found out that by this time in the student's life I had very little influence. Kids need parents. They need rational adults who will stand up and fill the role as parent, the person in charge, someone who will do what is best for the child. Greg's mom said she cared about Greg, but every time she threw her hands in the air in defeat, Greg realized how little she cared. I had

seen this at the high school, but had never realized how soon it started with some students. Greg would never even make it to high school.

"Do you want to tell me your version of what happened Greg? I've already heard Mr. Smith's." I asked as he sat down in a chair.

"I didn't do anything! I was just walking down the hall and this ____teacher starts yelling at me for no _____ reason! "I didn't even hear him and he starts saying let's go to the office your getting a pink slip. So I say what for? I didn't do anything this is gay! I'm not going to the office I didn't do anything."

"Was that the right way to handle it Greg?" I told him. "When a teacher tells you to do something you do it!"

This was a mistake. He was already too upset and angry. His emotions were already out of control, and to him I was just the second round of the attack. I guess I can blame it on inexperience but I should have given him time to cool down before we talked about what had happened.

He exploded! He was back into the same defensive mode as with the teacher. Swearing and screaming how stupid this was. Refusing to do anything, we told him. "Call my mom I don't care! I'm not going to the ISS room, you can't make me! I don't want to sit down, go ahead, call the cops; this is a bunch of…" He went on with the ranting in spite of requests and attempts at reasoning. I tried everything I could think of. Between the intern and me, we had given him several different options and scenarios, trying to get him to comply with requests. His utter refusal gave us no options except to get a hold of his mom and have her come and get him. I left Greg sitting outside my

office supervised by the administrative intern, and went to call his mom. When I returned Greg had pulled out a portable CD player and was listening to his music at full volume. I had him hand it over. CD players and such were against school policy. I told him I would turn it over to his mother when she arrived. It took some arguing but he eventually complied. He then laid down across the chairs and started making a lot of noise and being disruptive. This was not such a big deal until he stood up and asked if he could go to lunch. I told him no, and to sit back down. He continued to ask to leave for various reasons, and I kept refusing his requests. He then said, "I'm going to get a drink" and walked down into the main office. I got him to stop before he left the office but he still continued to refuse to do anything else. In all reality, Greg was enjoying this by now. He had everyone's full attention, he felt in control, and he did not care about consequences. His mom had said to call his past probation officer and have him talk to him but I was unable to reach him. I told Greg that if he continued to refuse to cooperate I would be forced to call the resource officer and have him removed. As I turned to make the call, Greg walked back into the main office just as his mother arrived. Again, he started yelling and swearing, being very belligerent and disrespectful to his mom. It was obvious Greg could not stay at school as out of control as he was but who was I supposed to send him with? He would not listen to his mom and refused to go with her. Again his mom said to call the former probation officer. She believed Greg would listen to him so I tried again and was able to reach him.

The probation officer arrived quickly and was met at the office door by Greg's mother. She pleaded with the officer, "He won't listen to me. I don't think he will even

go with me, can't you have him taken to detention or something?"

The probation officer tried to get Greg to comply but to no avail. Eventually he had us call dispatch and a uniformed patrol officer was called in to the situation.

When the patrol officer arrived, he explained to Greg that he was being charged with disorderly conduct and made some calls to arrange for him to be taken to Attention. Attention is a little different from detention and the mom would still be responsible to transport Greg there.

Again, she pleaded with the officer, "He won't go with me! He'll just run off or something, I just can't control him. Can't you take him?"

Greg continued to yell and scream at his mom and the officer. He still refused to cooperate and eventually the officer gave in to the mother's requests and agreed to transport Greg to the station. At this point, the officer handcuffed Greg and searched him for inappropriate items or weapons. Just as I was thinking the situation could not get any worse, the officer found five bottle rockets and a cigarette lighter in Greg's pockets.

I was dumbfounded. How had this situation got so far out of hand? Why would Greg not listen to reason? Questions were racing through my mind and I just could not believe what had just happened. I paced back and forth in the office trying to make sense of it all.

The officer informed Greg he would also be charged with possession of illegal fireworks and bringing fireworks to a public school; two separate charges on top of the disorderly conduct. Greg was then escorted out the back office door to the patrol car.

Even now as I think back, I wonder if I could have prevented the whole situation.

If I had given him time to settle down would he have listened or would it have happened anyway? I felt sick to my stomach as I watched him being taken away. I was new at this and whether I wanted to admit it or not, it had really bothered me. I was upset at Greg and his mother, I was upset at the teacher, but mostly I was upset at myself for not being able to handle the situation. I felt powerless, and unprepared. This was not something I had been told about in my training nor experienced as a teacher.

Ironically, later that year in January I went to a training done by the special education department. It was required for the special education teachers and offered to assistant principals if they wished to attend. The teacher doing the training was from my school so I attended and was glad I had. It was a training put together and named after David Mandt and associates. It was in essence a conflict resolution training that dealt with resolving anger and aggression situations. The training described what was called the "crisis cycle." As we discussed it I could vividly picture this situation with Greg and wish I had had the training sooner. I do not know if it was the best available training but it helped me to make sense of what had happened and how I might possibly prevent this situation next time.

Greg returned to school the following week and continued to be a difficult student. Not that I expected everything to change after a few days. The defiance and disorderly conduct were not surprising really; we had seen it on several occasions earlier in the year; just not to this extent. I first experienced his defiance early in September. On the 13th while spending time in ISS for misbehavior, Greg took out a chain and started playing with it. The teacher asked him to hand it over and he refused. She eventually

brought him to me and he gave up the chain and I contacted home. His refusal resulted in another day in ISS.

A few days later, I had to contact home again because Greg and his cousin were involved in making a friend pass out in the bathroom. The friend was heavier than they thought and when he fell they were not able to catch him and he hit his head on the tile floor. All the parents were notified that day as well.

Greg walked out of class on October 8th when the teacher called his aunt because he was not working. He refused to go back to class.

His aunt often was the one who worked with Greg. At one point Greg moved in with his aunt and uncle in an attempt to give him some structure and keep him out of trouble, but it did not last long. He would not comply with their rules and finally they decided it was too much. Greg's behavior was affecting their family and causing problems with their children.

After calling the aunt that day, Greg still refused to return to class or go to ISS. His refusal simply made the matter worse and we were forced to suspend him and have him do his ISS time the following Monday. This time I called his mom first, but she was busy at work so she called the aunt to come and take him home. It went on like this throughout the year. Greg was in and out of ISS. He was closely tracked in a special behavior program called PRIDE. He was suspended multiple times for fighting, disrupting classes, and blatant defiance. Greg was capable of doing good work and succeeding in class, and there were positive times when certain teachers could get him to settle down and accomplish work. However, these times were few and far between. Greg

had been in trouble with the law before the year even started. Now with the charges he received from the incident in October, coupled with later incidents of disorderly conduct Greg was heavily involved with the juvenile courts. He was in a program they called "options" and worked closely with a probation officer. This was an after schoolwork program set up for students to work off service hours and be kept under close supervision. Greg seemed to settle down a little but there were still reports from other students that he was smoking marijuana sometimes before school or on the weekends.

One morning Greg and his friend Wes were seen leaving the building. They returned but were obviously acting differently. I suspected drugs and we searched lockers, backpacks, and questioned the two students. They admitted to smoking marijuana sometimes but denied any use that day. Eventually we located a marijuana pipe and other paraphernalia but they were with another friend of Greg's. The friend was charged, but there was no evidence on Greg or Wes. Sadly, when I showed up to take Greg out of his math class the teacher commented that this was the best he had been in class for a long time and it was due to being high.

The mellow Greg did not last long, however, and by lunch he was worse than usual. He and Wes ended up getting in a fight with each other. I guess they were not that great of friends once the "pot" wore off. When brought to the office Greg refused to go to ISS. He was his typical defiant self and in spite of all my coaxing and reasoning, he was eventually suspended, and his probation officer contacted.

Greg's situation never improved. He showed signs of being involved with the local gangs and was often caught drawing gang symbols or making gang signs to his

friends. The home situation did not seem to change either, although with the help of the courts Greg was seeing some consequences for his actions. Then one day Greg did not show up to school and I received a call from his probation officer. He explained to me that Greg had been involved with a group of kids causing several thousands of dollars of vandalism to some businesses and cars on the street. He was sent off to detention and it would be some time before he returned to school. Greg had been in detention before just a day or two or over the weekend. This time it was for several weeks and that was about the last I saw of Greg. He did return for a day or two but was then gone again and the year ended. Being a seventh grader, he did not return to my school the following year. On occasion, I would speak to the assistant principal of the middle school and I do not believe Greg ever made it through the next year at the middle school.

I learned from Greg that Greg's story was anything but a success story. Nothing we did seemed to make a difference. He never responded to help or miraculously turned things around. For me, Greg was a cruel taste of the brutal side of reality. He was not like the students who instructors used in their examples when discussing at-risk students. Greg was different, more unique than Casey but still not very rare. Greg was a product of years of neglect. No one had ever cared where he was or what he was doing and he knew it. He was aggressive and wanted the attention of everyone so much he was willing to do whatever it took to make people notice. He was a very clever, conniving young man and could quickly manipulate a situation. He never seemed concerned about the consequences of his actions, although he should have been. Perhaps this was his real problem; it was as if he never thought there would really be any consequences for his actions.

Similar to Casey and nearly every other at-risk student, he never accepted responsibility for his actions. He had learned to do what he wanted and not to worry because no one would follow through with the consequences. Sadly, in many ways he was right. His mom did not know what to do and was in actuality afraid of him, and Greg knew it. She never followed through. His Aunt did well for a little while, but Greg always had an escape. If he did not want to follow her rules he would go back home where he knew he was in control. Greg's desire for attention, his disregard for the eventual consequences of actions, coupled with a desire for excitement and thrills set him up for failure. I have often wondered if there was ever anything I could have done to change that situation. I was new, and inexperienced, but as hopeless as it may seem, I do not believe anyone could have helped Greg by this time. It is difficult for me because this feeling opposes a core personal belief that all students can succeed. In addition, perhaps, if given the chance sooner, someone could have made a difference. Greg did not allow the help or want it in any way. I could not force Greg to recognize his decisions were self-destructive or convince him to care, and that made all the difference. Unlike Casey, Greg did not care to succeed. He did not want to slip under the radar and be left alone to sink or swim. He wanted everyone to watch and think that he was in control and could do as he pleased.

I learned from Greg that perhaps all students can succeed, but the choice was not mine to make alone, which was a critical lesson to learn. I did not know what to do, nor did anyone else I was working with. I believe every new assistant principal will encounter a student or two exactly like Greg that first year. How will they handle the

situation? Unless there is greater training, and more preparation they will inevitably have the same outcome. How many more "Gregs" will need to self-destruct before we learn how to deal with him better?

Wes and Kate

Along with an understanding of student choice, I gained a new understanding of broken, dysfunctional and even abusive homes from students like Wes and Kate.

Wes was a pleasant young man with a great sense of humor. One on one he was very courteous and easy to talk to and work with. Wes, however, wanted acceptance and security. He was not very tall, and was often the "stooge" for other kids like Greg. He lived with his dad and brothers.

"Ok Wes, you want to tell me what happened today? " I would ask.

"I don't know, Greg was making funny noises and it made me laugh."

"You mean you were sent here because you were laughing? What did you do?"

"Well I wasn't doing my work, but I needed a news paper and I didn't have one." With a few more question I would eventually get the whole story and end up having him come in early or at lunch to help him get his homework done. Wes liked that attention, and often would do stupid things to get it. I will never forget the morning the bus driver brought him in to me and he had pierced his forearm with a safety pin. I had known students to push a pin through the top few layers of skin before without causing any real pain or damage to the skin. This was not the same. It appeared that Wes had taken a half-inch fold of skin on the underside of his forearm and shoved a large safety pin through it

while his so-called buddies cheered him on. This mentality often brought Wes to my office. Each time I would call his dad and get a message on his cell phone. At first he would call back but eventually that stopped. The home phone was disconnected and there was no one else to call. In getting to know Wes, I learned that dad was unemployed or self-employed. He left Wes and his siblings alone most of the time. Wes wandered the streets with friends like Greg most nights being the stooge or according to the officers at our school most likely the supplier for their drugs and alcohol. You see Wes' father was well known to the detectives that came and worked at our school during lunchtime. He was a convicted drug addict and suspected dealer. Wes had no support or help at home. He usually got himself up and on the bus by himself. He was a product of his environment and as much as Wes had never known a stable home, he sought out others like himself to hang out with for attention and support. He was in survival mode just trying to survive day to day and honestly, school was not a priority.

Kate was in a similar situation. At first, she was living with grandma who had legal custody of her and her younger sister. Her mother and her mother's new boyfriend were still around, but the courts had removed Kate from that home due to repeated convictions for substance abuse. The custody battle had ended years earlier when it became evident the mother was not going to stay clean of meth long enough to be able to care for the children.

Still Kate lived with grandma some weeks until grandma could not handle it and then she would live with the drug addict mother and boyfriend. She was very aggressive and tough just like the stereotypical street kid. She talked tough, and was not afraid to

back up her words with a fist or more often her friends or gang members. She was a pretty girl and had a new boy friend each week. That alone was enough of a danger sign for the counselors to meet with her on a regular basis.

She developed a good relationship with her counselor but that did not seem to change her behavior. She was good at telling you just what you wanted to hear and then doing her own thing. She could be as sweet as sugar one minute, telling you she liked your tie and saying "Hello Mr. Jackman, look I'm going to be on time." She always greeted me in the halls as well as the principal. Then the next moment we would have two girls in the office afraid to go to class or walk home because Kate had threatened to have them jumped and beat up on the way home because they were talking to her boy friend.

Kate's situation was desperate. I remember how excited she was to tell me her sister had just had her baby. I knew her sister; she was 14, with a 17-year-old boyfriend. The sister and boyfriend ended up moving in with Kate and her mother. Kate would tell the counselor that she would never be so stupid as her sister and get pregnant, but she was already sexually active and was not even in the seventh grade.

Like Wes, there were times I worked with Kate to finish assignments or get work done after she was sent out of class. Once I took her into the library to look up definitions and identify various instruments for her music class. This young lady could identify every illegal drug or gang sign out on the street, but she did not know what a horn or violin looked like. She could not even point them out from a list of pictures. Her knowledge of everyday, or what I considered everyday information, was extremely limited.

Kate too was simply in survival mode at school. She got in fights, and started numerous conflicts. She seldom participated in class work or worried about academics. All she saw was the life she was in. She wanted control and recognition, which she acquired from her group by being forceful, "hard core," and hooking up with the right boy friend. In spite of her lack of academic knowledge, Kate was not the least bit slow. She knew how to manipulate others, and give the right answers to counselors, the police and myself. She could control her anger, and turn on the tears at will. What she did not do, like most 12 and 13 year olds, was think ahead to the future. Kate would say how her sister was stupid, but she was on the same path. She hated her mom for being an addict and keeping the abusive boy friend around, but she was going through the same motions. She often claimed she had to be good or they (the courts) would send her to detention. She was not worried though. The fact was that state custody was several steps up from home life. In detention she got away from her family, avoided the abusive boyfriend of her mother, kept from being jumped on the street by the high school buddies of girls she had threatened. In reality, Kate was not too worried about detention or even the long-term facility for girls, and by the next year, that's where she was.

Like Greg, I do not believe Kate ever made it through middle school. I did not see her again after she was sent away. Wes actually seemed to improve when Greg was gone but one day the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) called the school to inform us Wes had been removed from the home and placed in state custody following a drug bust. As suspected Wes' father was selling drugs and one night in front of Wes and his brothers the police handcuffed and hauled their father away to prison. Sadly, it was

not the first time.

I learned some valuable lessons from Wes and Kate. True, I had taken a class on at-risk children during my administrator training but it had not prepared me for Kate, Wes, or Greg. Perhaps it is something only experience can teach a person. I felt inadequate, and caught off guard. I was expected to be the expert in dealing with these students, but I really had no understanding of the situation or what to do to help. The teachers could not handle them so they sent them to me and what did I do? I felt sick to my stomach when Wes was taken away, just as I had with Greg. It bothered me because I had hopes of making progress with him and now felt shocked and thwarted. These events made me feel helpless to the situation. I felt powerless to fight the influence of the home and destructive environment that these students had grown up in. My view of reality had never been exposed to this level of neglect. I had no real understanding of what these students were going through and felt helpless to find a solution. I could see myself becoming calloused and indifferent, writing off students like Greg and actually being glad when he did not attend school. This was not the solution, but it was what was being done.

Further Insights

These four students were in all respects at-risk. They were not classified with any learning disabilities; they were not in special education, or receiving help through some other classification. They were not like the students discussed in my at-risk students class taught through the special education department. I do not wish to undervalue this class in

any way. It was very informative and our school had several students that fit just that mold. They had severe to moderate disabilities, they needed great support as well and they fell under the special education umbrella. These students were receiving services and many were supported by a fabulous behavior unit at our school. The teacher running the class was proficient in working with these students and had an aid, or if necessary two, to help work with students. The class was invaluable, but none of the students I have mentioned qualified for this program.

The students like Casey, Greg, Wes, or Kate were at risk for other reasons. They were highly at risk of dropping out of school, or not making it through life in general. Each was different, but they all needed help, and I was the one to give it to them but lacked the know how to do it effectively. These students and others like them were a small part of the whole school population, but they very effectively monopolized my time each day without significant results or improvements. I was trained to be an instructional leader, but for an audience that did not include the population I spent most of my time with. No doubt about it, I had been caught off guard. As a teacher, I had only dealt with these students briefly in class during my experience teaching at a middle school. As a high school teacher, these students were very seldom seen. As stated, with the exception of Casey, to my knowledge these students never made it through middle school. When I did meet them in my class, students like Greg often acted out and I would send them to the office, but that is only if they made it to my class. Often they were already in the office from another class, a fight, or for something, they did during break or at lunch. Then, they would be so far behind when they returned that I never expected them to

really recover. As a teacher I saw very few of the students like Greg, so I knew little of how to help or support him. Students like Kate, Wes and Casey were not the big disruptions in class. They came unprepared, seemed to not care about homework or grades and when approached would be pleasant, promise to do better but with no real determination. They too might be missing from class, but still I never met the parents or knew their situation. Had I known, I am not sure as a teacher what I would have done. I believed when I became the assistant principal I knew a lot about these students and how to work with them. I thought I was qualified, and perhaps I was more qualified than some, but it quickly became obvious that I was unprepared. As the assistant principal, I needed to do something but lacked the training to know what. These students were never the focus of the certification program, but were the focus of my time and abilities as an assistant principal. My own experiences were drastically inadequate to prepare me to help or even effectively understand these students.

The PRIDE Program

What to do with at risk students was not a new question to the assistant principalship. How to help these students and give them support was something I knew schools across the country were working through. As I attended the assistant principal conference and other similar conferences, talked to other vice principals, and read through various publications I realized the problem was one that plagued many other assistant principals. There were various programs and methods on the market to help solve the problems. My school had adopted a school wide behavior plan and received

training a few years earlier because behavior had become such a critical issue. Behavior was a concern for the entire staff and the previous assistant principal had made some attempts to improve the situation. On a whole, the plan they had adopted was good and helped standardize classroom behavior models, although nearly every teacher had modified the plan to fit their own classroom. The plan was fairly complicated and most teachers had simply modified it to be more straight forward and easy to implement.

Along with this, the school had developed a type of "school within a school" program called PRIDE. This was for that small number of students who were often in trouble and were not succeeding in their classes. The program was modeled after the special education behavior unit and, in short, was not working in the least. The principal told me right from the start he did not believe the program was working and wanted me to see what I could do to make it work. It was also my responsibility to train all the new teachers in how to use the school wide discipline plan.

What did I know about behavior plans? Again, I was caught off guard and without any real training. As a teacher, I had developed what I thought was a pretty good classroom discipline plan and had been to a little training on behavior. I had also team taught with the behavior specialist at the middle school, which in many ways is what saved me. However, very little was ever discussed in the administrative endorsement program about behavior or setting up a behavior program. My experience at the middle school proved to be my only training for the largest part of my position. I shudder to think what I would have done without that experience. In fact, the first thing I did was to arrange a day for my PRIDE teacher to go with me to observe and visit with the behavior

specialist at the middle school. We gained many good ideas that day and tried to implement them as best we could.

Some people questioned why we went to observe another school when the special education behavior unit at our school was working so well. The reason was the difference in students. The PRIDE program was set up for regular education students with behavior problems, and did not cross the line of special education. The program at the middle school had actually combined the special education behavior unit with the regular education students with severe behavior problems. We had tried to set up the PRIDE program like our special education behavior unit but it had not worked. The students were different, the teacher was new and inexperienced, and he did not have the aids and classroom help available through special education.

I spent a lot of time and effort that year working with the PRIDE teacher and revising the entire program over and over. We set up a level system with rewards and positive reinforcements. We met with parents, signed contracts, and tried to work with students one on one. It was incredibly frustrating, because no matter what we did to revise it the program never really worked.

I watched Greg wandering the halls one day just before Christmas. He was one of our PRIDE students and was suppose to be heading to his computer class. I did not stop him it would only cause a confrontation, which he thrived on. I was so aggravated, not because he was wandering, but because I knew he was not getting anything out of school. The PRIDE program was not providing him anything more than close supervision. I knew the program needed to be completely reorganized but did not know how. “What do

I know about setting up a self contained classroom?" I thought. "Sure, the one at the middle school worked well but the teacher's personality and situation were so different!" The more I thought about it the more frustrated I became. The program was suppose to provide these students with one-on-one instruction and a complete battery of incentives to help them see some success along with providing close and constant supervision. What really happened was that it took students out of a class they did not want to be in anyway, and put them together in a room with four or five other behavior problems. The students were all at different levels and in different classes requiring different work and assignments. The diversity kept the teacher from being able to help or instruct every student individually. It was completely ineffective. The PRIDE program pulled students out of class, giving the teacher a break perhaps, but never succeeded in helping the student learn or even keep up with his or her class. I learned a lot that year and the next year went better, but even then there were many problems.

Jill

"Please grandma, don't let them take me! I'm sorry, please!" Jill screamed as she sat on the curb. She was sobbing and pleading with her grandma for the better part of 10 minutes. "Please, please!" she kept crying. "No Jill, this time you've gone too far," the grandma repeated, but I could see from the doorway the tears in her eyes as well. I felt sick to my stomach and helpless to do anything. The principal and both counselors were there as well watching and waiting for the ambulance to arrive. I will never forget that scene, although I often wish I could.

I knew Jill, although I really never dealt with her. She worked with the counselors quite often, and when her anger flared, she usually met with the principal because he knew her and the family fairly well. Jill was not the stereotypical petite, gentle, seventh grade girl. She was explosive, tall and heavy set, which complicated matters when she went into one of her fits. Jill suffered from many things both physical and mental. She lived with her grandma and had for quite some time since been removed from her home due to abuse by her father. Jill spent most of her day in the special education functional skills classroom. She had some severe learning disabilities and suffered from seizures. Her therapist claimed that many of her seizures were actually pseudo-seizures or in other words, just made up in her mind. When she had a seizure we simply cleared the area and waited for them to pass. I sat with her once on the special education bus while she had a seizure. I also remember directing students around her while she experienced one of her seizures in the middle of the hallway. Usually they happened in the classroom. Whether they were real or not was impossible to tell. I once watched the principal talk her into coming into the building when she refused to get off the bus. She also tended to do things to get attention. So whether the seizures were real or just a ploy for attention, no one could really say. All that was sure was that her mental stability fluctuated and when she became frustrated or upset she could explode. She had on a few occasions hit an aid or another student, or threatened to beat someone up. Usually however she would hide in a corner or restroom and refuse to talk to anyone. The grandma had expressed her concern that she had became violent at home several times. Jill had contemplated suicide, and had been hospitalized in the behavior ward previously. In short, life had dealt her a pretty

rotten set of cards and she was not really able to understand why, or deal with it emotionally.

Therefore, it was on the day she sat pleading with her grandma. She had been having problems and the grandma did not know what to do. She had become upset that day and I do not even remember why. It was at lunchtime and she ran into the bathroom and locked herself into one of the stalls refusing to come out. Most days we hired an off-duty detective to come and patrol at lunchtime to help with the standard problems and deter fighting. The officer was there this day as well, and when Jill ran into the bathroom he came to help. To his credit, he was probably just following procedure but his presence made the situation go from bad to worse. Jill had been aggressive, and would not respond to the officer. Rather than wait for the principal to calm her down he entered the restroom and simply began to take the lock off the stall door with his Leatherman to get her out. Before he was able to get the lock off, Jill came through open the door, and tried to push her way past the officer. She became very aggressive and it ended with him restraining her with handcuffs. This was the final straw for grandma. Jill had been having problems at home, and coupled with assaulting the officer, they called an ambulance. It was to take her to the hospital's behavior ward.

There she sat at the edge of the parking lot, pleading with grandma not to send her back to the hospital. Grandma knew Jill needed help, and as much as it pained her, she realized she could not give her the help she needed. Perhaps that is why I felt sick to my stomach as well. Jill needed help; clinical, psychological help; we all knew it, but I did not know how to give her the help she needed. The situation might have been different if

the principal had been the first one to respond and not the officer. The ambulance might have been avoided, who can tell. Is that what Jill needed, or would it have simply postponed the inevitable. I said to myself, “I’m not a counselor or a social worker. I want to help these students but what am I suppose to do?”

I was shocked and amazed at how many students in our schools are receiving professional counseling or seeing a therapist on a regular basis. They come to school on medications for depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, attention deficit disorder, and so many more that I could not name them all. I worked with these students and their parents nearly every day with not so much as one hour of training. I did not know what to watch for, or what side affects the meds might have. A student would go ballistic one day and when I talked to the parent they would inform me that the therapist had changed their son’s medication and that it might be a few days before he settled down. As a classroom teacher, I had never recognized or noticed these students.

Sure, some parents use the diagnosis of a mental disorder simply to cover up the effects of poor parenting. I am sure there are many students who are incorrectly diagnosed and simply need a stable home environment, but do I have the expertise to identify which ones?

“Mr. Jackman, there is a young lady here to see you, do you have a minute?” the radio would say. “She was looking for the counselors but they are all at their meeting today.”

“Sure, send her in,” I said. She was in tears because of problems at home and other kids were teasing her about it at school. I did the best to calm her down and sent her

back to class. The counselor came in right after and I told her about the situation. She agreed to call and let the girl's mom know what had happened. No sooner had she called then she was back in my office looking very troubled. "Jerry," she said, "I called the mom and she says her daughter ran away last Friday and has been missing ever since. They have been looking for her all weekend."

I have watched as a student curled up in the fetal position and pulled their hoodie over their eyes in the middle of the hallway to escape somehow into a safe place. This was during class break with hundreds of students shuffling past in the hall. I have worked with students so upset that they would not respond to me or a parent while in my office. Some students hide in bathrooms, some in custodial closets. Ron, whom I mentioned earlier, a tough kid who liked to fight, would pull his hood over his head, tuck his knees up under his jacket, and try and close out the world. He stayed like this even after his mother came to talk to him. Most of these students were not special education students. They suffered from abuse, neglect, drug exposure, divorce, suicide, and every other ailment or flaw in our society that could turn a child's world upside down. Not to mention the simple effects of being a teen and trying to feel accepted by peers and make sense of changes in their bodies. They might be bi-polar, have ADD or ADHD, or suffer from schizophrenia. They could be white or Hispanic, live with grandparents or in foster care. They came in all shapes and sizes and had many problems. Few actually tested positive for a learning disability that might qualify them for special education.

Many of the students who came into my office, as well as a few parents, were not emotionally stable. They needed more than discipline or time in ISS. They needed help

and I did the best I knew how, but where was the training to help these students? Why had no one mentioned them before? I worked close with the three counselors and learned many things from them but still I felt inadequate and frustrated. Jill returned the following week and continued to have good days and bad days, but the situation was never allowed to become so out of control. It was quite the learning experience for me.

Summary of At-Risk Students

Many of my greatest frustrations that first year came from working with this unique group of at-risk students. They were at risk for dropping out of school, becoming involved with drugs, alcohol, and gangs. They were at risk for being neglected, abused, and in general not seeing success in school. I selected these students because although they were different from each other, they are like so many other students. I believe every school has a Casey and a Greg as well as students like Wes, Kate, and Jill. I selected only a few, knowing it would take volumes to discuss even half of the situations and instances that came into the office. I can honestly say there was never a dull day.

They were not the only students by any means that stood out that first year. I worked with many other students, families, and teachers. It was challenging and often difficult, but I do not wish to paint such a bleak, tragic picture. I often had to remind myself that although much of my time and effort was expended toward a select group of students, the majority of students responded to our efforts and continued in school. At-risk students like these, however, make such a tremendous impact on the role and position of the assistant principal that they should not be neglected. Efforts to help new

administrators understand and help these students, need to be included in the certification program.

Now when I attend a conference addressing at risk students, or read a report about at risk indicators, I think of these students. As studies have shown, these students have many things in common. Most of these students come from what is classified as a dysfunctional and, more than likely, low-income home environment. Parents and other family members have minimal education and often have a negative attitude toward school in general. If there are two parents in the home and both parents are working full time, the students are usually without supervision for a large part of the day. At-risk students are most likely to be living with one parent, usually the mother, or what is often the case, living with grandparents. They are regularly exposed to alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs by parents, friends, or other family members. In short, they exhibit the behaviors and live in the environment identified by countless studies to put them at risk.

Before working with these students as the assistant principal, at-risk for me was a faceless, statistical measure for students who did not care and dropped out of school. Now these students have names, faces, feelings, real life circumstances, problems, and are at-risk for much more then not getting an education. They need help and support which requires a better understanding and perspective from those designing behavior plans and doling out random consequences. In their 1989 study, Frymier and Gansneder identified 45 factors that put children at risk, or that can be used to identify at risk youth (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989). Barr and Parrett (2001) included this same list along with some tables of risky behaviors, charts of predictors for at risk students, and numerous

other data from various studies to help identify at-risk students as early as third grade. These studies and many more point to broken homes, drug and alcohol abuse, early sexual activity, and poverty.

It must be noted that the debate continues as to what at-risk means. Personally, I began my career in education with a narrow description and ideas on what it meant to be at-risk. The definition has broadened through experience. This reflection has magnified many questions and topics for debate. These students were at-risk for not succeeding in school but why they were at-risk is a greater question. The topic is one in need of a much more in-depth discussion than this study will allow but there must be a short consideration of why these students were not succeeding. Was it because of parents, abilities, socioeconomic status, motivation, or their social environment? Was Casey at risk because of Casey and his parents? Was Greg on track to drop out because of a personal desire to fail? Can we blame Wes and Kate's situation on their environment that we have no control over? The simple truth, although not pleasant, is that these students were at risk for failure in part because the "system" was failing them. The current educational system is set up for students with parent support and resources. The "system" caters to those who play the game right. For example, assignments often go home requiring parental help whether directly or indirectly. Students without available parents are automatically put at a disadvantage. It was not Casey's fault his parents worked swing shift, yet he was the one penalized for not getting projects done. He was signed up for choir, not that he wanted to take choir, or needed it, simply because his parents never went over his options and talked to him about what classes he would really like.

It would be easy to blame home-life for the failure of Wes and Kate, and it defiantly made a big impact, but where was the support for them. They were not classified as having a learning disability, and so they never received additional support, or services to fill the gaps in their learning and background knowledge. They were surrounded by examples of failure. They needed someone to show them how to succeed. They needed to understand the reason for education, the benefits of learning and what a stable environment really was. They were individuals with very unique needs simply thrown into the "system" and expected to perform. These students were trying to survive the moment, and the "system" was penalizing them every day for not doing homework.

In order for me to discuss my thoughts and experiences about at-risk students it must be noted that this is a much greater topic in education that is in need of further discussion. Our current system continues to fail in providing the needed support for at-risk children. The focus in this study is on the assistant principal but his role is greatly affected by the debate on at-risk students. It is a critical topic but cannot be discussed in detail at this time. Let it suffice to say that the research is quite clear to the extent that we can identify the at-risk students. However, what is happening to help these students? It is a topic neglected by the certification process for those who will make the greatest difference to these students and their education.

As a new assistant principal, it was never difficult to identify the at-risk students. In fact, I did not even need to put forth much effort to find them. Most were at some point sent down, called down, and often personally brought down to me by the teacher. Identifying them was not the problem. What I needed was an understanding of the

individual. I needed to see the different situations, the different attitudes, the different methods of working with these students. I needed to know how to take the student out of their dysfunctional situation and social environment for six hours a day and somehow change their attitude and behavior enough to allow learning. I needed to know how to work with the probation officers, the social workers, the counselors and the medical professionals involved with these children. I needed to be prepared to deal with the personal frustration and disappointment that often accompanies reality in an average middle level school. I spent the vast majority of my time and effort each day working with at-risk students and their parents, not only the first year, but also each year after. Why did the preparation program for becoming an assistant principal not focus on vital intervention practices? Why were we not trained and prepared to improve student learning through the creation of a discipline plan? As an assistant principal, these were the students I worked with; they were the ones I needed to help. I was not prepared, which condemned me to be less effective until I struggled to gain experience and compensate for my initial lack of understanding.

CHAPTER VI

FACULTY AND STAFF

The PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

When I showed up that first day, I asked the secretary to print me off a list of teachers. I wanted to know everyone's name and get to know the staff. About a month into the year as students were coming down and setting up for our first assembly a woman walked up to me and said, "Mr. Jackman, would you be willing to help us during the assembly?" I had seen her but could not recall her name. I thought perhaps she was one of the special education teachers whom I had not really got to know very well.

"Sure! What do you want me to do?" I replied.

"Just go back stage and they'll get you set up."

The next thing I knew, I was standing on the stage dressed in a pizza costume and the PTA president, the woman who had approached me, was telling the student body about their fundraiser.

"For each coupon you sell our school gets three dollars…" and she continued on.

The embarrassment of being on stage in front of the school in a pizza costume wore off in a week or so, but I never forgot who the PTA president was. Although not on the official staff list, she spent many hours each week at the school. I sat in meetings almost every month with the PTA answering questions, taking suggestions, and I soon realized that not every member of the staff was on the official list. The PTA was our tie to the community. They were a great source of help to the school throughout the year.

Book Fines

"Mr. Jackman, what would you like me to do?" she asked.

The librarian had just entered my office. She was speaking about overdue book fines. I could tell she was frustrated. I knew that she had just had a heated discussion with the financial secretary about some problems with collecting the fines.

"What do you mean Judy? Tell me how you have things working at the moment."

She went on to explain how the system was set up and how much of a hassle it was for her and the secretary. She would send out the fines and then have to hound students to get them paid. Some would bring her the money and others would turn it in at the office. Having students turn money in at two locations caused a lot of confusion. Some students would falsely relate to the Librarian that they had paid their fine in the office, and then conversely tell the secretary in the office that they had given their money to the Librarian, when in fact neither was true. Parents would call upset that their son or daughter owed .30 cents and therefore could not check out a book in the library. When they called and got upset at the librarian she would in turn get upset at them and then the call would come to the principal or me. Overall, the system was just not working.

"So what should I do? What do you want me to do?" Judy the librarian asked.

I replied with a few questions of my own. "Honestly, I don't know, how do other school do it? How do you think it should work?"

"You know?" she said, "They don't even give fines at Box Elder Middle."

The discussion continued and eventually we resolved that the fines were not necessary. They caused more problems than they were worth, literally. Few students ever

brought in the money for the fines, and all the librarian really wanted was simply to get the books back. It took some adjusting and a little getting used to but we came up with a process that did without the fines but still got the books back. It basically involved sending home several notices and then I called in those students who still had not brought back their books. We got the books back quicker; fewer students were kept from checking out books, and the hostile phone calls and arguments decreased. It also solved the confrontations in the office trying to balance the records.

The librarian is another forgotten member of each schools staff but her influence not only affects students, but parents, and teachers as well. Working with her and supporting her program in turn helped both faculty and students at the school.

Mrs. Simms

It was early in the morning when Mrs. Simms knocked at my door.

"Jerry, you got a minute, I want to talk to you about Tom. I understand Mr. Ogden sent him out of class yesterday so he's on level one."

"That's right; his pants were sagging way down again when he came into class so Mr. Ogden told him to get some twine to tie them up with, but you know Tom, within minutes the pants were sagging again so he sent him to the PRIDE room. He ended up getting defiant with the teacher so he worked his way to level one."

Tom was a difficult student. He was the only sixth-grade student in PRIDE but we just did not seem to have a choice the way his behavior was so out of control. He had Mrs. Simms for math and social studies, and Mr. Ogden for reading and language arts.

All 6th grade students were in what we called a core block and spent four of their six classes with two teachers that worked together to teach the core topics. Tom however clashed quite often with Mr. Ogden and was repeatedly sent to the PRIDE room.

PRIDE, the "school within a school" program we used at our school, in theory was a great idea, but in practice was not at all effective. Students received a score or points in each class that entitled them to privileges, or as was the case here, took away privileges. It was a level system, and when a student was sent out of class or was misbehaving they lost points that put them on a lower level. By getting sent out of class and then being belligerent and defiant Tom was now on level one that meant he would be contained all day in the PRIDE class with no privileges. In theory, the PRIDE teacher would work with him all day in the room. They would cover all of the various subjects ensuring that Tom would not get behind. The purpose was to remove the privilege of being with other students without affecting his academic performance. These were students who had been in ISS so often they needed another option and PRIDE was intended to be a step better than spending the day in ISS. It would take away their social time while providing instruction throughout the day.

"I saw the sagging pants and probably should have said something, but Tom has been working so well the past week and is getting work in so I didn't push the issue" Mrs. Simms stated. "I'm afraid that if he spends the day in PRIDE he will just get further behind. They just do not receive the instruction they need and I will never be able to get him caught back up. Is there some way he can come to my class instead of going into PRIDE?" Mrs. Simms concluded.

Now I had a dilemma. One teacher wants him out and the other wants him in, now what do I do? Both classroom teachers want my support as well as the PRIDE teacher, and like it or not this will set a precedent. I had several concerns, the first being that Tom feeds off attention. Going to Mrs. Simms' would give him that attention. I can imagine Tom bragging to the other kids in the PRIDE program saying, "Big deal, so what if I'm on level one I still got to go to class." I cannot send him to class but the teacher is right, he will fall further behind. With the number of other students in PRIDE there is just no way the teacher can give each student the instruction they need. This was the major flaw with the program and I did not have a solution. Tom needed isolation and instruction and there was only one way to do it.

"What if Tom comes in here and works with me during math, will that work for you?" I said. I was a math teacher. I could teach the subject and Tom would still be isolated, and I knew he would not be bragging about spending the hour in my office.

"I think that will work." she said. "I'll get the assignment down to you third hour during my prep."

I picked Tom up that day from the PRIDE room and brought him down to my office. I explained that he was there to receive my help with math. I do not think he expected to receive help when I brought him to my office. He was a little shocked really, but accepted the help and did very well. Tom was a bright student; he just had major behavior problems. It did not take more than half an hour to explain and complete the assignment, but the time was appreciated and I gained some ground with Tom that day.

Often we are faced with situations in which no matter what you do, it seems the

result will not be favorable. No matter what, someone will be upset with your decision. That's how I felt when the conversation started that morning, but instead this simple decision made a world of difference. It would have been easy to give in to Mrs. Simms and let Tom go to class. It would have been just as easy to tell her it was not possible and support Mr. Ogden and the PRIDE teacher. Those were the obvious solutions. After all, I had work to do and it was piling up as we spoke. Why I chose to work with Tom, I'm not sure. Most likely I just missed teaching that day and was tired of fighting the fires and needed a change. I gained a lot of ground that day with several great teachers. Both classroom teachers felt I was supporting them as well as the PRIDE teacher. The one-on-one time with Tom was quite valuable. His behavior and effort was great and it carried throughout the rest of the day. He was therefore on a higher level in the program the following day and was able to attend class as normal. The choice to have Tom come to work with me that day was the best decision I could have made, and it was such a simple choice. Sure the paperwork piled up a little, but I realized the paperwork would still be there later. It never goes away, nor does it ever really make a difference when you have it done. That half an hour spent with Tom made a difference. It influenced two teachers, and provided support for Tom. I learned to watch for those small opportunities to really make a difference.

"Zip Ties"

Tom was not the only student who had to walk down the hall with one hand on his waste to hold his pants up that year. Styles come and go I suppose, and the latest

"thing" was to let your pants sag down below your waist, and often even further. Outside of making it nearly impossible to walk normal down the hall, this little quirk aggravated teachers more than any other dress code item. "I'm tired of seeing his underwear all the time," they would say. "His pants were down below his cheeks, and that was just more than I needed to see," they would write on the pink slip they sent to the office. "He refuses to pull up his pants" they would write and give him a slip for defiance. What teachers were really saying was that they were frustrated because they had told the student to pull his pants up a hundred times and it was embarrassing to the teacher and other students to be seeing the his boxers. It was not just one teacher, it was everyone. The problem would come up in faculty meeting and teachers would swap stories of how far down they were and how many times they had made them tighten belts and pull them up. They had had it and I could not blame them because I was just as frustrated, but putting students in ISS or taking them out of class simply for not pulling up their pants was not the answer either. The problem could not be ignored, and it was consuming more and more of my time each day. As teacher frustration increased, more students would be sent down; more parents called, and still no change.

One day my ISS teacher brought a roll of old bailing twine from the farm and we started sending student to her. She would tie two belt loops together with the twine, which seemed to help a little. It was a quick consequence, and the students were not being taken out of class, but it lasted only for a little while until the student either untied or cut the twine. When I found myself asking the faculty to be careful who they loaned scissors to because they could be using them to cut someone's twine I again realized the

plan was not working.

Once again, I could not believe something so trivial could cause so much trouble. I even had parents complaining about coming to pick up their son or daughter and being appalled to see other students walking around with their pants sagging down below their bottoms. Calling parents, the obvious solution, was not working either. Parents would ensure sure their student wore a belt and had their pants pulled up properly. Parents were quite supportive and made sure the student was dressed properly when they got on the bus. Once on the bus however, the belt was easily loosened and the pants went down the minute they arrived at school. Students caught and sent to the office for twine could undo the twine nearly as fast as we could tie it on. The red twine was beginning to become a symbol of accomplishment, a "red badge of courage" you might say, and I knew taking students out of class to do ISS time for this dress code problem was not the solution.

Then one day as I was talking to my mentor, he mentioned "zip ties." If you are unfamiliar with what a "zip tie" is let me explain. They are plastic straps that synch up but do not come undone. They only go one direction. Usually they are used to hold a group of wires or a bunch of items together. For us they were the answer. We bought a large number of heavy duty "zip ties" and distributed them to multiple people. They were easy, fast, almost unnoticeable, and they could only be taken off with a knife or pair of pliers. Once on, the student generally had to wear them until they got home. If a teacher was having a problem with sagging pants I gave them a few "zip ties" and they took care of the problem in class. The student could not take it off so the problem of defiance decreased considerably, they did not miss any instruction, and in most cases returned

home with evidence of their misbehavior attached to their belt loops to be addressed by parents. The teachers liked it. They were empowered, and supported. The incidents decreased considerably and I could better use my time.

The solution was not a systemic overhaul of our school behavior program. We did not need greater consequences, or better training in working with students to understand how their actions influenced the punishments. It was not that teachers needed increased training on establishing rules and expectation in their classrooms. In addition, although the problem may have seemed insignificant to outside onlookers, it could not be ignored. It was distracting the students and teachers in the classroom and it was consuming my time as well as others. Overall, it was getting out of control. However, the solution was simple. All it took was another viewpoint and a little looking outside the normal discipline "box."

Hallway Talk

There were many occasions my first year to work with teachers, and staff both individually and collectively. My interactions were usually related to student behavior or discipline in some form. At first, I was wanted to visit every classroom, to watch and get a feel for each class and the teacher's personality. The first week I made it into three or four classes a day, but that soon ended. After that, if I was able to get into a class each week for 15 minutes, I felt good. I found that most of my interactions happened before school and during class break. I learned to be out in the halls during class breaks, not only to monitor the halls, but also to talk with teachers. Teachers were expected to step out

into the halls during breaks to help with crowd control. As I walked by, I would stop and talk. I asked how things were going; followed up on students; gathered ideas and feedback on events or new ideas we were trying. I never really found a good way to get into the classroom often enough to make much of a difference. During my training to be an administrator, the class had often discussed the importance of classroom observations and that being in the classroom was an essential part of improving instruction and being an instructional leader. We just never discussed how to make it happen. I forced myself to create the time to do observations. I knew they were important, as well as required by the district, but even then it was only a few times a trimester and only in a few classes. These observations were often interrupted by a call on the radio, "Mr. Jackman, there are two officers here, they say they received a 911 call from our pay phone, could you come and meet with them?" There was always something, and I did not feel I was able to spend enough time in classrooms to change teaching practices or introduce new ideas.

What I was able to do was to briefly talk with teachers during these break times and discuss individual students. I gave suggestions about motivation, and ways to improve participation. I could even share what other teachers had found to work with that student. It was not much time, but it was a time teachers could talk. They were not in front of the class and I could ask about students who had just left or who were on their way. It was timely, immediate information, unlike catching up with the teacher after school or even a day or two later. I could ask "How was John today, did he bring his homework?" I could comment, "Jenny had a hard time settling down this morning in math and may need some extra encouragement or supervision." "John and Lewis were

yelling at each other before school, did they say anything to you about why?" I did not make it out at every break, but I made it out to many. I was able to meet with or speak to each teacher every week. These short discussions about individual students were useful. A little supervision mixed with a few quick ideas and follow through helped to make a difference.

Faculty and Staff Summary

Most of my administrative training focused on improving instruction and student learning through classroom observation and staff development. I worked with the principal a little with staff development, but observations were few and far between. Where I was able to improve student learning was through improving discipline. I made a difference by working with that one student in each class that causes the teacher fits. So many of my responsibilities focused on individual student behavior. By working with the individual I made the most progress. By helping the student, I helped and supported the teacher. The converse worked just as well many times. By supporting and helping the teacher improve their classroom discipline and methods for working with students in their class, I in turn helped the individual students in the classroom.

That first year the little things made the difference. Ideas as simple as "zip ties" and short conversations with teachers during class breaks made the difference. Helping the Librarian talk to students with overdue books; waiving to the bus drivers each day as they pulled out of the parking lot; volunteering to help judge the reflections entries after school with the PTA; and even bringing in extra produce from my garden to share with

the faculty. All these little things helped me get to know the people I was working with. They helped develop a positive school community and improved the learning environment. They opened up opportunities for conversations about students and how to change behaviors. It was all the little things that generated the trust and willingness to listen to ideas and advice. That first year was full of all kinds of experiences and interactions both large and small, but overall the little things made the greatest difference in my effectiveness working with the staff, students, and the community.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Before further analysis is attempted, I believe it is important to return to the purpose and objective stated at the beginning. As previously stated the purposes and objectives of this study were to improve training for new assistant principals, and provide a better understanding of the position of middle-level assistant in order to help those in similar situations make sense of their position. The study was intended to answer the questions.

1. Where can we improve administrative training?
2. What support is needed?
3. How do we balance school wide discipline with leadership?
4. How can the transition from teacher to assistant principal be made easier?
5. Are current training practices working?

The reader was, however, forewarned that this was a personal narrative or autoethnography and, therefore, by definition was "a study of how humans make meaning of experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). The reader was informed that this was and still continues to be an open, evolving work of research, whose value will change with time and each individual reader.

This study has been a critical reflection and growing experience. My personal focus and expectations for this study have however evolved as the reflection has progressed. I began with the expectation that this study would show the need to separate the training of assistant principals apart from that of the principal. I expected to conclude

that the training of assistant principals needed to move away from the focus on becoming an instructional leader to that of becoming an expert on behavior and discipline. This was perhaps my personal hypothesis that I expected to validate although I knew the reflections process would in the end produce its own direction and purpose.

The direction has indeed changed throughout the reflective process. The process in its self has helped me to put ideas and theory in perspective. This experience has changed my understanding of the role of assistant principal. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that although my personal focus began with the need to change the training of assistant principals, it has ended with a different focus; that of support to at-risk youth, and the need of the assistant to become an educational leader.

This change in focus or understanding is not a complete change from the original purposes. The change does not in any way devalue the results of the study; in fact it proves to validate the choice for using personal narrative as the methodology of the study. The change in focus may have been subtle and part of the learning process but it was enough that I believe it should be acknowledged up front.

Myself as a Person and Administrator

I set out on this journey with a backpack full of ideals and confidence in what needed to be done for students to learn. I raced in; my mind full of ideas and with my experience as a classroom teacher, father, former student, and my newly completed certification to justify my philosophies. My views of student learning focused around the classroom. My job was to insure effective teaching and student learning were happening

in the classroom. Through wise hiring, and effective teacher evaluations I could create an atmosphere for learning that all students could take advantage of. I knew students were affected by family situations, socioeconomic status, poor choices and other external influences such as friends. Nevertheless, I believed that as an instructional leader, my role was to improve teaching methods, to evaluate testing data and identify areas in need of improvement on a school and individual basis. I expected to help the principal ensure the student body made continual improvements in learning. We needed a vision and mission that permeated the entire culture of the school. I expected this involved training teachers to use more effective teaching methods and strategies, provide needed technology, and when necessary help motivate and discipline students not wanting to try. I planned on being involved in setting schedules, budgets, and taking care of some of the managerial aspects of running a school in cooperation and under the guidance of the principal. As a person and individual, I was confident in working with all students and comfortable with my abilities as a teacher. I had what I thought was a good grasp of student behavior, but also recognized the possibility that my views and experiences might need expanding. I was ready to work hard, be tough, and support both teachers and students. I was ready to work with teachers and make decisions that improved student learning. I was perhaps idealistic, but preferred the term optimistic. I felt "green" around the edges and recognized I was an outsider to administration just starting to look in expecting to see the picture painted by the certification program.

As with all experiences in life, becoming an assistant principal, or more precisely this reflection, has left me a different person. As I look in upon administration through

the eyes of experience, the picture painted by the certification process has faded into many new and unexpected scenes. What was painted to be a single picture has turned out to be a collage of paintings. As I lived and reflected, my "self"; my own pictures of life painted by past experience, began to chip away leaving blank spots and questions to my view through the biased lens through which I saw my reality.

Administration is an umbrella statement really encompassing many varying and important roles. These roles although all lumped together are different and require a different view and focus. The role requires unique discussions and explanations for training to be effective. However, with each position I have observed that falls under this umbrella, being an effective teacher alone is not adequate preparation for administration. It is an important step, but further training is required. Teaching provides only one view and perspective, limited by the classroom boundaries. Although I did not realize it at the time, my reflections have shown just how sheltered from the students environment I really was as a classroom teacher. The troubled students often skipped class or missed class due to truancy, suspension, or other reasons and I seldom sought them out. As a teacher, I did not go looking for these students. When they acted out I did not seek to understand, my time was limited and they were disrupting others so they were sent out, sacrificed for the good of the whole. I never met the parents, knew little about the home life, and focused on teaching those who played the game well. I know now that many of these students never even made it to my class. They dropped out for numerous reasons, pregnancy, drug addiction, simple lack of hope, or even incarceration. It was not that I did not care; I did, or at least wanted to. It was simply the classroom environment and

pressure to continue on with the vital curriculum. As an administrator, I changed because my view changed. I saw students outside of class, outside of test scores and missing assignments. I talked to parents, and realized how many students had missing parents or substitute parents. I saw their environment and began to understand their situation that had never been opened up to my eyes as a teacher. I saw them in all of their classes, in the hall, at lunch, and after school. As a person, and administrator this journey has helped me understand these students who are often invisible or undesirable to the teacher. This experience has pointed out personal faults and mistakes I made as a teacher and novas administrator that I can correct, and avoid in the future. I also see through privileged eyes newly opened, the faults and problems with discipline systems that are in need of reform. I have less confidence perhaps seeing my own numerous mistakes, but my determination and resolve to make a difference to this unique group of at-risk students is greater.

The Role of the Assistant

As I took the position, throughout the summer and even into the first weeks of the assignment, my understanding of the role of the assistant principal was similar to those who asked, “Why would anyone want to be an assistant principal?” I was the enforcer when it came to discipline or attendance, the instructional leader when asked about curriculum, and the new guy when asked questions I could not answer. Honestly, I had no idea what the role of the assistant was outside of being the guy who handled all of the discipline. When a student disrupted a class, they were sent to the assistant principal. When they got in a fight, were late to school too often, skipped out on a class, they all

went to the assistant principal. He handled the discipline.

I had expectations born out of the discussions and classes in the certification program. In essence, I expected it to be very congruent to the principal position, simply an assistant as the name implied. As evident throughout this narrative, my expectations were given a sound thrashing. The assistant principal is perhaps the enforcer to the average student running through the halls. He is ultimately the person responsible of all aspects of discipline earning many titles associated with enforcing rules and policies. He is also a vital educational leader, not necessarily in designing curriculum although he may be involved with these vital tasks, but usually in cooperation with the principal.

Where I, as the assistant, provided critical leadership necessary to student success was through discipline. Classroom discipline, schoolwide discipline, and working one and one with students, parents, and community services to provide discipline and support to students, teachers and parents; this is what I was given to do. I was an educational leader, or I was supposed to be, by using discipline as the vehicle to bring about change to ultimately affect student learning and success. Discipline was the world I had stepped into. In that world I was the leader and had the ability to help students to succeed. At first, it was just an unpleasant task that somebody needed to do. One of those undesirable duties that the principal had passes on to the assistant to free up needed time to accomplish other issues. To some, I believe it is still viewed as such. A necessary evil to be passed on to someone else if possible so more important things can be done. Perhaps this explains the disregard for the topic in the certification program, in spite of the overwhelming acceptance backed by research showing discipline as the primary role and

duty of the assistant principal. I had the chance to impact the classroom through helping teachers improve their classroom discipline, by helping the students succeed who were not proficient at playing the school game. I could coordinate efforts between social services, juvenile justice, parents, guardians, and students to help the "problem" student to contribute in a positive way to the class. I had the chance to help teachers better understand these students and learn to provide them the support needed. I was the advocate for the student, even if he had been kicked out of class for the hundredth time, or if she was starting fights and making threats. My efforts could change the entire dynamics of a classroom by changing, or more appropriately stated, supporting the individual who needed my help to succeed.

I had the chance. I could have done many things. I tried to make a difference, and I became better as time passed. Looking back, I see the mistakes, and the triumphs. I have both regrets that I will have to live with, and pleasant memories that I am happy to share with friends. Looking back, I have a better understanding of the role of the assistant principal. Knowledge gained through trial and error that other assistant principals can use if they choose, to become an educational leader.

Recommendations for Training Assistant Principals

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into how to more effectively train new administrators, specifically new assistant principals. It is important to note up-front that there are differing viewpoints regarding the training of assistant principals and school leaders in general. The debate continues as to whether it is better to provide a broad,

general training for all school leaders, or to focus on particular positions such as the assistant principal and provide training specific to the position. With either case my experiences may now be shared and used to enrich the administrative certification program and increase understanding about needed support, school wide discipline, what the transition is like from teacher to administrator, and to point out perhaps a few things that are working and where reform is needed. How this is accomplished depends partially upon how the reader interprets and finds meaning in my narrative. The rest depends on my experience and understanding of what I gained in my training to be an administrator, and what I lacked.

First, I must address what my experiences taught me about the certification process I was involved in. The administrative program I completed focused on becoming an educational leader. It addressed the importance of providing support and mentoring for new teachers. I was assigned a mentor as a new administrator and experienced the value of having a mentor. My experience with new teachers focused on helping them develop effective discipline models, working with nontraditional students and keeping their class under control.

The certification program stressed the importance of administrators leaving the office and not to let management issues take precedence over leadership. My experiences validated the importance of being out in the halls and classrooms.

This certification program focused on sharing leadership with teachers and staff. Developing learning communities or groups that focus on improvement and accomplishing school wide goals. It stressed the importance of a common vision and

mission. I experienced how impossible it is to do everything alone. I now have a greater understanding of the importance of sharing leadership to accomplish a common goal. My experience has emphasized the importance of leadership and how it is critical to the success of every school.

My training was rich with important, valuable and necessary knowledge. The training I received was valuable and important to me personally. I do not wish to depict my experience in the certification process as negative or to lead anyone to believe I did not value the knowledge I gained. This study has simply focused on highlighting areas in need of improvement in regard to the position of the assistant principal. Currently most administrative programs focus on preparing new principals. This study identifies ways certification programs may be improved to better serve the assistant principal.

Based on the results of my study, I conclude that the administrative supervisory program needs to continue its focus on leadership, but tie it in with school wide discipline. New administrators need to learn how to help teachers develop effective classroom management systems. They need experience in organizing reform linked to student behavior. The role of the assistant principal is centered on whole school and classroom discipline. Information on how to track behavioral data, what trends to watch for, and how behavior effects instruction and learning should be one of the primary focuses of administrative programs. In essence, the administrative program needs to place a much greater focus on understanding student behavior and developing an understanding of discipline programs and methodology. With the majority of new administrators stepping into an assistant position there is a great need for focusing on discipline and

student behavior in the certification program.

New administrators need training on working with parents, counseling with them on working with their troubled teens, and in the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. Assistant principals need to be a resource for parents so parents can take part and accept the role of counselor, mentor, and disciplinarian. New assistants need training on how to deal with outside agencies such as juvenile justice, the division of child and family services, the courts, and other social workers.

New assistant principals need training on issues such as attendance, truancy, dress code, cyber bullying, pornography, and most of all working with students of every kind. The most critical issue an assistant principal is faced with, and perhaps the one most overlooked is learning how to work with various types of at risk students.

This study identified four types of at risk student that a new assistant principal will need to be trained to work with. Each identifying different areas of study that needs to be included in the certification process.

My experience with Casey showed the need for providing student support. New assistants need to be trained on how to provide remediation and extra help programs for students without home support. How to give hope and a way to succeed before the student gives up all together.

My experiences with Greg brought out the extreme need for training in dealing with volatile students. It showed the importance of learning to work with confrontational students. New administrators should all be trained on the stages of anger and how to help a student or parent to calm down. Greg also brought out the need to understand what

other agencies are available to help and how the juvenile courts can be included and often dovetailed into our efforts.

Both Wes and Kate stressed the need for training in understanding dysfunctional homes. Reflecting on these two students identified the need to better understand Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Administrators need to understand the effects of the home environment and how to work with students in "survival mode." The certification program needs to expose new administrators to these situations so they can be prepared to provide support to students with limited academic background knowledge. We need to understand how to support students who may not see education as even one of their top ten needs for survival.

The account of Jill and even the brief mention of Ron describe the necessity of including training on mental illness into the certification program. Metal illnesses, learning disabilities, and other forms of psychological disorders are becoming more and more prevalent in society as well as in public education. New assistant principals need a better understanding of treatments, medications, and possible behaviors to watch for that are associated with these various disorders.

Altogether, my experiences that first year have shown me that in the areas of discipline and behavior, I was the least prepared. The first and strongest recommendation of this study is to devote more attention and training to the understanding of behavior and discipline in the certification program. The primary responsibility of the assistant principal is discipline. The majority of new administrators entering the field enter as assistant principals. Therefore, a greater effort and focus must be made to prepare new

assistant principals for this critical responsibility. The primary finding of this study is that certification programs for assistant principals need to include a greater focus on discipline and behavior.

The next major finding was much more subtle. The importance of becoming an instructional leader is just as important to an assistant principal as it is for a principal. How it is accomplished, however, is different for an assistant principal. An assistant works primarily with discipline as previously stated. This focus on discipline is of great importance to student learning. By working with students in trouble, or those in danger of being in serious trouble, the assistant principal is able to help them understand their actions and how their actions influence their learning. The assistant often works with individual students to improve the situation of a whole class, and in some cases, the situation of the school. A good example of this was in working with Greg. His actions affected himself, students around him, and multiple classrooms and teachers. His explosiveness and violent behavior effected every student or teacher he came in contact with meaning he influenced the whole school. This is a little backwards from working with whole school goals, to influence classroom instruction, and thereby influence individual student learning. As the assistant I worked with the staff and whole school goals as well but often found myself working with individual students; much more often than did the principal. My focus was different as the assistant principal. All administrators will work with staff, but while the assistant's role is directed toward discipline and behavior, the principal's focus is more on curriculum. The assistant principal therefore interacts with a different group of teachers, such as I did with the ISS

teachers or the PRIDE teacher. My interaction with the other teachers was also different then was the principals. I talked to them about students acting out in class, students not getting assignments handed in, or those students who were constantly absent. My conversations were around a completely different aspect of the school then were the principals. I talked with them about removing students from their class or in the case of Mrs. Simms ensuring the student attended her class. This was different then meeting with teachers about curriculum, professional development goals, changing their teaching to include cooperative groups as did the principal. I was still an instructional leader but with a different focus or set of goals. The discussions and examples during the certification program were focused however, on the principal's role. The need to be an instructional leader was still very important but it took some time before I realized how it really fit into my position simply because it had never been discussed from the view point of the assistant principal or regarding discipline. My recommendation based on this study, is therefore, not to change the content or focus of the certification program in regard to becoming an instructional or educational leader. My recommendation is to change the presentation of the content to include situations, examples and perhaps role plays from the viewpoint of the assistant principal. The assistant principal has a tremendous opportunity to effect student learning and success, but how this is done through behavior and discipline is seldom discussed.

The final recommendation for this study is perhaps only a reminder to those beginning their journey as a new administrator. My experience that first year brought to light the simple fact that the little things really do make a great impact. There is no

possible way to prepare new administrators for every situation, or to tell them everything they need to know. I discovered many little things that worked well for me in many situations. I have related a few of them in my account that they may be of value to others faced with similar situations. Little ideas like calling home first, or using “Zip Ties” became the means to bring about important change.

The administrative certification program is vital to new administrators. This study indicates a need to improve the program by increasing the amount of training to deal with different students and at-risk youth; continuing to train new administrators to become educational leaders but from the viewpoint of the assistant and discipline; and in helping encourage new administrators to look “outside the box” for the small and simple things that may make the most difference.

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VITA

GERALD R. JACKMAN

CAREER OBJECTIVE

My goal as an educator and leader is to further the use of best practices and improve the education of students. I intend to continue as an administrator and educational leader, looking for ways to help teachers and students increase their desire and ability to learn. My desire is to pass my knowledge and expertise along to others in the field of education.

EDUCATION

BS in Physics / Teaching, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah (6/1996) GPA: 3.17 (4.0=A).

MS in Buisness Administration, University of Phoenix, Ogden, Utah. (8/2001) GPA: 3.80 (4.0=A).

EdD in Curriculum and Instruction, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (expected 12/2009). Grad GPA: 3.90. Emphasis in Curriculum & Instruction – Educational Leadership. Dissertation research conducted under direction of Utah State University 2003-2008.

EXPERIENCE

Teacher – Bear River Middle School (Garland, Utah) (1996-2001)
Teacher – Bear River High School (2001-2004)
Assistant Principal – Adele C. Young Intermediate School, Brigham City, Utah (2004-2007)
Principal – Fielding Elementary School, Fielding, Utah (2007-present)

PRESENTATIONS

Jackman, G. R. (2009). *Who Knew? An Autoethnography of a First Year Assistant Principal.* Paper and research presented to the Box Elder School District Assistant Principals Training, Brigham City, UT.