EDAD 632

Article Analysis #1

Jason Harmon

 I choose to read two articles from Improving Leadership for Learning. I read “A Better Pipeline to the Principalship” (Mezzacappa, 2008) and “Out of the Office and Into the Classroom” (Holland, 2008). The overarching theme of these articles is to show how critical it is to have principals that focus on improving student achievement, and that are highly trained and getting into the classrooms to guide teachers to successful teaching. It became apparent to me while I read these articles that as an administrator it would be so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day issues of a school and loose focus of what is most important. Penny Cecil attests to this, as a first year principal, school management tasks dominated her agenda. “School bus problems, testing schedules, personnel changes, discipline issues, building maintenance, phone calls from parents, and endless stacks of paperwork consumed her 12-hour days (Holland, p.12)

 In the article “A Better Pipeline to the Principalship”, Mezzacappa describes a new superintendent from Atlanta who saw a huge problem with administrators in her district that didn’t understand how to improve teaching and learning in their schools (Mezzacappa, p.7). Even though there were plenty of teachers with principal certificates to fill in for retiring principals and administrators, they just needed help understanding the importance focusing on student achievement. Luckily, she took action, wrote, and received a grant from the Wallace Foundation for $5 million to create programs to train and prepare school leaders.

 The programs were created and they searched for educators who were “willing to take a hard look at themselves, happy to embrace change, and urgent about improving student achievement (Mezzacappa). They would interview possible participants, and those admitted to the program were not only trained, but would become part of a continued mentorship program that helped them to understand themselves, and what it takes to become a successful educational administrator. The program has been a big success, and is a model of what can be achieved with administrators and professional educators through collaboration and extended training.

 In the article “Out of the Office and into the Classroom”, Holland takes a look at a program called SAM (School Administration Manager). This program is based on a study done in Kentucky, and has three components. First, someone is hired to take on many of the duties of administrators that deal with school operation. Second, a principal’s time is accounted for to assure he emphasizes a great deal of his time on instruction and learning. Lastly, a principal is coached to become a “more effective and reflective leader” (Holland, p. 13). The article is full of success stories that have come as a result of this program. The article states that as principals learn to deepen their conversations with teachers, their role shifts from an evaluative role, to a collegial and supportive role (Holland, p.14)

 As I have reflected on these articles, I can see how important these role changes can be for administrators. As teachers understand the connections between their proficiency in creating the right classroom environment, and student achievement and learning, they will want to improve. This improvement is critical, but will require adept and astute administrators that care, take the time, and understand how to focus on student achievement and learning. We are on the right track. Thanks to funding sources such as the Wallace Foundation, projects are being piloted, and change is happening. But still “There are children being failed by our schools in part because of the poor preparation of school leaders (Norton, 2002).”

 In my limited experience the classroom visits and observations from my administrators (Principal and Superintendent) haven’t helped me very much. I rarely get specific feedback, and wish they were more of a guide to me as a teacher. I know I have a lot to improve, and want that guidance from someone with experience. My school also lacks a mentor program, which could be really beneficial for beginning teacher such as myself. Although I observed many classrooms while getting my degree in Art Education, I understand more now, and feel like I need to spend more time observing great teachers. I know that all of these experiences will help me to be more helpful to others and purposeful in my own approach as I look into the future.

Holland, H. (2008). “Out of the Office and into the Classroom: An initiative to help principals focus on instruction.” *Journalistic Accounts: Improving Leadership for Learning: Stories from the field. 6-11.*

Mezzecappa, D. (2008). “A Better Pipeline to the Principalship: Atlanta builds education leaders from within.” *Journalistic Accounts: Improving Leadership for Learning: Stories from the field. 12-16.*

Norton, J. (2002). *Universities in the Lead: Redesigning Leadership Preparation for Student Achievement.* SREB Leadership Initiative, Atlanta, GA.