
Practice and Theory: Ten Lessons that I Have Learned about Being a Vice Principal

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Abstract

The vice principal has the potential to significantly influence everyone in the school building. The expertise required to effectively carry out the duties of the role include interpersonal skills, leadership skills, reflective practice, and knowledge of the current research in the field of education. The position of vice principal requires a skillful blend of practice and theory to successfully maximize the role's impact on students and staff. Foremost among the necessary skills is interpersonal relationships, as the majority of the vice principal's activities involve interactions with students, staff, parents, support staff, and members of the community. While often viewed as a preparatory stage prior to becoming a principal, the vice principal position has a significant impact on the lives of many people. It is therefore important that the vice principal build a repertoire of skills and knowledge in order to maximize the positive impact that the vice principal exerts. To that end, this paper describes 10 lessons the author learned as a vice principal in Ontario, Canada, and the theory underpinning those lessons that also had to be learned in order to make the role as effective as possible. This blending of theory and practice is imperative for the vice principal's role to be as effective as possible for students and educational institutions. This paper provides a practitioner's viewpoint of how theory supports practice. While functioning in the role, the author had the opportunity to impact the lives of a large number of students and staff. In addition, the author learned a great deal about current research and how it applies to the role of vice principal. By typifying the role of lifelong learner, a vice principal can maximize their impact while also serving as a role model for aspiring school administrators.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Administration, Interpersonal Skills, Invitational Theory, Reflective Practice, Theory into Practice

1. Introduction

The vice principal plays a vital role in the functioning of a school. The vice principal has the opportunity to influence many people in the school: impacting students through direct interactions; impacting staff and support personnel; impacting students indirectly through one's influence with staff; impacting the school community through liaising with parents and the broader community. To effectively function in the role of vice principal requires a broad array of skills and expertise, in areas such as interpersonal skills, reflective practice, knowledge of teaching and learning, leadership skills, and knowledge of current research in education. By skillfully blending knowledge with experience, the vice principal can positively influence the lives of everyone in the school building and beyond.

I was a vice principal for six and a half years in two large secondary schools in a large urban school district in Ontario, Canada. This article describes what I learned during my tenure. In addition, the article identifies a body of research that informs the vice principal's position. I have integrated pertinent studies into this article and demonstrated how they impacted my behaviour as a vice principal. Thus, this paper provides a practitioner's perspective on how theory supports the vice principal's practice.

Most new vice principals come to the role with significant successful teaching experience but possibly insufficient leadership experience, and usually little or no experience and knowledge in key areas such as interpersonal theory or invitational theory. To become a vice principal in Ontario, one must have at least five years of teaching experience, a Master's degree, and have successfully completed Parts 1 and 2 of the Principal's Qualifications Program (PQP) under the auspices of the Ontario College of Teachers. The major focus of the PQP is concerned with the day to day activities of running a school and deals very little with significant facets of the principalship, such as creating a vision, managing staff, or obtaining buy-in. There is a myriad of additional skills that a vice principal needs to develop in order to function effectively in the role, especially in the area of interpersonal relationships. The skillful blending of experience and research is necessary to maximize the impact of the vice principal's role.

2. Review of Relevant Theory

There are many areas of research and theory that are relevant to the role of vice principal. Four areas that I have found particularly applicable are invitational theory, interpersonal theory, reflective practice, and leadership theory. All these theories involve interactions with people to at least some degree.

2.1. *Invitational Theory and First Impressions*

Invitational theory (Purkey & Novak 1996) postulates that a person issues invitations to others, based on their words and actions. This theory of practice identifies four levels of invitation: intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, and intentionally inviting. Most vice principals' interactions should fall within the intentionally inviting range, as do most interactions between teachers and students. In most cases the goal is to work collaboratively to resolve a problem or initiate productive action. This means that vice principals need to be aware of the impact their words and behaviours have on others. The invitation may be verbal but can also be conveyed through tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and gestures. The invitation also may be influenced by the setting, such as the vice principal's office, the position of desks and furniture, and whether the ambiance is inviting or disinviting.

First impressions have a major impact. Research by Ambady, Hallahan, and Rosenthal (1995) and by DeWitt (2015) confirms that people make decisions about a new acquaintance within the first ten seconds of an encounter. Vice principals thus need to be aware that those first encounters should be intentionally inviting. This is also the case when disciplining students. Students make decisions that result in consequences, both positive and negative; in the latter case, the vice principal's role is to consequence the behaviour, not the person. Projecting an intentionally inviting stance reduces confrontations and encourages productive dialogue.

The entire school needs to project a positive, inviting atmosphere for everyone in the community. Thus, teachers need to be intentionally inviting to students; administration and school staff need to be intentionally inviting to students, parents, and the community. The school needs to be seen as a positive, inviting part of the community, a place where good things happen for everyone who comes in contact with the school and its inhabitants.

2.2. *Interpersonal Theory*

Much of my time as a vice principal was spent dealing with people: students, teachers, parents, and support staff. Thus, interpersonal and communication skills were particularly important. Research on interpersonal styles was especially important, since so much of the job involved interactions with others. Klein, DeRouin, and Salas's (2006) non-hierarchical taxonomy of interpersonal skills, based on an extensive research review, encompasses two major dimensions: communication skills and relationship-building skills (Figure 1). Klein et al. provide detailed descriptions of each skill, outline related skills, and cite extensive research supporting the inclusion of each skill in their taxonomy. It would be beneficial for vice principals and principals to investigate the details of this taxonomy, given the key role that interpersonal skills play in being successful school administrators. As a vice principal, communication skills that I found most relevant were active listening, oral communication, and nonverbal communication. Many relationship-building skills were particularly important: conflict resolution and negotiation; cooperation and coordination; service orientation; trust-building; and intercultural sensitivity.

Research led by Pennings (Pennings & Hollenstein 2020; Pennings et al., 2018) interpersonal theory identifies two dimensions to every interaction, called *agency* and *communion*. Agency relates to the degree of power and control in the interaction, whereas communion is the degree of friendliness and affiliation (Pennings & Hollenstein 2020; Pennings et al. 2018). Combinations of these two dimensions result in eight interpersonal styles, shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 was developed to describe teacher–student interactions and also can be used to predict the outcomes of any interpersonal interaction. In Figure 2, the initiator’s behaviour is shown above the responder’s predicted behaviour, which is set in brackets. For example, if the vice principal exhibits *understanding* behaviour, they should expect the respondent to exhibit *collaborative* behaviour. Many vice principal interactions fall into the upper two quadrants. The upper left quadrant interactions (Imposing-Critical and Confrontational-Confrontational) are often immediate action interpersonal styles; for example, when a student misbehaves, immediate action by the vice principal is necessary. However, this immediate action, which typically involves imposing some consequence for the misbehaviour, does not address longer term issues. These longer term issues need to be dealt with in order to redirect behaviour and prevent reoccurrence of the misbehaviour. When addressing these longer term issues, interpersonal styles in the upper right quadrant (Directing-Proactive and Helpful-Supportive) along with Understanding-Collaborative from the lower right quadrant, are the most beneficial interpersonal styles.

An additional dynamic in play for most of these interactions is a power disparity; in interactions between the vice principal and a student, this power discrepancy is apparent. However, power disparities impact interactions between the vice principal and teachers; vice principal and parents; vice principal and school staff. A reverse power discrepancy exists in interactions between the vice principal and the principal or other board employees such as superintendents. The vice principal needs to be aware of these power discrepancies during interpersonal interactions and take them into account when determining a course of action.

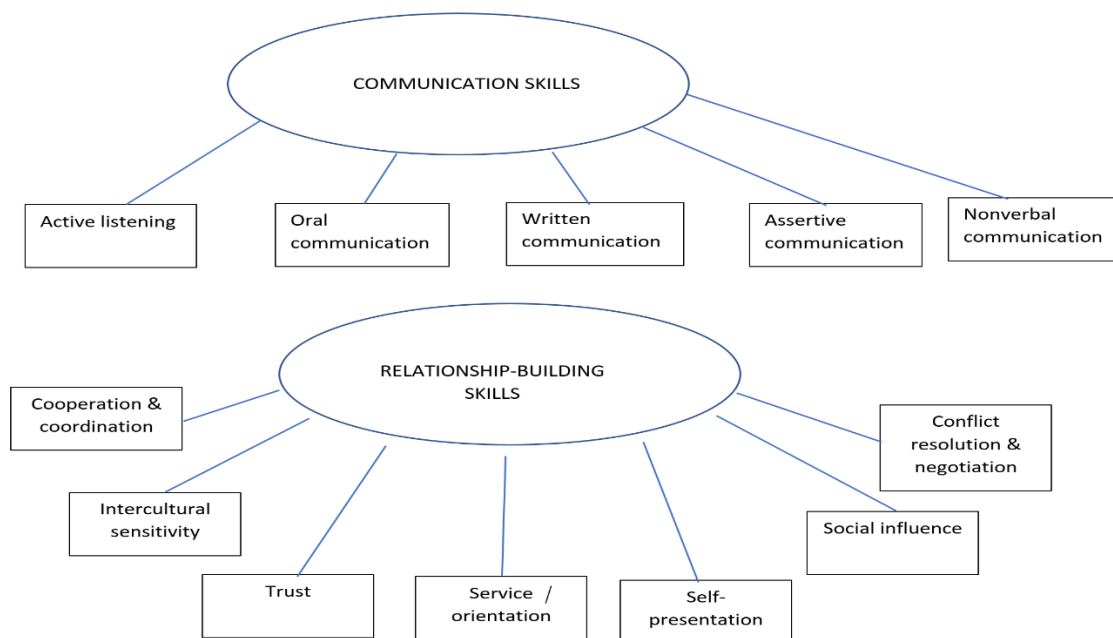
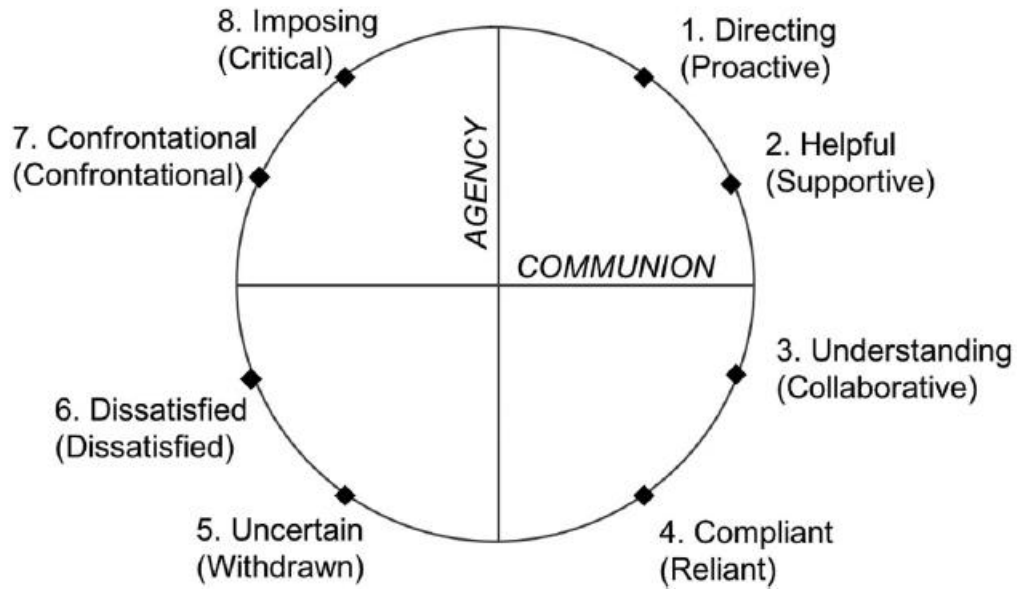


Figure 1. Interpersonal skills taxonomy.
Based on Klein et al. (2006), Table 3.1, pp. 85-87.



**Figure 2. Interpersonal styles (responder style in brackets).
From Pennings & Hollenstein (2020). Reproduced with permission.**

A vice principal could be expected to exhibit a variety of interpersonal styles, depending on the situation. By knowing the expected response to each behaviour, the vice principal may influence buy-in, reduce confrontations, and have more productive interactions with students, parents, and staff. Research on interpersonal theory provides valuable information for any vice principal.

2.3. Reflective Practice

Schön’s (1983) seminal work on reflective practice identified two dimensions of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is the moment-to-moment decisions, such as those a teacher makes to adapt a lesson to student responses. In the case of the vice principal, reflection-in-action comprises decisions that vice principals make as they interact with a student, parent, teacher, or other stakeholder to further the goal of the interaction. Reflection-on-action, in turn, is the after-the-fact reflection on an event that allows for consideration of alternatives, identifies learning, and fosters potential future actions. The lessons in this paper frequently present examples of reflection-on-action involving mistakes and successes alike.

Edwards (2017) proposed two additional dimensions of reflection: reflection-before-action and reflection-beyond-action. Reflection-before-action is an opportunity to integrate theory into practice, before the fact. For the vice principal, this represents an opportunity to consider how research can support the role, and provide research-affirmed alternatives for action, prior to an interaction or activity. Reflection-beyond-action allows for consolidation and integration of diverse interactions, and consideration of how these interactions may be congruent with existing theory. Many of this article’s anecdotes represent reflection-beyond-action, consolidating individual instances into categories.

2.4. Leadership Styles

The research literature identifies both leadership styles and leadership attributes, as well as the impact on staff of various leadership behaviours. Goleman (2000) identified six leadership styles based on his theory of emotional intelligence (Table 1). These leadership styles are recognized in education and other fields as well (e.g., Saxena et al., 2017).

Table 1. Goleman’s leadership styles

Leadership style	Brief descriptor
Visionary	Identifies a vision for the school and allows innovation and experimentation
Coaching	Develops long-term goals based on staff strengths and weaknesses
Affiliative	Promotes collegiality, harmony, and personal relationships
Democratic	Promotes collaboration and teamwork
Pacesetter	Focuses on learning new approaches to meet challenging goals
Commanding	Requires immediate compliance

Leaders typically will exhibit different leadership styles depending on the context and situation, but most prefer one style, based on their personality or training. For example, democratic leaders would be more comfortable with distributed leadership

strategies (Irvine, 2020), but leaders with other dominant styles could employ distributed leadership to meet their goals and support the school's vision.

Leadership behaviours have a major impact on staff motivation, morale, and work performance. Research has shown that staff highly value leaders who have strong communication skills, foster relationship-building, demonstrate enjoyment of education, and are knowledgeable (Stewart-Banks, Kuofie, & Hakim, 2015). It was also important for leaders to be accountable, and to foster staff recognition. Kouzes and Posner's (2013) *Leadership Practices Inventory* identified five important behaviours: (a) model the way, (b) inspire shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. Such behaviours can be learned, challenging the idea that leaders are 'born, not made.' These diverse leadership behaviours emphasize that administrators (i.e., the principal and vice principal) must function as a team.

Hodge, Aly, and Elmahdy (2020) identify two dominant leadership roles: transformational and transactional. Transformational leaders establish a vision, support the emotional well-being of staff, and focus on motivating and directing staff towards a shared goal; this is mainly the task of the principal. Transactional leaders are more concerned with managerial functions and the day-to-day functioning of the school; this is more the realm of the vice principal.

3. Lessons I Have Learned as a Vice Principal

When one begins their role as a vice principal, there is an abundance of trial and error learning. The key is to learn from experience, recognize what works and what does not work, and adjust one's behaviour appropriately. The ten lessons described below emphasize the key role that educational theory can play in maximizing the positive impact of the vice principal in a school setting. Because the role involves interacting with people much of the time, invitational theory and interpersonal theory are major aspects of educational theory that influence the vice principal's role in making the school experience a positive one for anyone who interacts with it.

3.1. Lesson 1: Own Your Mistakes and Learn from Them

None of us is perfect. We all make mistakes, sometimes trivial ones but sometimes significant ones. As a vice principal, many of my mistakes corresponded to interactions with students, teachers, or parents, and sometimes with my principal. This provided impetus for learning about interpersonal theory, in order to minimize these mistakes and prevent repetition of similar mistakes going forward. The skills identified from the Klein et al. (2006) taxonomy were particularly informative here, particularly active listening, nonverbal communication, and self-presentation.

Student discipline is a large part of the vice principal's role, and we often have to make decisions with imperfect or incomplete information. Here, conflict resolution and negotiation are skills that were particularly important. When a student was sent out of class, I had the student complete an information form that included headings like 'What happened,' 'What was the result,' 'What did the teacher do,' and 'What could you (the student) have done differently.' The form asked the student to reflect on their actions and consider alternatives, and also had sections for the teacher's comments and for me (as vice principal) to outline the actions I took to resolve the situation. Completing the form allowed students to reflect on their own actions, take ownership of the issue, and also gave the student time to de-escalate emotionally before discussing the issue with me. This also gave the vice principal time to assess the severity of the situation. I always gave a copy of the completed form to the teacher. By reflecting on mistakes, the goal was to minimize similar mistakes by the student, myself, and the teacher going forward.

3.2. Lesson 2: Celebrate Successes—Yours and Your School's—And Learn from Them

A school is part of a community, and community relations are extremely important. Being perceived as intentionally inviting and taking steps to demonstrate this stance to the community was vital to the school being seen as an important community member. The schools I which I was vice principal were large and very diverse. Such diversity gave the schools a very rich environment, which we celebrated by recognizing holidays such as Diwali and Eid, and by having annual multicultural days that featured flags of nations from which our students emigrated, cultural dances, foods, and dress. Parents were invited and often showed up in large numbers. This was an opportunity to mingle with parents and students and to develop relationships not associated with negative situations involving disciplinary matters. For the vice principal, the intercultural sensitivity dimension from the Klein et al., taxonomy was paramount.

The school was also successful academically, including on standardized assessments administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Our school was featured on the EQAO website for our successes in developing Grade 9 Applied Mathematics (non-academic stream) programs, culminating in above-average results on EQAO assessments. This was a chance to celebrate our students' success, as well as demonstrate to the community the professionalism and dedication of the teachers who worked hard to construct activities that led to the students' success. This is another example of intentionally inviting behaviour.

A highlight of each year was a 'recognition night,' which lauded not only academic achievements but also students who had contributed to our community through charitable works, participation in community events and sports, and other outstanding work. Parents and other community members were always invited. These nights were excellent examples of invitational theory at work. They were very successful and rewarding events, and when there were changes in school administration, I championed the continuation of these and similar events. Such special occasions were an additional way of intentionally making our school inviting for all.

As a vice principal, I also celebrated when I ‘reached’ students and modified their behaviour for the better. While every student is an individual, I mentally recorded these successes so that I might use similar strategies in the future. These successes also provided some affective satisfaction for me (celebrate the wins!). Here, the goal of reflection-on-action was to optimize successes by engaging in similar behaviours in the future.

Therefore—celebrate your successes, and learn from your failures. Einstein is said to have opined “Insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result.” However, in education, since we deal with individuals and every individual is different, Einstein’s remark should be rephrased to “Insanity is doing the same thing and expecting the same result.” No two people are identical and therefore a repertoire of approaches is necessary to optimize interactions.

3.3. Lesson 3: Identify What You Don’t Know and Address Your Shortcomings

This lesson highlights the need for reflection—reflection-on-action, reflection before action, and reflection after action. While the day to day activities for the vice principal also involve reflection-in-action, it is important for the vice principal to identify their shortcomings and take steps to address these shortcomings. In my own case, while I brought extensive teaching experience to the role, I quickly identified the need to investigate interpersonal theory to improve my interactions with others while in a new role.

Some of what a new vice principal does not know may involve ‘nuts and bolts’ issues like school timetabling and budget. The principal or district office will provide the knowledge one needs in these areas, so it is useful to seek them out. As mentioned, an area of knowledge growth for me was related to interpersonal dimensions. For example, one of the most difficult issues that I regularly dealt with involved girl-on-girl bullying. While rarely physical bullying, this often took the form of verbal abuse, social shunning, and social media ‘trolling.’ I learned (from my wife, a principal) to use the ‘What, so what, now what?’ heuristic: What happened? So what—How did it make you feel? How do you think it made the other person feel? Now what -- What can we do to address the problem? This pushed students to reflect on the impact of their actions, and often resulted in behaviour modifications. I learned to refer some of these situations to others on our staff who were trained in restorative justice techniques, and to rely on their proposed solutions. Often the solutions helped resolve the problem.

To inform my intentionally inviting stance I learned about the community in which my school was located, by attending community events and school council meetings, and by just driving around the community to identify landmarks, residential areas, as well as places like malls and stores close to the school. This driving around also allowed me to find great places to get lunch, like the samosa shop not far from the school. By my getting to know mall administrators, our school participated in a charity book fair; the mall donated space and advertising. Our students and their families contributed books to the event and our students participated as salespeople at the book fair, whose entire proceeds went to local charities.

3.4. Lesson 4: Be Organized, But Flexible

I started every day with a general plan for the day, much like the one shown in Table 2. It is always good to have a plan. However, as Prussian military commander Helmuth von Moltke (1880) once opined, ‘No plan survives first contact with the enemy.’ In the case of vice principals, we don’t deal with an enemy; rather, our motto should be ‘No plan survives the first bell of the day.’ Some interruptions can be anticipated—the Monday morning administration meeting, attending out-of-school meetings, doing in-class observations, scheduled appointments with parents—but many cannot, including: student discipline issues, a teacher becoming ill, a parent coming to the office without an appointment, the principal asking to meet with you, student injuries or illness, or student at-risk or criminal behaviour. I once told a colleague, ‘I don’t really need to plan my day; it just unfolds in front of me.’ While this is a slight exaggeration, it’s not far from the truth. Navigating a typical day required flexibility but also knowledge and skills in order to make informed decisions that were win-win and developed buy-in from the participants.

Table 2. Plan for a Typical Day as Vice Principal

Time span	Focus	Typical Activities
7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and student attendance • Supply teachers and on-calls • Teachers-in-charge (TICs) • Physical plant issues
9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues from yesterday • Attendance • Discipline • Celebrations
11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.	Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hall presence • Cafeteria presence • Interact with students and staff • Class drop-ins
1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Staff management • Meeting planning

3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Paperwork

- Paperwork
 - Follow-up
 - Issues to address tomorrow
-

3.5. Lesson 5: Give Credit to Your Mentors and Learn from Them

Some districts have mentorship programs, usually for principals. Much of the mentoring of vice principals is informal and often involves learning from the principal. Every principal had been a vice principal at some point in the past; they have gone through what you are experiencing right now. Therefore, new vice principals need to seek their advice, give credit when advice is followed, and also learn from other vice principals, some of whom have been in the position for a long time. In addition, vice principals need to seek out and use the advice of guidance counsellors, social workers, teachers, and other support staff who bring different perspectives and sometimes more knowledge about a student or a situation. Also, make use of resources at your district office and at other schools, where there may be people in the vice principal's network on whose advice the vice principal can rely. Mentoring has been shown to be a very useful professional development strategy (see, e.g., Ingleby 2014) and was for me a very rewarding experience.

In particular, by observing the leadership styles of principals and other vice principals with whom I worked, I was able to develop a flexible leadership style by taking strengths from various leadership styles and blending them with my own personal style. Among the leadership styles that I observed were commanding, coaching, pacesetter, and visionary. One visionary principal with whom I worked was very strong on developing a school vision, but relatively weak on implementing that vision; they were frustrated by lack of teacher buy-in, since the staff were not involved in developing the vision. Eventually the principal resorted to a commanding style, with less than optimal results. In another instance, the principal had an affiliative style, focusing on personal relationships and harmonious staff activities; however, the school was somewhat adrift, since there was no common vision or purpose. By blending these styles, and recognizing that a particular style was more appropriate in certain situations than others, I was able to develop a flexible personal style of leadership. I utilized distributed leadership in many situations with which I dealt.

3.6. Lesson 6: Be a Lifelong Learner

In addition to augmenting job-related knowledge and skills, I increased my knowledge of leadership techniques, like distributed leadership (Irvine, 2020) and transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Although I had a strong background in instructional strategies, I increased this knowledge. This research was initiated by a request from the mathematics department, whose teachers were dissatisfied with the instructional strategies that they typically employed. They felt that these strategies were not meeting the needs of our students, especially students enrolled in non-academic level courses. This led me to establish a whole-school book study, based on Robert Marzano's (2007) *The Art and Science of Teaching*. I convinced our superintendent to purchase a copy of the book for each staff member, as well as for every staff member at our feeder schools. Parts of several staff meetings and a full professional development (PD) day, led jointly with our feeder schools, built instructional strategy knowledge for everyone. A subgroup of staff, working on their own time, developed an instructional strategy handbook, which was reproduced and provided to everyone who participated in the joint PD day. This situation and my reaction to it illustrated the strength of the democratic leadership style, which was appropriate for the situation.

Another initiative that I spearheaded involved instructional words—such as *demonstrate*, *justify*, *define*—that are used in EQAO assessments. The Art department developed posters with definitions of each word, and I persuaded the EQAO to allow us to include its logo on each poster, which were placed in every classroom in our school and all classrooms in our feeder schools (sample, Figure 3). In this way, use of the instructional words was consistent across all the schools and all the classrooms. This reduced both student confusion as well as cognitive load on students during EQAO assessments (see Irvine, 2016).

The instructional words initiative illustrated both a coaching leadership style and an affiliative style. While the principal initiated the activity, by expressing the desire to improve our EQAO results, the resultant activities met that goal while also increasing collaboration with our feeder schools, as well as improving student success in non-EQAO related learning as well.

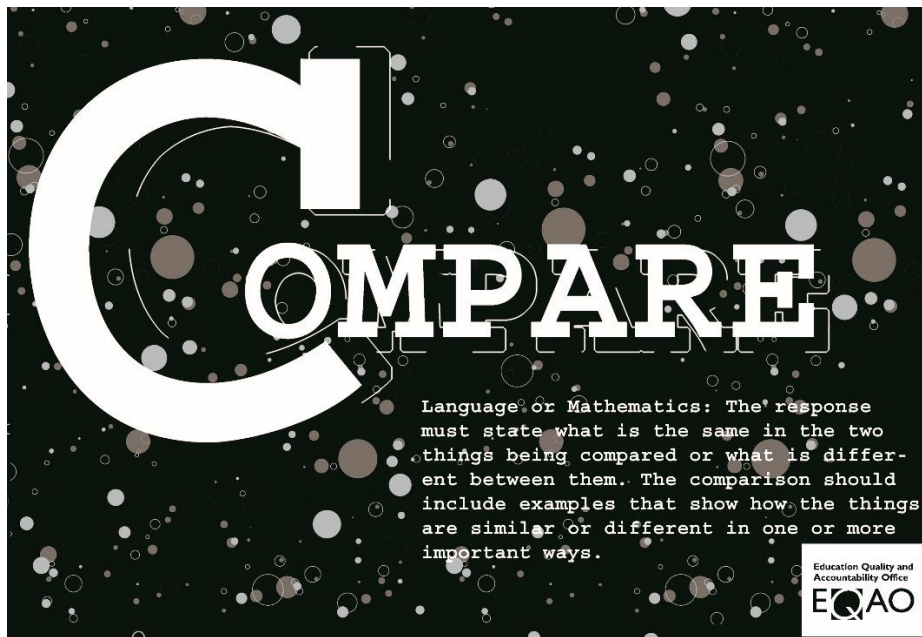


Figure 3. Sample Poster Created to Reduce Extraneous Cognitive Load for Students

3.7. Lesson 7: *The School Is There for the Students, So Your Time in the Building Is Not Your Own*

This lesson illustrated the need for the school and its administration to be intentionally inviting to the community and to the students who the school served. In one instance, I spearheaded an initiative to beautify the school's front entrance, to promote a welcoming feeling for students, parents, and other community members who arrived at the entrance. I was also responsible for school safety. In this role, I actively sought out situations that might impact on the safety of students or staff, and sought remedies by utilizing resources within and outside the school. This could involve physical safety issues but might also involve interpersonal interactions among the students, such as potential bullying behaviours.

Problems do not arise on a fixed schedule. I became the master of the three-minute lunch, as many issues arose during the lunch periods and had to be dealt with immediately. An injured student or a student-bullying situation will not wait for you to finish what you are doing before dealing with the issue. Also, expect to spend time celebrating student accomplishments, either during the school day or after school, at concerts, plays, parent nights, sporting events, or meetings. This returns to the concept of the school as an important part of the community, as well as the vice principal being visible outside their normal role to parents and students. This behaviour contributed to my intentionally inviting stance, which I reinforced frequently.

3.8. Lesson 8: *School Administration Is a Team; Be a Team Player*

As noted, the role of the principal is to function as a transformational leader, establishing a vision for the school and taking steps to achieve that vision. Meanwhile, the vice principal's role is to act as a transactional leader; this means taking care of day to day activities, but also enacting the vision of the principal. Two examples of this relationship are described below.

In the first instance, the principal desired to establish an atmosphere where professional learning communities (PLCs) flourished. In my role as vice principal, I timetabled the school so that each complete department had a common lunch period. This enabled both formal and informal collaboration among department members, and the establishment of numerous PLCs. The PLCs were both intra- and inter-departmental in nature, since multiple departments had the same lunch period. Further benefit was that the monthly department meetings were held during one of the lunch periods, so that teachers were much more alert and involved than if the meetings had been held at the end of the day, which was the norm prior to the timetabling change.

In a second instance, the principal wished to have closer connections with our three main feeder schools. Together with vice principals from the feeder schools, we constructed a joint professional development day, with staff from all the schools meeting at one of three schools for the day, depending on subject specializations. For example, teachers of mathematics, science and technology met at one school; social science and humanities teachers met at another school, and so on. Each school had an agenda specific to their subject specializations. In this way, all teachers became aware of the pathways that students would take in those subject areas, as well as challenges and issues specific to a particular grade band. As a result of this professional development day, inter-school committees were struck to address specific concerns and formulate joint action plans.

While principals and vice principals collaborate routinely, the vice principal's duties are assigned by the principal. The vice principal should feel free to offer advice; however, some issues such as disciplining of staff fall outside of the vice principal's domain and must be referred to the principal. Having a collegial atmosphere between principal and vice principal benefits the entire school. It is often helpful if the principal and vice principal have different leadership styles. For example, if the principal's dominant leadership style is Commanding it may be useful for the vice principal's leadership style to be Affiliative

or Democratic, thus providing a different lens on an issue. The vice principal should feel free to offer opinions and suggestions, but the final decision on an issue is the prerogative of the principal.

3.9. Lesson 9: Know Your Limits, But Try to Stretch Them

As vice principals, we sometimes become so focused on day-to-day issues that we neglect our own personal well-being and growth. We need to be aware of this, and ensure that we continue to grow as individuals. Reflective practice allows the vice principal to identify areas of growth, as well as opportunities to give back to both the school and the profession. For example, I functioned as a workshop facilitator for a district-wide leadership development program, as well as co-Chair of our regional leadership group. This allowed me to share my learning on interpersonal theory as well as topics such as invitational theory and leadership styles, which are vital to school growth.

In another instance, when I learned that there were district funds available to support action research projects, I was able to get funding for four such projects in my school. I also learned a great deal about action research and the potential benefits to students, as well as the empowerment of staff. The results of the action research projects led to several initiatives being included into the school strategic plan. The action research projects illustrated my use of distributed leadership and a democratic leadership style.

3.10. Lesson 10: Make a Difference—You Influence Students' Lives

This lesson, although placed last in this paper's list, is the most crucial element of the vice principal position. Three brief vignettes illustrate the impact that a vice principal can have on students' lives. All of the topics in the literature review: interpersonal interactions, invitational theory, reflective practice, and leadership styles-- impacted these vignettes in various ways.

As a vice principal, I was in a position to know much more about students' personal situations than most teachers. For example, I dealt with a student who was in her final year of high school, living on her own, and holding down a full-time job after school. Because of her job, she often did not arrive home until after 2:00 a.m.; she was frequently tired in her classes and often arrived late to her first class of the day—mathematics. The math teacher was unwilling to bend any rules for the student, arguing that her late arrivals were disruptive for the other students. The teacher's behaviour was intentionally disinviting. I arranged for the student to go to the guidance office for her first period class; the math teacher sent the work to my office mailbox each day so when the student arrived, she worked on her math in the guidance office, and came to me if she had questions (I had been a math teacher for many years). The student graduated and received a full scholarship for a languages program at a local university. This was an example of invitational theory in action; the school needed to be intentionally inviting for this student for her to be successful.

In another case, I suspended a student for carving gang symbols into the workbenches in woodworking class. This represented interpersonal behaviours from the upper half of Figure 2, necessary for immediate action. Longer term, using interpersonal behaviours from the lower right quadrant of Figure 2, I arranged for the student to meet a community police officer who was involved with our school. The officer developed a relationship with the student, and the student learned that there were other options rather than gang life.

In a third case, I found it very difficult to deal with a particular student, as she frequently disobeyed school rules, came to school drunk on at least one occasion, and repeatedly swore at her teachers and at me. For this student, I frequently had to remind myself that we consequence the behaviour, not the person. I utilized behaviours from the upper half of Figure 2 to deal with immediate remediations for the student. Subsequently, using behaviours from the lower right quadrant of Figure 2, I assisted the student in identifying behaviours that she found more desirable and allowed her to function as a member of our school community. In her senior year, she transferred to another school and subsequently graduated. I received a very eloquent letter from her, inviting me to attend her commencement ceremony. She thanked me for establishing and enforcing clear boundaries, and for treating her and other students equitably. She recognized that immature students need boundaries, and that clear and consistent boundaries helped her mature, and later thrive.

Every vice principal has stories like these. Sometimes we know how we have influenced our students' lives, but often we do not. I was once thanked by a student whom I had demitted from school the previous year; when he returned, the student said that he had needed that year to grow up and recognize that he was headed for a life of dead-end jobs unless he finished high school. While we remember the 'wins,' we also need to realize that there are 'losses' as well. We must try to maximize the wins and minimize the losses.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to give a practitioner's viewpoint demonstrating that both practice and theory are vital to the role of vice principal. The lessons outlined above are not meant to be sequential rather only to illustrate that practice and theory are both important. I learned a great deal as a vice principal. I was in a position to influence the lives of large numbers of students as well as staff. By adopting a consistent, equitable approach, grounded in research, I believe that I promoted and supported the growth of many students, as they learned to become productive citizens, athletes, and scholars.

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