Date April 15, 2012

Journal Entry # 6 Dowdy Week 6

Issue Addressed: Retention

Principal Standards II Principals Demonstrate Instructional Leadership; a and d

**What I Observed/Learned**

It is that time of year, when there is talk of retention in the schools. Retention is a very touchy subject with strong opinions on both sides. I consider myself to be moderate in most situations. I believe it is important to view each situation individually and make decisions after research and/or lengthy discussion on that topic. My feelings about retention are the same. It should be a case-by-case basis, and, of course, circumstances and factors change drastically as a child progresses in grades. It is not the same, I feel, to retain a child in the 1st grade as it is to retain a child in the 9th grade or even the 5th grade for that matter.

When I was growing up “flunking” a grade was the worst possible thing that could happen to you, academically speaking. There were whispers of the few children who “flunked” or “got left back” and they were not kind whispers. I believe society’s opinion has changed a lot since then, and I can’t say whether I think it is for better or worse, but there is much less stigma to being retained then when I was a kid.

This week I was able to sit in on a retention meeting. The meeting was called by the teacher, regarding her kindergarten student. This child was leaps and bounds behind the other students in class, had little motivation and lacked the basic skills needed to be successful l in 1st grade. Prior to the meeting, I had scored a Light’s Retention Scale for the teacher, and the child’s results were “Fair candidate for retention”. The classroom teacher, principal, literacy resource teacher, myself and the librarian all attended the meeting. The parents were invited, however, they were no-shows-this is typical for them. We discussed the factors that may not change with retention, such as parent involvement as well as his acquisition of skills. The teacher stated this child was about 2-3 months behind the other children, and with another year in kindergarten to grow, she felt he would eventually be successful. We all gave input, the principal asked a few questions and then sided with the teacher. He gave the teacher suggestions about how to approach the parents with this information, as well as offered his support in meeting with them. I addition to retention, it was decided that the teacher was going to recommend the student for Special Ed testing, as he had already gone through the RtI process.

**How will this Impact my Leadership?**

Honestly, this particular case was an easier one then many others. We all agreed this child would benefit from another year to grow in kindergarten. He has an August birthday, which makes him one of the youngest in his class, and it would be really tough for him to acquire the knowledge and skills he needs to start first grade, in the next four months or so. This really got me thinking though, how would I handle this with a 4th or 5th grader? When they are that old, there is a much greater social impact, but how much should that matter? As a leader, I need to arm myself with knowledge of studies, the pros/cons of retention and take each situation on a case-by-case basis. I would have to know how and why the child would benefit from repeating a grade, and I would want a strong success plan in place for the retention year, if that is what is decided. I always have to keep the human factor in mind, and know my decisions could have a lifelong positive or negative impact on a child and their family. Every decision must be made with careful thought, research, discussion and input from all people involved. What I find difficult, is you may never know if the decision you helped make was the right one. But I hope I would find peace in knowing that after careful consideration, it was what my team and I thought was best.

**Critical Issues:**

Our decisions as leaders can have lifelong positive or negative impact on our students

There is no one size-fits-all decision for retention