**61687-87 Module 2 Assignment: *Interview with the Principal***

**Timothy Tutt**

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**Intro**

On Friday, January 29, I interviewed my principal, Jolene Liebl. This is Jolene’s third year serving as principal at my elementary school in Des Moines, Iowa, and her second assignment as a principal. She also was an elementary principal in Oskaloosa, Iowa, a smaller city of 12,000 people an hour southeast of Des Moines. Before that, Liebl served as an instructional coach after starting her career in education as a primary-grade teacher (grades K, 1, and 2).

**Her Thoughts on Leadership**

From our discussion, I learned that Liebl’s style of leadership is one where she will follow the directions that she has been given. “I am definitely a rule follower,” she states. While she may define part of her leadership style in that way, she also says that she is driven most of all by “putting students first”, and that includes minimizing use of any types “top-down” models to managing the staff, students, and family communications and practices.

What Jolene looks for most of all in a leader is an ability to listen to what others have to say, along with being able to offer “genuine feedback” that does not come across as judgmental or pretentious. She also believes that a leader needs to able to hear and respond to what others share, even when Liebl is the one doing the sharing. A leader is also one who can roll up her or his sleeves and help throughout the building as needed. She also believes that leaders “should not have a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach” to decision making and problem solving.  
 As Liebl spoke on what she considers to be important components of leadership, I found myself often nodding in agreement. As she spoke on leadership, she was indirectly addressing Daniel Goleman’s Six Leadership Styles that were heavily democratic, with only a minimal need to utilize coercive or authoritarian approaches. In both her words that I heard, and in her practices that I’ve seen, Jolene values and utilizes the help and assistance of others in getting the job done and in getting the job done and decisions made. I both appreciated and liked what she had to say, as I use a simpler, watered-down approach with second graders who are *developing* their leadership skills in my classroom.   
  
**Her Views on Mission Statements and Visioning**

When asked to opine on mission and vision statements, Liebl began by saying that, “The mission is what one *sees*, and the vision is what one *works toward*.” At Hanawalt Elementary, Liebl believes that it is necessary to employ the efforts of several people to bring a mission and a vision to practice. I asked her if her supervisors had addressed developing or re-creating a mission and vision statement at the building level and they had not. Yet the district mission and vision is displayed in district communications.  
 Liebl recalled her finding a past mission statement and vision at the building level. When addressing this to the building leadership team, there was consensus that the mission she found upon her employment were outdated. Instead of recreating a new building vision and mission, it was decided that the Hanawalt community would (1) focus on bringing the *district* mission and vision to practice, and (2) our continue to use the Stephen Covey Leader in Me program to fulfill a district for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as part of the district’s mission and practice. This was communicated to staff from the building leadership team, to our building’s professional learning communities, so that all would have a voice. There was very clear, building-wide consensus to use this approach, customizing the district vision and mission as our own, using Leader and Me for SEL, along with a new initiative on anti-racist work that Liebl has emphasized as a response to concerns brought up from the parent-teacher group and one to two members of our building’s professional development committee.   
 Liebl readily admits to the importance of the necessity of having that collaborative model practice to move forward, allowing for as many voices as possible. I can verify that her approach is effective, as her efforts toward “collaborative leadership” and “unity of purpose” rated very highly in early results from a survey I gave to school culture survey on which I’ll be reporting for the Module 3 assignment for this class.

**Closing**

As I reflect on what Liebl shared in her interview. I could clearly hear how she values the roles that so many play in creating a sense of direction, purpose, and functionality in our school’s visioning process(es). I have clearly observed that she utilizes and facilitates the talents of many people, ranging from those with leadership titles in my building, to classroom teachers, specialists, aides, as well as the parents and students, all play a part in making the mission of the Des Moines Public Schools work, and the vision real.