



An Educational Odyssey

**A Report from David Hunt
Ambassador for Education**

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Appreciation:

I would like to express my gratitude to all the school personnel that aided me in my travels and made my year such an enlightening one.

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AN EDUCATIONAL ODYSSEY

David Hunt

1991 Iowa Teacher of the Year

The Program

To win a Teacher of the Year Award is indeed a great honor, but it is not an honor that one wins alone. I've appreciated the support of my colleagues and my students who contributed to the positive educational climate at Clarence-Lowden. Additionally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Bob Cardoni, my superintendent, for initiating the process that led to my award. He understood that such an award confers honor not only on the individual, but on the school district as well.

Two years ago, the Iowa Legislature had the foresight to create the Iowa Ambassador Program, thus establishing a one-year sabbatical for the Teacher of the Year winner. The benefit of this program was clearly pointed out by former Teacher of the Year winners who were pulled out of the classroom as many as 40 times during a school year. The demands on their time made it very difficult for them to do justice to either their Teacher of the Year responsibilities or their teaching duties. I am grateful to Pam Johnson, the first Iowa Ambassador, for her helpful insights as she blazed the trail, and to the Iowa Department of Education for allowing me the flexibility to put my own imprint on the program.

Through this paper, I will share directions that I believe the Teacher of the Year program should take, to highlight some programs that I observed, share comments from teachers that I interviewed, and raise questions about educational change which will hopefully stimulate continued discussion about educational transformation in Iowa.

Role as Spokesperson

As the program continues to evolve, I believe that the primary role of the Ambassador should be to serve as a spokesperson for educators. Too often, in our educational system, those who have the most contact with children have the least say in the educational change process. I was able to attend many meetings on educational change in which teachers were significantly underrepresented. Due to the busy nature and inflexibility of teachers' schedules, this will continue to be the case. Given those dynamics, I feel that it is important that the Teacher of the Year continue to be available to help fill this void.

It is critical that the role of teachers be promoted within the ranks of colleagues, as well as to the general public. I tried to extend my role as spokesperson to include this. During the course of my travels, I met some colleagues who introduced themselves as "just a teacher." I was quick to point out the complicated and demanding nature of the job; requiring one to simultaneously monitor behavior and present information while making as many as 10,000 decisions in the course of

a day. I was equally quick to point out that the teaching profession is entrusted with a society's most precious resource, its children, and, should never be devalued.

The role of spokesperson also allowed me to assist in bridging the gap between teachers and administrators. At the invitation of Bob Steele, I had the opportunity to speak at the superintendents' meeting at Green Valley AEA. I worked to recall with them their own connections to the classroom while sharing concerns of teachers. I was then able to initiate dialogue on school issues and to make contacts for upcoming school visits. The impact of this meeting leads me to hope that the 1992 Teacher of the Year will have opportunities to speak at superintendents' meetings in each AEA.

I had the opportunity, as a spokesperson, to promote education and educators during my school visits as well. Some communities, such as Centerville, Carroll, and Shenandoah incorporated press coverage into my visits, while others, such as Denison and Charles City used me to speak to its clubs and organizations. Hopefully, this coverage fostered dialogue within the communities. I see this as a positive way for the Ambassador program to grow and expand.

One key to the continuing strength of Iowa education is the quality of the incoming teacher force. The Teacher of the Year can function as an important resource here as well. I had the chance to speak to education majors at Grandview, Wartburg, UNI, and Luther. I also had the opportunity to sit in on methods classes while at Wartburg. Visits such as these could facilitate discussions on actual practice, innovative ideas, and the joy of teaching.

Teachers Changing Lives

Another theme that I have stressed throughout the year is that teachers have the power to change lives. To illustrate this, I asked a number of teachers throughout the state to describe instances in which they were aware of their impact on a young person's life. Each school building in the state contains many powerful stories about the impact teachers have on students' lives. Many of these stories evoked great emotion in their telling:

An elementary teacher in College Community Schools shared the story of her year-long, successful battle to get a voluntary mute to talk.

A high school science teacher from Lincoln Stanwood told me about making a call to a student's home to find out why she had missed several days. He discovered that she was pregnant, convinced her to return to school, and she finished her education. She is now a very supportive parent in the community. Because a teacher cared, the cycle was broken.

I encountered a similar story at Norwalk High School, where a teacher encouraged a pregnant teen to return. She sought the support of the girl's parents, worked with

the girl's peers to create a positive climate for the girl's return, and even took the girl shopping for maternity clothes to wear upon her return.

In Davenport, a teacher talked of intercepting a note being passed and putting it on his desk. He happened to look at it and discovered that it talked of suicide. He contacted the counseling office and they intervened successfully. A teacher's prompt action may have saved a life.

Also in Davenport, a fourth grade teacher shared a powerful story that brought tears to her eyes. Several years ago, she had a very troubled young girl in her class. The student was prone to episodes of anger where she would leave school and not return for several days. The teacher's level of care for her student prompted her to search for some good to use to connect with the student. She discovered that the girl could run very well, but also, due to problems at home, the girl had moved out of the district and was living with a grandmother. The teacher went to her principal and asked him to keep silent about the change in district. The teacher went to the home, provided transportation for the student, and worked out the details necessary to get the student involved in track meets. The student is now a successful high school student. Recently, she nominated her fourth grade teacher for a Golden Apple Award, and admitted to having realized only recently just how great an impact this teacher had on her life. Such is the power of the teaching profession!

Teachers caring for students goes far beyond the classroom. This was brought home to me by a teacher at North Scott who was losing sleep over how to find a special gift for one of her students whose family was suffering from great economic hardship.

Sustained influence was illustrated by a story from a Denver, Iowa elementary teacher. She made sure that the nurse provided one of her second graders with breakfast and modeled caring behavior in the classroom. Years later, he was invited to be her classroom volunteer. He wasn't popular with his peers, but turned out to be wonderfully sensitive to her students and never missed a day in the two years he worked with her class. The students loved him and even had a birthday party for him. He went on to be the first member of his family to graduate from high school. The second graders had a graduation party for him and he still corresponds with the teacher.

Tears often welled up in the eyes of teachers as these stories were told and this is just the tip of the iceberg. Each teacher I encountered had his or her own collection of stories and each building I visited was a repository of a powerful history of growth and change in young people. In a time when "education bashing" is popular, it is critical to remind ourselves, as well as the public, of the importance of our profession.

Teachers Talk About the Profession

One question that I asked teachers throughout the state was what they liked best about teaching. The universal answer was that they liked the students. Many went

on to comment about the energy and enthusiasm of their students and the joy they, as teachers, received from watching youngsters grasp concepts.

There was also a great commitment to positive interaction within the classroom. A good example of this is a story told to me by an elementary teacher in Sioux City. Her class was playing a word recognition game with the boys against the girls. The rules were that if a child recognized the word first, they went to the end of the line while their opponent had to sit down. One girl always recognized the word, but was never as quick as her opponent. She began crying. The teacher held her in her lap and asked if she would like to hold up the next word. She tearfully replied, "I want to get a word." Eventually, it was her turn again. Billy, her opponent, was a boy who was frequently in trouble. He appeared to think and think about the word. The tearful girl finally got the word. Billy walked to his seat, and as he walked, he turned and winked at the teacher. What a joyful moment for this elementary teacher!

Although all of the educators I interviewed expressed their enjoyment of the students they taught, many did not see themselves remaining in teaching. When I asked them how they viewed their professional future, I received a variety of answers. Of greatest concern to me was the fact that only three of the teachers I interviewed with ten or less years experience intended to make teaching their continued career. I have serious concerns about the fact that, while I and many others teachers believe that teaching is the most important profession, many of the state's young teachers are looking at alternative careers. The issue in most cases is more than just salary, since those electing to teach are already aware of the pay situation. This is an issue that I hope will ring alarm bells throughout the state.

Experienced teachers who hope to stay in the profession communicated problems as well. During my visit to New Hampton, I had the opportunity to observe an excellent English teacher. During our interview, she expressed concern that after 15 years of experience, she might be unemployable. Her husband was being transferred and she feared that budget issues would cause districts to hire less experienced teachers. Schools often use the cheapest method to fill slots. That awareness is demeaning to the profession and its talented members. This issue strongly illustrates the need to abandon short range economics and the need to make teaching a valued career path of its own, rather than a stepping stone to "more important careers."

As I interviewed teachers across Iowa, I asked them to identify the strengths of their districts. The overwhelming response was that the strength lay in the hard work and dedication of their colleagues. The only other response that occurred a significant number of times was supportive administrators. Teachers understand better than anyone that a good administrator can significantly enhance a building's climate, freeing each individual to be the best teacher he or she can be. This was best expressed by a highly respected principal from a middle school in western Iowa who says to his staff, "I'll walk with you and I'll carry the target." All of this feedback

seems to suggest that any significant reform effort must address working relationships and school climate in positive ways.

Innovative programs were rarely mentioned as a strength, which would suggest that they are not yet part of the district's culture and that the majority of teachers do not yet feel ownership of such programs.

Teachers Talk About Change

The last two questions of my interview dealt with change. I asked teachers to pick the one thing that they would change in education and to describe their ideal school.

The general feeling among teachers was that they wanted a system that would treat them with respect and allow them the opportunity to maximize the use of their talents. Most teachers felt that the areas that most needed to be addressed were those of time, isolation, and class size.

Some districts have taken the lead in making sure that teachers have time to focus on education by hiring aides to deal with things such as hall duty, lunch duty, bus duty, recess duty, and study halls. This small step has demonstrated that these districts value teachers' time and talents. They have truly demonstrated their awareness that teachers are professionals, and not mere babysitters.

There is much talk about reform in education and a vast amount of information about new approaches to teaching, yet, there is almost no time for contemplation, reflective discussion, and thoughtful implementation of new methods.

The sense of isolation that teachers experience inhibits reform efforts as well. One teacher I interviewed said, "This 15 minute discussion with you is the longest I've had with a colleague all year."

Educational reform efforts need to concentrate on ways to enable teachers to support one another and contribute to each other's growth. The typical teacher has very little contact with colleagues in the same building or in other districts. Many teachers, schools, and districts spend useless time re-inventing the wheel.

Several districts have tried to address the issue of isolation in positive ways. Lamoni put state of the art phones, with voice mail, in every classroom. Schools in Des Moines also had phones in classrooms. This approach creates a more professional atmosphere, enhances inter and intra-building communication and makes it much easier to make parent contacts.

The typical situation, however, was described by a teacher who said that in his building, 30 teachers have access to three phones between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m., and between 3:20 and 4:00 p.m. Beyond 4:00 p.m., other teachers and coordinators often weren't available.

In order to combat issues of time and isolation, some teachers expressed enthusiasm about 11-month contracts with commensurate salary increases. They felt this would significantly reduce re-teaching in the fall and would make fuller use of existing facilities as well.

Again, because of time constraints and isolation, there are frequent debates about extending school days to seven or eight periods. I believe true reform efforts should focus instead on the question of whether to have periods at all and should take a visionary look at true restructuring of time within schools.

One interesting idea expressed was to work with students for four days of the week and use the fifth day for professional growth.

Class size was another issue frequently mentioned as a much needed area for change. This was particularly true at the middle and high school levels in urban districts. One Lisbon educator said, "I'll gladly give them their extra \$5,000 in salary per year in order to work with only 18 students per class." The class average for the district was 18, but this teacher saw an average of 30 students each period. A Davenport junior high teacher said he saw 180 students each day and his colleagues in the building related the same statistics, although, again, the district average was supposed to have been 18. Since that talk, I've found numerous districts with typical class sizes of 30.

In discussing the class size issue, many teachers commented on the fact that each student represented more than another number or another paper to grade. Each additional student comes with individual abilities and needs that should be addressed, and each one adds his fingerprint to the class dynamics. Significant attention to educational improvement requires that this issue be addressed.

When describing their ideal schools, teacher responses strongly suggested a school where the necessary resources were available; where there was sufficient reflective time, and where time schedules allowed for more flexibility. The ideal school would work hard to generate parental involvement and community support. Class sizes would be kept small and there would be a strong staff with an openness to innovation. This school would use site-based decision making. There would be a great deal of academic freedom, interdisciplinary teaching, and networking of ideas. Technology would be used to enhance teaching, rather than to supplant it. The ideal school district would make an effort to develop a sense of community.

Two other proposals suggested as components of the ideal school are represented here as food for thought. I neither endorse nor criticize them, but did find them to be interesting approaches. A teacher in Maquoketa suggested that a team sport, band, chorus, and speech be required of all students, thereby, teaching students success, proactive teamwork, and control; and critical life skills. She further suggested that all electives be available each afternoon. In Williamsburg, a teacher

suggested that public education not be an option beyond eighth grade, because the mere fact that education is free devalues it.

The teachers I interviewed had an abundance of insight and ideas about the directions change in education should take. Given that, I am concerned that more transformation is not occurring. I suspect that funding has had a tremendous impact on forward progress. Districts facing budget cuts and layoffs must focus all energy on survival. In addition, I suspect that the push towards whole grade sharing has also inhibited the transformation process. The vagueness of the law and the political machinations often created during the process direct much attention away from educational change. District size is another factor that affects change. Large districts benefit from having more expertise to draw on and more available resources, but these are offset by levels of bureaucracy, turfdom, and the tremendous difficulties of keeping buildings moving at the same pace. Frequently, they all must move at the pace of the slowest building. In areas where buildings are allowed to move at their own pace, it appears to be necessary to make provisions for students moving to the next grade or level. In a southern Iowa district, the middle school has dropped many of its interdisciplinary programs due to criticism from the high school that students were entering high school without basic needed information.

Although small districts don't have the diversity of resources available to larger districts, they do have a much easier time communicating and building ownership of new ideas. As well, they can move quickly in enacting innovative ideas as they are not as hindered by bureaucracy.

I would like to see the state look at some small districts as laboratories of change.

Another angle on change came from the Iowa transformation committee. This committee has raised questions about whether it is even possible to change education without trying to address the need for great changes in society. I predict that this will be a continuing debate.

The final issue on change has to do with the role of leadership. Many staffs and administrators see a need for change in "those other schools." Much needs to be done to educate people, within and outside of schools about real issues related to education. It takes strong leaders to "sell the vision." When Spirit Lake implemented a program promoting that all students could succeed, they needed strong leadership. They opened up sports, clubs, cheerleading, honor choir, etc., to all students. They met a great deal of resistance initially from the elite parent groups. They now, however, have an impressive program due to strong leadership and support of the staff.

Innovative Programs

While we still have a long way to go in transforming our educational system, we do have a great many innovative programs at all levels in Iowa.

One change that is occurring is the implementation of the middle school concept. This implementation is generating great enthusiasm and finding great success. I believe that there is much in this model that can and should be applied at the high school level as well. This middle school approach may have been necessitated by the way the educational system was constructed. For years, elementary buildings have been kept small and were in local neighborhoods, thus creating a nurturing environment. The assumption was, that at age 12, students no longer needed this kind of nurturing, so they were put in large factory-like buildings to learn "stuff" to get them ready to learn more "stuff" in high school. What middle schools have done is to split each grade into groups of optimally 80 to 100 students. These students work with the same teachers in their courses. This helps to renew the sense of community we now know that students need.

Lyon Middle School in Clinton has been a pioneer in the middle school business and they often present at middle school conferences. They recommend that:

1. Each team must teach the same group of students.
2. The team must have common planning time.
3. The team must be empowered to make schedule adjustments as needed.
4. There must be a staff in place with teaming skills.

Another observation of the Lyon's staff is equally important. They expressed concern that there is not a strand in most teacher or administrative training that deals with communication, interpersonal skills, or motivation. These skills are becoming more important with the teaming approach and will be a critical skill for students to learn as well.

I feel strongly that common planning time, beyond prep time, is essential to the success of this approach. Districts like Anamosa, Okoboji, Lewis Central, and Lamoni all realized that losing this planning time would seriously impair their ability to fulfill the middle school concept. Most of these schools devoted a two-period block of time to team and individual planning. The use of this block tends to be flexible, depending on the current needs and concerns. Its benefits are:

1. The ability to create a sense of family where, "We're all in this together."
2. Staff can communicate more effectively and consistently about students, including diagnosing individual needs from four points of view.
3. It helps the student to see that knowledge is interrelated.
4. Consistency in rules and joint conferencing provide security and stability for students.

There may be some debate about the need for the extra planning time. Teachers who have participated in this model say that it's the "hardest work they've ever loved." The results speak for themselves.

The excitement generated by the team approach is immense. During my visit to Lewis Central, a team member came in with a suggestion of doing an

interdisciplinary unit relating to weather and climate. Immediately, there were suggestions as to how each could get involved and I found myself caught up in the conversation and the excitement.

Interdisciplinary projects within the middle school concept are both taxing and rewarding. They also require a great deal of team planning. Lamoni middle school spent an entire year moving from project to project. Unanimously, they said, "Don't do it. It will kill you." Now, they focus on one major project per year.

In Okoboji, I was crowned King David when I attended their Renaissance Fair. Students had set up booths replicating what would have been available in those times. This was the culminating activity after many days of reading, art, science projects, and a host of other activities to bring the time period to life for the students.

Lamoni's middle school project is to create a business. They get seed money, do market research, go into production, maintain quality control, advertise, develop a delivery system, keep accurate financial records, and evaluate their profit or loss. These experiences have a powerful impact on students as well as staff.

One Lewis Central teacher told me that he had taught high school for over 20 years and that he would never go back, after experiencing the excitement of the middle school approach.

This approach is carrying over to the high school level. In Cedar Rapids, Washington, a three member team of math, language arts, and science teachers has been formed. They now have prep and team time. They have already developed cross-disciplinary competencies such as group work, computer, goal setting, and speech. They hope to have some interdisciplinary projects in the future.

Other approaches to the middle school level focus on the emotional needs of these students. Urban educators, particularly, express a need to confront these issues. They are concerned that the resources tend to go into advanced courses or to programs for students with disabilities, while class sizes for average students remain high, and many students slip through the cracks. As well, students may come to school with problems stemming from other parts of their lives. Schools are adjusting to meet those needs.

Sioux City North has implemented the Student Teacher Assistance Team which provides focus groups for students. Some of these include: The Insight group to help students examine their use and abuse patterns. The After-Care group to help link students to others who have been through a treatment program, and The Concerned Persons group, a group of students whose lives are impacted by others use of drugs or alcohol. This model has sparked groups to deal with other addictions and dysfunctions. About 100 students per year use the program. They can be self-referred or can be referred by a peer, staff member, or parent. One girl

who had dropped out kept sneaking back in to attend the group. Group members finally persuaded her to finish the program.

Support groups are not just limited to urban systems. Crestwood High School has been using support groups for five years. Students join on a voluntary basis or as a part of probation. The focus has been on education and information. Their concern has been the additional burden this puts on staff members. There are a number of needy students and a shortage of staff to run the groups.

Des Moines North is working with a program called Project Success. Human Services staff members have a small office area within the school building. They are made up of case managers who deal intensively with students and families and coordinate services for that student. The commitment is long-term and doesn't end when the student graduates. Due to follow-up of staff, five dropouts have returned to school.

The English as a Second Language (ESL) program at North has many Southeast Asians making a book called "What We Remember" filled with customs, clothing, holidays, good luck charms, etc. Students at North also perform community service either in school or in the community itself.

At Harding Middle School, the "I Have a Dream Project" has just recently begun. Thirty seventh grade students were adopted by a mentor who acts in conjunction with a family counselor. If these students finish high school, they will receive free tuition to any accredited institution in Iowa. Both North and Harding have done much to counteract the impersonality that can occur in large urban buildings.

An educator in an alternative school expressed the philosophy that "We can't afford to be a throwaway society." Schools are working harder than ever to address the needs of at-risk children. Anamosa High School, in conjunction with Kirkwood Community College, has created a program called Workforce 2000. There are currently 16 students in the program, eight freshmen and eight sophomores. Eventually, the program will include 32 students. Graduates of Workforce 2000 will have a portfolio of diverse experiences. They meet one hour per day in class and spend additional time per week training and job shadowing. Parents meet once per month with a counselor, teacher and social worker. These meetings seek to solicit input from parents, show parents what the program is doing, and tour Kirkwood to show them the opportunities their children have. The goal is to create a similar program for all of Jones County.

Fort Madison Middle School has set up a program for at-risk students in which students are in a pull-out program for one hour per day. They work on a curriculum specifically designed for each individual student based on study skills, self-understanding and effective interaction with others. The two at-risk coordinators maintain a link with the Community Mental Health Awareness Center. Through this linkage, three support groups are functioning; one to deal

with those just out of treatment, one for students having general adjustment problems, and one for those who are having very serious academic difficulties.

Lincoln-Stanwood has created a Health Careers Class. They meet in a two hour block. The course includes clinic rotations at the county home and nursing homes, as well as hospital visits. Each student will work three eight hour shifts at the hospital. They also get a working rotation as a Veteran Technician at a funeral home and at a dental office. Upon completion, the student is a Certified Nursing Assistant and gets priority enrollment at Kirkwood Community College.

Some school districts have looked at changing the way time is structured to help facilitate certain classes or programs. In Turkey Valley, a new structure is being tried to facilitate in-depth discussion. The class meets all year instead of one semester. Large groups of 30 students meet on Mondays and Fridays. During the intervening days, smaller groups of 10 students meet. This is an interesting approach and I enjoyed the spirited discussion the day I visited.

There are many visionary departments in the state of Iowa and one is the Boone physical education department. They have put together an excellent brochure on their programs. They make it clear from the onset that they don't simply exist to provide a supervised setting for students to recreate. Rather they have devised a four strand program. The first strand deals with fitness and wellness. Here, students research their own fitness/wellness levels and these results are tracked from seventh through twelfth grades. Another strand deals with aquatics, another with strength and conditioning, and another where students are exposed to a variety of recreational sports. The goal is to address fitness, wellness, and activity to make them each a part of every students' life.

In Charles City, the math department is pioneering the integrated math program. This is premised on the concept that geometric and algebraic concepts are interrelated and should be taught together, and linked with thinking skills. This program is a big step towards breaking away from the particle approach, where skills are taught in isolation and seldom have much meaning for the learner. Their current concern is on how to get universities to accept the integrated program credit.

Teachers at Elkader Central High School through the help of a R.E.A.P. and McElroy Grant have been able to set up a program in which students have produced brochures highlighting the history, environmental aspects, and natural beauty of their area. One booklet contains stories of Clayton County and covers subjects like Clayton County Soldiers and their role in the Civil War and Jesse James visit to Clayton County.

A related program occurs in Shenandoah where students take a year to research in-depth all of the historical, social, and cultural events going on in the southwest Iowa area.

In Urbandale, I got a chance to see students researching periods of history and then confronting the task of putting together a TIME magazine that covers the major issues of that era. The writing and the artwork that I saw truly illustrates the potential of our students.

Linn Mar has had a flourishing Vocational Agriculture department in a suburban school. This has been successful due to the willingness to adapt to a variety of student needs. There is a greenhouse to facilitate a horticulture program and recently they have expanded to become one of a very few programs in the nation to teach aqua-culture. They are exploring the potential for fish farming in Iowa.

Fort Dodge has also added a greenhouse. They have made their campus into an arboretum with a 120 different species of trees.

Garner-Hayfield has designated an area between the two wings of their building for a natural prairie.

Ames has its greenhouse connected to the science department and students are working on projects related to genetics.

Many schools have done a wonderful job of incorporating student art projects into the building. I saw murals on walls and in classrooms and I saw many other student projects on display.

In Indianola, the students have created a mosaic 40 feet long which symbolizes all aspects of the school. They also have an art gallery separate from the art facility. During the time I was there, they had drawings from Kuwaiti children recounting their experiences during the war on display.

During my travels, I had the chance to meet Mark Twain, an English teacher at Marion High School. With the help of the drama department who supplied the costume and make-up, he did a fascinating job of sharing Twain's wit and wisdom. This teacher planned to extend this lesson by having students do projects to highlight cultural aspects of Twain's time period.

A teacher in Boone had an interesting way of linking student activities in school with parents. He is an avid photographer who frequently photographs his second graders at work. He then makes copies and puts together mini-albums that his students can check out and take home to their parents. These are filed at the end of the year. He's been doing this project since 1974 and has enjoyed the reactions of former students when they return to visit and look at the albums.

Educators across the state stressed more and more the need for early positive intervention with children. Many school districts have initiated some form of preschool program.

In Fort Madison, there is a full-time preschool for four to six-year-olds who will be entering kindergarten or special education programs. Students are targeted for this program based on communication problems, mental disabilities, or discipline problems. This program has the advantage of being in a new wing of the school so that AEA staff can watch through a one-way mirror to evaluate behavior as it naturally occurs.

West Branch is the only rural small town to receive a state grant for an at-risk preschool. The program is geared to three to five-year-olds, some of whom will go on to kindergarten after one year. Those that remain often act as role models for younger students. Monday afternoons are set aside for parent involvement activities. Visits are also made to each parent's home.

I observed many other early intervention programs. The one component that ran through each of them was the linking of parents through home visits to the program and the schools.

A highly creative way to explore geography is being used by fourth graders at Price Lab School. The program, called Travelmates, involves each student selecting a stuffed animal. Dog tags with a class picture, school name, address, and phone number were attached to each animal. On the back of the tag is a description of the Travelmates program. A backpack for each Travelmate was made by the Home-Ec classes. The backpack holds a diary with a note on the cover that reads, "Dear Friend, Please sign my diary. Include places I've been and sights I've seen. A souvenir or, best yet, a photo of you and me together would be wonderful. My only form of transportation is from person to person, so please pass me on. Sincerely, (Travelmate's Name). P.S. Please assist me in sending home an occasional postcard."

By the time I visited this school, the Travelmates had been all over the country. One had joined a flight crew. There was a display on a wall of the classroom covered with notes, postcards, and snapshots of their travels. As Travelmates return, the students create a trip itinerary from the diary, plot locations on maps, calculate miles traveled, and write letters to those who responded.

Schools are beginning to identify Conflict Management as a valuable skill for students. In Mid Prairie, fourth through sixth graders are trained and at Price Lab School, first, third, and fifth graders receive training.

Conflict managers are particularly valuable in lightly supervised situations, such as the playground. Conflict managers work in pairs with some sort of identification. This helps children to solve problems and work out solutions on their own. At Mid Prairie, the various conflict manager teams meet regularly with the guidance counselor over lunch to discuss the effectiveness of each intervention and the program in general.

Schools are attempting to be proactive in difficult times. Such proactive intentions led to project G.R.O.W. This program was developed by three teachers, one at Denver, one at Price Lab, and one in a Waterloo elementary for the purpose of enhancing students self-understanding, interpersonal skills, and their appreciation of diversity. Triads were created from each school and matched by personality. These groups share videos of their parents, home, school, and friends. Partners get to talk by phone, write letters, and visit each others schools. Mini-sessions are presented. Denver did a mini-session on rural life, while Waterloo did a session on black history and culture.

Much is being done in schools to encourage more reading by students. Some schools are using the Book It or the Read a Million Minutes program. Many have put in place some sort of silent sustained reading program.

Ames has made a commitment to increase student reading and Northwood Elementary has taken Time Travel as a theme for recreational reading. Data is generated to see how much students are reading. This data provides a baseline and they calculate the average time needed to get to each destination in time. Students get an official looking passport booklet to chart progress, while balloons on the wall chart group progress. Enrichment presentations are given on the areas different grades choose to visit and extra rewards are given to those who read extra amounts. A high level of excitement among students permeated this project.

There has also been a significant increase in the amount of writing expected of students. In Ames, children write and illustrate their own books. These are available in the library to check out. The students get their books back when they leave school.

North Scott has instituted a writing center staffed by parent volunteers. The writing, editing, and reviewing work is done in class. When a work is ready to publish, the students go to the writing center. Students can pick a sample cover or design their own. The book is then put together in a professional manner. Bookcovers are made of cardboard and the school logo is stamped on the inside. The student makes a dedication on the first page. The student provides author information for the author page and reader comments for the last page. The reader comments include positive feedback from peers.

At Crescent Park Elementary in Sioux City, student writings are collected and made into a book. The book is over 80 pages in length and each family of a student gets one bound volume. To save money, the principal and teachers bind the volumes on their own time.

Cooperative learning is also being used in many districts. Most understand that cooperative learning is more than grouping four students together. A great deal of work with this process has been done by Edward White Elementary in North Scott. There, cooperative learning starts with pairs who learn the skills of working

together. Later, groups work on projects where each is assigned a task. In this manner, cooperative learning does not become a tutorial session. Cooperative learning frequently leads to cross-grade sharing, such as fifth graders working with second graders on a whole language project. Within a grade, there are also many project opportunities. One pair researched five tribes, then picked one, wrote a report, made a diorama, and did a videotape. Another pair developed a dialogue between two historical figures. They dealt with concepts like characters, setting, mood, and plot. Cooperative learning, when organized effectively, can be a significant enhancement to classroom learning.

On Technology

There is much concern about technology in schools. Teachers are concerned about whether or not we have the capability to prepare students for today's world. Much of this concern reflects a feeling that schools are addressing the needs of college-bound students, but ignoring the needs of the rest of the population. Many teachers feel that industrial technology is one area that has potential for meeting this need. A Mid-Prairie instructor of technology told me that two of his former students had been accepted at the Phoenix Institute of Technology, a top flight institution for drafting. One now earns over \$40,000 working for an architectural firm, the other earns more than \$40.00 an hour working for Warner Brothers. There appear to be many high tech jobs, but most schools are unable to adequately prepare students for them.

Many schools have instituted computer assisted drafting and some are moving into robotics. One of the most far-sighted industrial tech programs I visited was in Clarke County in Osceola. They have a "Rhino" robotic arm, a computer assisted lathe and a milling machine. Upper level students were drawing plans for a local contractor. The graphic technology program uses silk screening, mechanical drawing, C.A.D., and Desktop publishing. They introduce their ninth graders to applied physics by having them build toothpick bridges and testing how much weight they will support.

Students build wooden car model shells and insert CO2 capsules. They use a wind tunnel to test aerodynamics. They are constantly focused on thinking skills that transfer to the workplace.

In Ames Middle School, each industrial tech class works with computers and business process. Each class forms a company, decides what product to make, calculates the material cost, calculates the labor cost, calculates the sales commission, and the profit that will be distributed to the stockholders. They then sell stock to capitalize the company. Companies have made products like plastic picture frames and deck chairs. In five years, 55 companies made money, three broke even, and two lost money.

Fort Madison Junior High has a seven pen plotter which assists in drawing on a disk in a highly professional manner.

Outside of the computer lab, the high tech area in most schools is a part of the media center. Many have C.D. Rom. Some are using laser disc players. Some have disc players available for classroom use. I observed disc players in science and social studies classrooms. Okoboji has also added a video editing system in a tech storage room that can double as a studio. They can add graphics to videos as well. They recently created the introduction to a school play which appeared on local cable.

Melcher-Dallas and Okoboji hooked into C.N.N. video link, providing videotape news and allowing them to access a data base and three related worksheets per week.

Computer technology can aid schools by linking them to a broader pool of information. Whiting and Glidden-Ralston are involved in Project Dialogue which links them to 400 data bases. Glidden-Ralston is also part of the Nova Net System, which is a library of computer applications and will allow them to network with other participating schools. Project Express is in place at Centerville and Glidden-Ralston. This program provides a continuous Ticker Tape of information with access to information in a variety of social science areas. At Glidden-Ralston, news coming across the wires in Spanish is routed to the Spanish teacher, stock printouts went to the economics teacher, and Current Events were used by the social studies teacher.

The best summary on technology comes from the computer coordinator at Carroll Community School. When asked about the benefits, he noted that it can tune into data, provide an access to current information, allow access to other schools, yield a motivating product, and serve as a resource center. I asked him what a classroom in the 1990s should have in the way of technology. He suggested the following:

1. Five or six user friendly computers.
2. A printer in each classroom and access to a high quality laser printer for final products.
3. A T.V. monitor with laser disk player.
4. A phone modem and line access
5. A R.F. modulator for programs such as Project Express.

It's easy to see that while there are exciting opportunities for students to learn from, with, and about technology, most of our schools have a long way to go in meeting this need.

Closing Thoughts

One year and 22,000 miles later my journey has come to an end. I have visited over 90 school districts and seen education from a K-12 perspective. I come away from this experience with great pride in my profession. I have seen focused, hard-working students and teachers everywhere I have been. In addition, the many examples of creativity that I have seen have been truly energizing. This is not to suggest, however, that I am satisfied; for although we have much to be proud of, there is much more that we can do.

Through my own experience in teaching and working with the Upward Bound Program in the summer, I have long been an advocate of a student centered program in a nurturing environment which, through flexible curriculum and a strong team building culture, helps students maximize their potential. This year has not caused me to change this philosophy and I have been gratified that certain districts are moving in this direction and moving away from the old factory model of education. This movement is occurring at different rates and all districts are moving cautiously, because in our haste to change we don't want to throw out what works.

There are, however, certain factors that will enable some districts to make significant changes and make them successfully. The following questions can help a district look at its readiness for fundamental change:

- Does the district have a vision of where it wants to be five years from now?
- Is this five year vision clear and compelling?
- To what extent are staff members involved in this shaping and implementing of the vision?
- How much ownership is there of the vision by the staff and students?
- To what extent is the vision an actual part of the school culture?
- Are staff members viewed as cogs in a machine or as professional contributors to a critical enterprise? How does this manifest itself in the way schools function?
- What efforts have been made to communicate the school's vision to the public?
- What efforts are being made to help the public share ownership of the mission?
- What inputs have students had on the vision? To what extent do students have ownership of the vision?

I believe that once districts have addressed and dealt with these questions they are ready to take a giant step forward in the way we educate our young people.

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