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A REPORT OF AN INTERNSHIP IN THE
HASTINGS AREA SCHOOLS,
HASTINGS, MICHIGAN

by

Sally W. Fullerton

A Project Report
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Specialist in Education
Department of Educational Leadership

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1989

A REPORT OF AN INTERNSHIP IN THE
HASTINGS AREA SCHOOLS,
HASTINGS, MICHIGAN

Sally W. Fullerton, Ed.S.

Western Michigan University, 1989

This report is a summary of an 8 - month internship in the Hastings Area Schools, Hastings, Michigan. The internship began in September 1988 and ended in April 1989.

The objective of the internship was to give the intern practical experience in the close working relationship between the traditional public relations activities and most administrative functions of a public school system. The need for open communication to build confidence in the local schools was a basic thesis.

This report contains a log of activities as well as a personal narrative on the insights and experiences during the internship. A statement on the goals and objectives of the internship is also included.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Robert Brinkerhoff, for his encouragement and suggestions and Carl Schoessel, Superintendent of Hastings Area Schools, for his patience and availability during a trying school year.

Sally W. Fullerton

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PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Completing the 712 Field Experience in Educational Leadership brings a backward look at the knowledge and accomplishments of this intense period. I feel satisfied at have accomplished several objectives and yet frustrated at not having done more; of having enjoyed the challenge, but being wearied by the pace and, finally, of being sobered by the leisurely pace of change when working within human resource institutions when the tasks ahead seem monumental. But certainly, this experience has brought a perspective, insight and challenge that will influence both my personal and professional life.

Perhaps most basic to my work within the broad area of public relations is my increased understanding of the nature of public relations and the schools. Because of my background in media, public relations classes at W.M.U. and community work in the area, I thought I knew what public relations was. My teaching colleagues thought they had the answer to the school-bashing that had gone on in the letters to the editor in the local newspaper. "We need better P.R." was the glib answer (although the news pages were awash with school news).

What I learned was that public relations as it is viewed by most school personnel is misunderstood, under-estimated and yet strangely valued. Public relations is not publicity; it is neither propaganda nor advertising. The aura surrounding big business has made schools wary of working with proven public relations concepts.

Opinions that I have had to deal with range from the education association president who says openly that having too many stories

about school and teacher accomplishments will make it more difficult to pass a school millage because the public will think the schools are getting by pretty well without an increase to a highly respected math teacher who says that what the school district needs to do is hire a "professional p.r. outfit" that guarantees positive results

What I have tried to stress in working with groups in committees or inservices is that the best p.r. involves commitment to open communication with the various school publics. Perhaps because we are teachers and "professional educators," we tend to talk and not listen. After all, what do we do when a student doesn't understand? We explain it again -- more talk. At every level of school activity we need to listen more and only then will we be able to develop an honest give-and-take about what school are all about and what their needs are.

One small facet of this complex situation has been the developing sophistication of school public relations. Reading books on school p.r. dating back to the 1960's has been fascinating. The earlier books were how-to manuals on writing press releases and taking interesting photos. The late 1980's books discuss the needs and cost of setting up the p.r. function within the school district, identifying and working with school key publics. handling critical issues and developing building-level public relations.

I went into the 712 field experience thinking I knew a fair bit about school public relations. I finish knowing considerably more and really wanting to be able to use the concepts that are part of this comprehensive picture.

The experiences over the last seven months have repeatedly convinced me of the fragile nature of school public relations.

Attempts to analyze the reason(s) have been unsatisfactory so far, but the phenomenon can be seen by just a couple of examples. A display of student work from an elementary school evoked good public comment but harsh words from the teacher when the paddle boat constructed of popsicle sticks suffered some adverse torque in transit.

By far the hardest and most important lessons learned have been in the area of working with people. John Wherry in the Preface to School Public Relations: The Complete Book said that the aim of school public relations is, first, to make sure that the schools are identifying and serving society's needs as well as possible and, second, to make sure that the public knows its needs are being met so they (the public) will support their schools.

The first part, I can say with confidence, is true of the Hastings Area Schools, and they are doing a good job of it. The second part about getting the message out to the public engendering their positive response is not happening and has not happened as long as I have lived in town. Between the first and second parts of the aim and enabling the second part is the school district's total commitment to build public confidence in education.

My conversations with Superintendent Carl Schoessel frequently explored this problem in addition to our week-by-week projects. His insights on working with different groups were particularly valuable when I could observe the actual interplay of issues and personalities. However, I admit to some frustration at the pace and caution which make progress so slow. I have also tried to build a comprehensive, sure-fire public relations program in my head, but at this point the complexity and volatility of the situation confound me. I am only sure that years of hard work face the district.

We know that school public relations means building trust with-

in all areas of the school family by open and honest communication, year after year to prove to the community that the schools are vital to our community and deserve community support.

The need is clear; the individual pieces of the puzzle are no mystery. Putting the individual components together in a renewed commitment to open communication (with the emphasis on listening) must inevitably result in increased confidence in the schools and a better education for its students.

REVISED LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. The participant will gain an understanding of the legal and customary operation of public access channels on cable television and the strategies needed to negotiate contract changes to provide school and community access.

Comment: The participant did gain an understanding of the operation of public access channels on selected systems across the state. Within Hastings the end of the cable TV contract triggered widespread public dissatisfaction with the cable company. At a public hearing a letter of Superintendent Schoessel registered our official interest in gaining minimum equipment and a public access channel if a new cable company or a re-negotiated contract would make this development possible.

2. The participant will learn how to set up an effective newsletter using journalistic and communication skills. These skills plus research into format, costs and production methods will form the basis for decision-making.

Comment: The participant did background work on setting up a district-wide newsletter. However, lack of funds prevented going ahead. Areas researched included the relative cost of a separate publication compared to an insert in a shopper in terms of make-up costs, printing, postage and addressing. Various sample newsletters were collected to study for style and content.

3. The participant will gain experience in developing current and future educational issues to assist the Board of Education in strategic planning.

Comment: The participant did research in the area of strategic planning for the Board. My suggestions, based on research, demographic information and 8-10 interviews with teachers at all grade levels within the school district, were incorporated into strategic planning discussion during a weekend retreat.

4. The participant will gain an understanding and actively participate in a community survey.

Comment: Because several area businesses have underwritten the cost of a community survey on school attitudes and problems, the participant will have been in on virtually every step from initially contacting WMU's Center for Social Research to the evaluation and interpretation to the public in early May. This survey may have been helpful in passing a school millage by a comfortable margin after three defeats.

5. The participant will gain experience working cooperatively with staff, administration and community to tell the schools' more effectively.

Comment: The participant both observed and was a part of these public relations efforts that occurred during the term of her project: the re-establishment of a Hastings Education Association Public Relations Committee made up of staff with administrators and Board members invited, a Vocational-Industrial Partnership set up with industry representatives and school personnel to work on mutual goals, and the Community Survey.

LOG - 712 FIELD EXPERIENCE

1988	HOURS
9/22 Interviewing with Harbison and Schoessel re: possible topics. Writing letter to WMU	1.0 2.0
10/2 Call of Brinkerhoff Roughing educational objectives	1.0
10/12 Conference with Schoessel Call to Hastings City re cable TV	1.0
10/18 Researched cable TV - Hastings agreement Conference with Schoessel and Ken Radant re: FCC rules	.5 1.0
10/31 Great Lakes Savings re: displays	1.0
11/1 Write proposal	1.0
11/4 Meeting with Schoessel Chamber of Commerce & Hastings City Bank re: displays	1.0
11/5 Research on cable TV	2.0
11/7 Meeting at National Bank & Eberharts re: displays Phone call to County Commissioner Coleman	1.5
11/11 Meeting with Schoessel Meeting with Arnold re: display material	1.5
11/13 Writing memo on cable material to present to mayor	1.0
11/14 Meeting with Warren, Steif, Horan, Stahlman, Strong and Scott re: student work	2.0
11/15 Contacted Storrs, Oom, Smith & Domke re: student work	1.5
11/16 Educational Planning Committee	1.5
11/18 Meeting with Schoessel	1.0
11/21 Board of Education meeting Conversation with Brinkerhoff	2.0
11/22 Conversation with mayor re: cable access Set up schedule for picking up art work	1.0
11/23 Picked up art work and display panels	2.0
11/25 Writing captions, sorting materials	2.0
11/28 Bought hardware, worked with art teachers on school logo	1.5
12/2 Picked up projects, talked to reading group about publicity needs	1.5
12/7 Conference with Schoessel, phone conversation with Brinkerhoff	1.0
12/9 Conference with Schoessel, supplies from Central Supply, paint store, keys made etc.	3.0
12/10-11 Work on school district logo signs	5.5
12/12 News story on Christmas activities	2.5
12/12-15 Worked on student exhibits	9.0
12/16 Writing stories, phone calls for information	2.5
12/19 School meeting, conference with Schoessel	2.0
12/21-22 Work on and deliver student exhibits	4.0
12/23 Start research on community surveys - Grand Blanc and Hastings Project Outreach	4.0
12/26 Research on community surveys	2.0
12/27 Research and planning for inservice	4.0

12/28	Work on Photo area, research into school public relations and inservice	6.0
12/29	Contacted Reminder/Banner, contacted Steif, writing	6.0
12/30	Research and writing on strategic planning	2.0

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1/3	Reading and research on planning	1.0
1/4	Informal surveying of staff, HEA, school thinkers; organizing ideas	3.0
1/6	Meeting with Schoessel, Jill Turner on "Futuring"	1.5
1/9	Research into more area surveys	3.0
1/10	Phone call to Warfield; research	2.0
1/11-13	Finish exhibits	3.0
1/15	Research and notes on <u>Complete Book of School P.R.</u>	2.0
1/16	Board of Education	2.5
1/17	Phone Steif, research, phone calls	4.0
1/18-19	Phoning on long-range planning ideas, contacted Pennock Hospital to borrow demographic information	4.0
1/20	Meeting with administrators re: prospective administrators meeting	1.0
1/23	Prospective Administrators meeting speaking on intern experience	2.0
	Public meeting on cable TV situation	2.0
1/24	Research and notes on <u>Public Relations for Public Schools</u> , telephoning re: community survey possibilities	3.0
	Trip to WMU, conference with Tom VanValey	1.0
1/26		3.5
1/28-30	Research and writing	7.0
2/1	Meeting with Schoessel	1.5
2/4-5	Writing presentation	6.0
2/6	Meeting with Schoessel	1.0
2/8	Meeting with school administrators	1.5
2/9	Meeting with Hastings Education Association P.R. Comm.	2.5
2/13	Meeting with Schoessel and VanValey, phoning, writing	4.0
2/15-16	Research and notes on <u>101 P.R. Strategies</u>	4.0
2/17	Meeting with Schoessel	1.0
2/20	HEA-PR Committee; Board of Education	3.5
2/21	writing letter for survey input and public meeting	2.0
2/22	Meeting with bus supervisor for story; gifted & talented story	2.5
2/23	Preparing materials on techniques for bringing the public into schools for HEA-PR meeting	3.0
2/24	New display materials	1.0
2/25-26	Research and notes on <u>School PR: The Complete Book</u>	4.0
2/27	Complete handout for HEA	1.5
3/1	HEA-PR meeting	2.0
3/3	Meeting with Schoessel; displays	2.5
3/6	Educational Planning meeting, Community Survey Public Meeting, displays	3.0
		2.0
3/7-8	Displays	4.0
3/11-12	Compiling Community Survey questions	10.0
3/10	Meeting with Schoessel	1.0
3/15	HEA - PR meeting	1.5
3/17	Meeting with Schoessel; writing bus story	2.0

3/20	Board of Education meeting	1.5
3/21	Community Survey - working with voter records	2.5
3/27	Inservice planning	4.0
4/4	Survey work	6.0
4/5	Deliver survey material to WMU; meet with Brinkerhoff	4.0
4/6-7	Take down and return display material	4.5
4/6	Meeting with Schoessel	1.0
4/12	Educational Planning Committee	1.0
4/15-16	Write up final project	10.0
4/17	Board of Education	1.0
4/18	HEA - PR	2.0
4/19	HEA Educational Planning & HEA Board of Directors	1.5
	WMU - view calling procedure for survey and input	4.0
4/20	Prepare PR suggestions for Hastings Schools	5.0

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STILL TO DO:

1. Contact Harper Creek and Comstock regarding PR programs
2. Processing of Community Survey results

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