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Educational Leadership Philosophy

When thinking of my educational philosophy, I was contemplating the question raised by Douglas Smith (2005) of “What do we really stand for?” In this case though, I was questioning what do I really stand for? It’s a question that I wonder about a lot. This year I have thought about it more so than others, since I was put into a position of leadership at my school as a grade level leader. At my core, the things I put great value in for leadership are sharing leadership by working together in teams to achieve the common goal of improving education for students, bringing about meaningful change to improve education for students, and being true to who you are so that you are an authentic leader.

“Behind every organizing impulse is a realization that by joining with others we can accomplish something important that we could not accomplish alone (Wheatley 1997).” Wheatley’s quote shows why we need shared leadership in schools. One person can not lead schools all by him or herself any longer. This simply does not make the school as effective as it needs to be. I always think of the alternative to shared leadership in schools is a dictatorship because you are left with a one or two people in an authoritarian position to make decisions. This can be a very scary thought depending on who is in this position. Even if this was me, I would not feel comfortable because I do not have all the answers and ideas to run a school as best as I can. I need to rely on those I work with to challenge me, to make me think of things differently, or to come up with new innovations that I would have never thought of or imagined.

Warren Bennis (1997), in his article “The Secrets of Great Groups,” states, “At the heart of every Great Group is a shared dream.” This dream or vision needs to be communicated

throughout the school. The vision needs to be a statement that everyone within the school can take ownership of and work towards achieving. By distributing leadership opportunities, you are providing the opportunity for everyone to become a part of leading this vision forward.

Communication is one of the key components to leadership in schools. Leaders need to connect with the people they work with so that they can communicate affectively with them. This includes also facing controversial topics and difficult conversations. As a leader, I need to welcome conflict to my ideas for change. This resistance helps to fuel thinking about things in a different way and provides a challenge to make sure the changes that are being discussed are thought all the way through. "Often those who resist have something important to tell us. We can be influenced by them. People resist for what they view as good reasons. They see alternatives never dreamed of (Fullan 2001)."

"In all organizations, respecting resistance is essential, because if you ignore it, it is only a matter of time before it takes its toll, perhaps during implementation if not earlier (Fullan 2001)." When you avoid resistance, it does not go away. In fact, I believe it grows stronger. Which is why as a leader, when you are making changes, you need to welcome resistance to your ideas. Otherwise, you are left with a group of people who feel they have no say in the school, which is dangerous because this means they do not have ownership and are disconnected.

"We are more likely to learn something from people who disagree with us than we are from people who agree (Fullan 2001)." This statement is a big part of my philosophy that I am still working on. Before this class, I don't know that I always placed the proper value on the ideas of the people who disagreed with me. I always allowed for resistance to ideas this year. However, I always listened to the resistance, but privately, I saw them more as being obstacles to

overcome than truly allowing them to change my thinking. I know not every resistance will necessarily change my thinking, but the readings from this course have challenged me to be more open to allowing this to happen. I am working on learning to "...listen carefully, dismiss that which arises from ignorance, ignore that which arises from envy or malice, and embrace that which has merit (Hock 2000)." It is difficult because I want to defend my ideas that I am passionate about, but I also need to do this in a way that is not keeping other people from sharing their own ideas.

As a leader, I need to be an active participant when working with the other members of the staff. "Those leaders who have embraced a more participative, self-organizing approach tell of their astonishment. They are overwhelmed by the capacity, energy, creativity, commitment, and even love that they receive from the people in the organization (Wheatley 1997)." This is how you build connections so that you can gain further understanding of the people you work with. "I need to be working alongside a group or individual to learn who they are and what attracts their attention. As we work together, doing real work, meaning always becomes visible (Wheatley 2001)." By actively working with the people you are in charge of leading, you are able to gain a better understanding of who people are and what they think. This puts you in tune with the culture of your school, which is a key component to successfully bringing about change.

"All innovations worth their salt call upon people to question and in some respects change their behavior and their beliefs (Fullan 2001)." This quote is aimed towards the difficult conversations that change brings on. Having innovations is avoiding taking the easy route in schools. Without innovation, everything stays the same. However, this can not happen in schools because our students are not staying the same. They are constantly changing and each year we are faced with more and more challenges. In order to meet these challenges, it falls on

teachers and leaders to innovate to meet the needs of the students. While it may be more comfortable for teachers to sit back and do the same thing year after year, this would not be providing our students with the best education. Leaders need to help bring about or support innovations that will challenge people to questions themselves about what they do and how they can do it better. The goal here is not to do what is easiest for teachers, but to do what is best for student learning.

Another belief I have about leadership is that leaders need to be their “own person, authentic in every regard (George 2004).” Everyone is his or her own person and as a leader, you need to be true to that. Otherwise, I believe you run the risk of being seen as a phony. If you’re seen as being fake, it is hard for people to trust and connect with you. A leader needs to “hone his (or her) style to be effective in leading different types of people to work in different types of environments (George 2004).” This quote means that while you are staying true to yourself and who you are, you also need to develop your leadership so that you can work affectively with the many different types of people you will encounter.

As I continue to grow as a leader, there are still many things for me to learn. To be honest, there always will be things to learn because everyday brings their own challenges. However, as I continue to study and learn through my own practices I am finding that if I stay true to myself and I am open to give people the chance to share their thoughts and opinions, then I will continue to grow. My philosophy that I have stated above is ideas and beliefs that I may not have perfected yet and I probably will never perfect them because I will never be perfect. Which is why it is so important for me to share leadership opportunities with the people around me. Through each of our strengths, we can try to learn from each other to improve on our weaknesses, so that ultimately our students receive the best possible education.

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