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ED611 Leading to Learn in a Changing Digital Age
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Final Paper

What an amazing two weeks this has been! Every day I leave our class session feeling both energized and overwhelmed at the same time, which is to be expected given the volume of content we have been processing with the concurrent Digital Age and Governance classes. Personally, I appreciated the intermixing and intensity of the summer session. It was like watching a series on Netflix. If I were to watch one episode in the series each week, I would get the big rocks that were made evident in the storyline or I would be entertained by characters I found amusing; however, it isn't until you sit down and watch an entire series back-to-back in a service like Netflix that you glean the nuances of the character development. The storyline is even more clever as it builds and unfolds in front of you without the distraction of everyday life and a week between classes... I mean episodes. Just as I enjoy watching an entire series with minimal interruptions from life, I also enjoyed our intense summer classes. Similar to how the content evolved in front of us, the members of our cohort evolved in our ability to know the heart of what makes each of us so unique and so valuable to the whole cohort.

Speaking of a storyline... as clearly pointed out in Kotter's *Our Iceberg Is Melting* book, the art of storytelling cannot be separated from the actions that effective leaders must take to move a system. Storytellers come in the form of people as well as visual reminders that communicate the new vision. It is my job to make sure that the obstacles to change are removed, and that each person in the process feels empowered. As I reflect on Kotter's wisdom about how to lead through change, I found a lot of inspiration to help me lead from a 90% proficiency with the integration of digital tools into the learning and teaching process to where we need to be to truly transform the culture of learning in our district.

Being at 90% proficiency, as measured on an assessment of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Teachers, I must create a sense of urgency, as 90% leaves

us with some novel and meaningful uses of digital tools (e.g., 2nd graders using Minecraft as a vehicle to learn from Elders about Tlingit traditions and values) combined with a lot of teachers replacing didactic teaching methods using digital resources instead of the analog ones previously used (e.g., electronic whiteboard vs. whiteboard). The vision I see is consistent with what Sheninger shared about Ken Kay's research extending the work from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. Specifically, that we must transform our classrooms to be aligned with the 4C's – Creativity, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Collaboration, which are the essential skills necessary for this century that students will graduate into. The urgency for Sitka is that our graduation rate, despite small class sizes and 90% proficiency, is 74%.

Kotter also identifies carefully selecting a group to be in charge of the change, which was a common theme we discussed in our leadership quotes in that a leader should not be in front alone. At first I thought about our district's Technology Committee as the group, but as I read further in our class text, I realized that I must create a new ad hoc group just for this purpose. I have my players in mind, and I know that they will be willing to be part of the process; an advantage of being in Sitka long-term. Even though discussions with the ad hoc group will be needed, I have seen their work with students and know that we share a sensible vision of a better future, which is Kotter's third step to change.

To address Kotter's fourth element needed, communicating a vision so others understand and accept it, will be made easier for our ad hoc group because the school board has already identified a need to increase our graduation rate, as evidenced in a school board goal to increase our graduation rate to at least 95%. Additionally, our strategic planning process takes two school board goals and identifies Action Research questions that can help us accomplish the identified school board goals. Action Research projects are then developed and implemented to help achieve and measure progress towards the identified school board goal. The school board goal of increasing graduation rate was selected through a stakeholder process of being one of our two Action Research projects for the coming year. Our project is to look at the school culture and make sure it is not only welcoming but also

challenging for our students. We have a number of district initiatives that support this look into culture and rigor, including Restorative Justice, Social Emotional Learning, STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math projects, and Arts, Culture, and Technology (ACT) Standards and Curriculum. The pieces are in play, but we must communicate a coherent vision that brings all of the pieces together. Our Action Research project around increasing our graduation rate will help us to identify and remove the obstacles to action, which is Kotter's fifth step to change a system, as that is the heart of the Action Research projects each school will be implementing in the coming school year. In our communication plans, I will keep in mind Sheninger's pillars around branding, communication, and public relations, as these will be foundational to sharing our successes throughout our community.

I want to take a moment to reflect on Kotter's step six, which is to create a quick success. Six years ago, the Sitka School District did not have a wireless network, it took 20-minutes for students at the middle school to log into the school server, students at the high school that wanted to print from a district computer had to get the librarian if in the Library or a teacher if in a classroom to authenticate during the printing process, and a brand new lab of computers at the elementary school sat unused because there were not shared folders set up to foster access to student work beyond keeping it on an individual computer in the lab. Needless to say, teachers did not rely on using digital tools in the process of learning. It was students who went to the school board and shared their concern that they were not being prepared for *their* future given the state of technology throughout the district, and I say technology because it was all focused on the hardware not working at this point in time. The school board listened and responded appropriately. Within two years from that initial awareness of the reality or shall I say lack of reality of learning with the benefit of digital access, teachers became 90% proficient in their use of digital tools to inspire deep learning in their classroom. How did this happen you may wonder? It was because we created a short-term success that helped us to show what we meant about the value of a digital-rich learning environment. Suddenly, the conversations were not only around the

dinner tables because the students were so excited but also teachers down the hall realized the value that digital learning afforded their students, and students and parents started demanding full access to this transformed learning and teaching environment. We then provided an opportunity and expectation – during the work day – for each teacher to be part of a Professional Learning Community around the use of digital tools to enhance student learning. We will create short-term wins in our planning.

Kotter's seventh step in the change process is to ensure that there is no sliding back until the new way of life is firmly established, and the eighth step is to ensure that traditions don't overcome the positive change. Given that our cave – the need to increase graduation rate – is a school board goal and even further is a strategic plan Action Research project, I want to say that these steps are a given. However, I will say that to ensure continued success we need two things in place. First, we need to have digital devices readily available whenever they enhance the learning process. Typically, districts start 1:1 projects to achieve this goal. We have evaluated our readiness for a 1:1 and found us lacking for two reasons – we don't have broadband Internet at home for all students and especially for students who are low income. The second reason we are lacking in readiness for a 1:1 is aligned with the second reason we need to ensure continued success in that we need more professional development for teachers in how to restructure learning in their classroom given the benefits and affordances of having ready access to digital tools to meaningfully increase student learning of content. In my first year as superintendent I was able to re-work our district calendar so that next year we will double the professional development opportunities for our teachers (moving from 6 to 12 days of inservice), which will allow us to imbed professional development in district initiatives into the work day for all teachers. We are positioned for change, and by implementing Kotter's eight steps in the change process we will grow beyond our 90% proficiency regarding the true integration of inquiry-based learning throughout the district, which can only be achieved in today's world by using digital tools in a manner that extends and enhances student learning of content so that at least 95% of our students graduate.

Other learning this summer that has been meaningful to me include the reflection through Fullen's secrets coupled our leadership quote discussions and the Kouzes and Posner five practices to honor others always. The information about how to build better relations with my school board members and the presentations about important laws that I am responsible to implement will undoubtedly contribute to my successes as a superintendent, whatever they may be. That being said, the area where I have grown most as a leader this summer is due to the ethics case studies, and my reflection on our ethics case studies discussions. Integrity is a character value that cannot be understated in the success of a superintendent. Acting in a way that is always focused on the best ethical decision possible will be a hallmark of my superintendency. Why do I know this for sure? Because I had the benefit of studying and reflecting on the various ethical lenses, and I have gained skills that will inform my decision-making process to honor student and staff diversity always.