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Final Paper
ED593 Orientation to Superintendency

“Courage is the most important of all virtues, because without courage you can’t practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.”

- Maya Angelou

Leadership in the single seat of superintendent requires that I be courageous. The articulation, empowerment, and inspiration that comes from this knowledge is one of my most profound learnings from the *Orientation to Superintendency* course. By courage, I mean being an active listener even if others around me are shouting from fear; courage means trusting the strength of my convictions to make decisions and do what I feel to be right because sometimes that is all I will have given that the superintendent role is firmly situated in the pool of ambiguity; courage means growing in areas where I have weaknesses because I cannot be an effective superintendent with a weak area of knowledge or skill; courage means under promising and over delivering instead of saying the easy response that cannot be realized; courage means being gracious in the face of inconsiderateness or mis-information; courage means picking my battles and manner of response, which means keeping my emotions always in check; and courage means always focusing on what is right and best for students and their learning.

The knowledge that courageous thoughts and actions are not only needed but are fundamental to my success in my new role as Superintendent of the Sitka School District is significant. Like the air I breathe to sustain life, courageous actions are needed to sustain success as superintendent. It is not that I haven’t had awareness of this reality before; however, the activities associated with this class have helped me to solidify the role that courage plays in being an effective leader, and that in turn helps to prepare my mind for the reality of what being an effective superintendent will ask of me as a person.

In addition to all the ways that I need to act courageously as a superintendent, courageous action is needed for schools to improve. Jack Jennings in our Fieldbook (Harvey, Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, and Koff, 2013) shared that “school reform has not been bold enough or comprehensive enough to substantially improve public education” (p. 4). If we really want to improve education, we need to focus on improving it from within the field instead of allowing initiatives or individuals outside of education dictate how learning and teaching should occur, which will take courageous action on the part of many especially given this moment of transition to new expectations and new opportunities.

As I reflect on some of the challenges before me, acting courageously when it comes to being an effective advocate for public education surfaces as an action item. If we want educators to help improve education, then I need to make sure that we are doing everything within our power to share our stories of success and to advocate for public education with local, state, and national policy-makers with a focus on being seen as credible, which includes efficient and effective management of resources to ensure student success. I have extensive experience advocating at the national level; however, advocating at the local and state level feels much more personal and thus much more requiring of courageous actions.

Another significant learning from the course is in regards to Gareth Morgan’s metaphors about organizational development. I have visited and re-visited the list of metaphors or images shared in our Fieldbook (Harvey et al., 2013) to not only think about where I see the Sitka School District today, but the metaphor I want to create within the district. Today I see Sitka as Morgan’s Emerging Image of Culture. We have experienced many successes with Culture as our metaphor, and the only thing missing has been the actual crafting of our story, which simply hasn’t happen. We have stories, legends, and myths that create our Culture but they have not been documented by design or shared with the whole of the community. Because we are missing the intentional documentation of our stories, different parts of our community have different stories to tell, and they don’t all reflect the same learnings and

challenges. My goal is to create stories that include the richness of voices from our community and where we are all characters in the same story learning and growing together.

I plan to make the telling of our story a primary focus of my superintendency for this first year. At the same time, I want to breed innovation within the district to grow us into a Brain metaphor, as I feel that this Emerging Image articulated by Morgan will best help us meet today's challenges while also best preparing us for our future. Additionally, the Brain metaphor aligns well with my Transformational Leadership style, and the type of leadership team I hope to cultivate.

The learning activities associated with this class have created in me a sense of urgency around the need to tell our stories. During the superintendent interview process I articulated the need to tell our stories as a missing component in our current work, but now I understand why this is so critical. Not only is the deliberate telling of our stories essential to complete our current Culture metaphor, but without a story to build upon it will be more challenging to realize the Brain metaphor; I want a functioning Brain where the different systems work together instead of a Brain where seizures and misfirings interfere with normal functioning. Additionally, I can now clearly see why different parts of the community have such different stories to tell about the process of schooling in the Sitka School District.

The Brain as a metaphor or image is helping me to solidify where to put my efforts as superintendent. One of the emotions I experienced when I first sat in this single seat in my new corner office is that of unlimited options and potential. Although I appreciate the value of chaos, I also know that I lead best when there is a structure upon which to embrace the chaos. My goal is to be an effective superintendent that helps to improve student learning, and to realize this goal an integrated web of information and decision-making that is guided by core values will be a structure that can help to extend our insight and the effectiveness of our work. I plan to share the Brain metaphor with my Admin Team so they understand their role in the process of learning and teaching in the Sitka School District, as well as help to build the innovation and flexible learning environments we will craft.

I want to circle back to advocacy, storytelling, and innovation. One of the reasons I chose to become a superintendent is to have an amplified voice in promoting public education. In our Fieldbook (Harvey et al., 2013), Jack Jennings spoke about the need to have big ideas to realize broad improvements in education not only to improve education in ways that start within the sphere of educators, but also so we can advocate that equal educational opportunity should be a civil right for all students. Advocacy, storytelling, and innovation are all areas that I am passionate about, and areas that have been interrelated in my thoughts and actions for many years; however, the reflection regarding the civil rights aspect to education has created a call to action within me. Prior to this class, my focus was on ensuring equity in educational opportunity for all – regardless of financial means and opportunity. To me, this has meant ensuring that every child has opportunities to learn in a manner and with content that prepares them for their future, and not just students in classes where teachers want to embrace digital learning tools or new instructional practices, for example, but every classroom and every student. Now I know this is not just about equity, but about a civil right.

I choose to have the courage to lead my district in a way that fosters innovation and broad improvements to the process of learning and teaching and ultimately student success for all, and then to be able to craft the story and use it as a vehicle to advocate for the civil right of a public education. This is my calling, and this class has helped me to bring various pieces of the puzzle together in a way that empowers and instills action within me. And to top it off, the implementation of the essential learnings from this class will help me demonstrate mastery of each of the 2011 ELCC District Level Standards!

Reference

Harvey, J., Cambron-McCabe, N., Cunningham, L. L., and Koff, R. H. (2013). *The superintendent's fieldbook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.