

My Philosophy of Educational Leadership

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The word philosophy is uniquely suited for education leadership. The word philosophy comes from the Greek word φιλοσοφία, which is a combination Philos (φιλία) and Sophia (σοφία), meaning love and wisdom respectively. When joined, the word philosophy is the love of wisdom. To me, the very word philosophy is in itself a one word philosophy of education. My philosophy of educational leadership consists of 3 parts; having a love of wisdom or knowledge, sharing that love of knowledge and using wisdom to lead.

Among my friends, I have long been known as a random facts guy. The type of person who might be good on the TV show “Jeopardy” but true knowledge is not about trivia. Having a love of knowledge is based around personal growth, collaboration, improving practices and learning for the past.

In my life, I have often driven myself towards personal growth. I remember back as far as fourth grade when, unsatisfied with the amount of time spent on science in the classroom, I asked for a parent-teacher meeting to discuss how I could continue those studies outside of the classroom. To this day, though I am slow reader, I am an enthusiastic reader. I read scholarly articles to gain insight into my profession and literature to gain insight into the soul.

Growth is not truly possible unless you are willing to apply your new knowledge as well as share the process with colleagues. Our school recently completed a reaccreditation process that started with a reevaluation of our mission and goals. As I read Robert D. Ramsey’s book *Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way* (2006), I could not help but feel that we were missing something.

In Chapter 2, Ramsey discusses planning for the future and the visioning process. I realized that our school had never established commonly held beliefs. Ramsey’s statement that “all organizations

(including schools) become what they believe,” (Ramsey, 2006, Chapter 2, “How Effective School Leaders Use the Visioning Process”, Para. 10) struck a nerve with me and I brought it to my principal. From there, a collaborative process was started to discover just what it was that drove our school and what was most valued and prized within our organization. This exemplifies the progressive nature of knowledge. Knowledge is not a static entity but something that changes over time as it grows and incorporate new people and information.

The Teacher Leader Model Standards offer a set of 7 domains to guild educational leadership (Teacher Leadership, 2011). Domains 2-Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning and 5-Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement, relate to the need of all educators to show a love for knowledge and wisdom. Domain 2 shows us that the growth of knowledge is a communal process that requires the support of the school as a collective. In a school setting, this growth is accomplished through the collection of assessment data and a dedication to the correct interpretation of that data. Though this is linked to the functions of Domain 2, it truly shines in Domain 5, where not only must the data be interpreted, the findings of the assessments should be used to promote positive change in instructional practices.

Knowledge is useless in a vacuum. As we seek and acquire knowledge, we must also seek to share that experience. Going back to philosophy as “the love of wisdom,” it goes hand in hand with the sharing of that love and passing it to others. Education is not about passing pieces of information onto the students. It is about passing a torch to the next generation of knowledge seekers.

As educators, it is our job to facilitate the learning process in our students, whether those students are children in our classroom or peers in a professional development session. The best way for teachers to help learners is to give them a mental framework within which they can create and refine the learning process. I like the 4 phases laid out by Fisher and Frey in their book *Better Learning through Structured Teaching* (2014). First teachers focus the learning process; using direct instruction to establish learning

expectations, model thinking and encourage metacognitive awareness. From there, teachers can move into guided instruction. Guided instruction looks very different from direct instruction. Students are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process so that they are ready to take on the learning process individually. This looks like a lot of questioning, prompting and cues from the teachers. This progresses into a collaborative learning period where students work towards further understanding with their peers. Finally, the model ends with a period of independent learning where students apply what they have been taught to cement the knowledge. Often this is summarized (from the perspective of the teacher) as “I do, we do, you do (collectively) and you do (independently).”

This model of learning can be applied to all types of learning and helps to establish a schema in each learner that allows them to be increasingly independent in their learning and institute a practice of lifelong learning. This leads me into a second and integral piece of sharing the love of knowledge. The torch cannot be passed if the learners are unwilling to participate. In order for education to be successful, a culture of learning must be created with buy-in for every member from the students to the teachers to administrators to support staff.

A large part of that is a non-punitive atmosphere. Everyone needs to have the chance to practice and experiment in order to improve, before being evaluated on that work. "We don't score practices. We score real games...Practice doesn't make perfect; practice makes permanent. So we'd better be sure students practice things that build the habits we're looking for." (Fisher, 2011, para. 6) I would go even further and say that we as educators must practice the habits that we are looking for. That is done when the leaders of the learning community establish a culture where practicing for improvement is encouraged not punished. Tiger Woods did not wake up one morning and decide to win the Masters. He practiced daily for hours and hours in bunkers and sand traps. We all must do the same with our profession.

This part of my philosophy relates back to the Teacher Leader Model Standard, Domains 4, 6, and 7 are integrated in to the model of continuous improvement through practice, community building and advocating for the students and peers (Teacher Leadership, 2010).

The final fundamental piece of my leadership philosophy is using wisdom to lead. Obviously no one believes that leadership should be done through irrationality but that does not mean that wisdom is constantly a part of everyone's leadership.

The domains of the model encourage a leader to be guided by wisdom, particularly domains 1, 3 and 7 (Teacher Leadership, 2010). I consider it wise to utilize groups to collaborate on problems in order to form intelligent and prudent decisions. Multiple domains in the model discuss the need to understand and accept the differences that stem from people's backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and socio-economic status. An open mind is crucial in instituting and fostering a trusting environment where progress can be made. In the international setting where I work, I see this as more important than almost anything else in my philosophy.

To keep leadership accountable to the collective wisdom of society, Ramsey says that leaders must constantly seek feedback and input from students, faculty, colleagues and community members (Ramsey 2006). That said, leaders also need to have the wisdom to understand when decisions need to be made unilaterally. Leaders need to understand that a school cannot run by a direct democracy or else it will become gridlocked with indecision and uncertainty that will destroy the learning environment. Participation should be sought but in the end, a leader must have the strength to take responsibility for the school and make the decisions.

The love of wisdom is a powerful philosophy that should be a guiding force for everyone in the educational community. We must seek out wisdom from sources, both conventional and alternative, share the wisdom we find with our peers and students and use our wisdom to guide and structure our actions.

References

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