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ELHE 7708.02 Instructional Leadership

My Instructional Vision

As someone who has moved from the brick-and-mortar school community to a virtual private tutoring role, my instructional vision has already seen many iterations over just several years. My practical experiences as an educator have shown me how often mission and vision can get lost in application. I do not have much background in education but rather the technical background of my teaching subjects. As such, I did not start teaching with any type of foundational belief system, which caused some chaos at the start. I leaned into my intuition and strove to individualize where possible. COVID threw a wrench in those gears, and my ability to connect through a screen to help students learn grew enormously. While the pandemic forced nearly all of us to reevaluate priorities, goals, and personal belief systems, it primarily encouraged me to leave my tutoring center and venture out on my own, working as a private teacher and tutor. Reflecting on my progress and growth as an educator over the past six years, I have developed several beliefs about schools, curriculum, and how teachers and students interact that now govern my current vision.

Teaching in a variety of educational settings has caused me to seriously reflect on the nature and purpose of education. I firmly believe that the role of formal education within schools is to create and serve lifelong learners. I am inspired by the seminal works of Dewey and agree that education is twofold: it occurs both in the classroom and out in the student's community. Therefore, "school must represent present life" (Dewey, 1925). I believe that education should be as personalized and individualized as possible. Theory and research have shown that the ideal learning environment is an individual one-one-one tutoring arrangement (Bloom 1984, Guskey 2015). When dealing with larger classroom sizes due to the nature of conventional schooling, I

believe in finding ways to transfer the crucial elements that are successful in this method to group-based classroom settings, as illustrated in Guskey's 2015 article on Mastery Learning.

The biggest takeaway I had gleaned from being educated at the turn of the century and now teaching in the 21st century is that the world is constantly evolving, in many ways faster than we can adjust. As such, education is no longer a means to educate the workforce to be ready for labor, like a popular "factory" analogy used in the early 1900s (Schlechty, 1990). I can again agree with Dewey's idealistic vision for what education looks like:

> "It is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions. To prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command, that his judgment may be capable of grasping the conditions under which it has to work, and the executive forces be trained to act economically and efficiently" (Dewey, 1925)

In other words, I need to be flexible and adaptable as both my students and my educational staff that I work with grow and evolve in our understanding of the needs of 21st-century students. The educational outcomes of students reflect what their worlds require of them. We need to provide our students with cross-disciplinary skills and analysis tools that will serve their future problem-solving needs. In their article on the relevance of emotion to learning, Immordino-Yang and Damasio express a thought that encapsulates this sentiment – "I believe the chief purpose of education is to cultivate children's building of repertoires of cognitive and behavioral strategies and options, helping them to recognize the complexity of situations and to respond in increasingly flexible, sophisticated, and creative ways" (Immordino-Yang, 2007).

When it comes to the specifics of what students are educated in and how they learn their knowledge, I believe that the design of curriculum is grounded in scientific principles. There should be open communication between researchers and educational practitioners with respect to ideas and findings in order to design programs more optimally, as argued by Daniel in his 2012 article. I also feel the curriculum should be guided by education and research into neurocognition and psychology. This view has been supported by theorists and professionals such as Bobbit, Hardiman, and Roediger. Hardiman based her entire Brain-Targeted Teaching (BTT) model on researched scientific principles behind the brain and learning mechanisms (Hardiman, 2012). I am bolstered by Roediger's article which yields several inexpensive techniques utilizing cognitive psychology to improve education, which makes practical sense in a world where funding for education is surprisingly hard to come by (Roediger, 2012).

One such researched takeaway that has recently changed my outlook is learning about the neuromyth of individualized learning style. I had heard of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and how some educators took the application of it to mean they should find a student's preferred learning style and use that exclusively where possible. By leaning into the most current research, I found this to be a false technique that does not improve learning outcomes (Rogowsky et al., 2020). Instead, educators should utilize multiple dimensions of learning for all. Additionally, the role of embodied cognition has inspired me to incorporate movement and physicality where possible (Fugate et al., 2019). Employing metacognitive knowledge as illustrated by Krathwohl et al in 2002 is important to allow students to reflect on their own growth, a key component for a growth mindset and development of grit. To round out the curriculum, I believe in the success of mastery learning, as explained by Guskey in their article appropriately named, and championed by Dr. Hardiman in her book on the BTT model

(Hardiman, 2012). Mastery learning allows for significant adaptability to the student's skills and goals and has been shown to have superiority over traditional methods of instruction (Guskey 2015). I believe that using these principles, learning environments can be both supportive and challenging.

A crucial part of curriculum design and implementation, I believe, addresses the "hidden curriculum" (Jackson, 1990). School is very much a social institution, and students often find themselves navigating situations that require "soft" or social skills. Sometimes these rules are centered in roles and aspects of power and some students do not come to school equipped with these instructions provided by their home lives (Delpit, 1988). Since many rules of proper behavior at school may be rooted in unintentional biases, I believe it is important for a leader to be aware of how the rules of behavior, power, and culture play a hidden role in what students observe and reproduce.

I believe the best leaders emphasize camaraderie and teamwork, and this can be displayed on micro levels in the classroom and macro levels within districts and communities. Group work within the classroom can be encouraged when staff members show group decision making and collaboration. Similarly, the best principals "share leadership with their teams," encouraging buy-in on a personal level (The Qualities of a great principal). Also shared among a strong team are goals and a unified vision. When a vision is strong, it can lead to a well-defined mission for the entire organization.

Speaking of a mission, my educational values have evolved into a more substantial mission behind my work. Howard Gardner noted that "education always involves cultural values" (Gardner). Besides the obvious hope that I impart technical mathematics and science knowledge to my students, I strive to ensure I approach each class with cultural competency and

understanding. The majority of my students are non-White while I am a White teacher socialized in a very Eurocentric background. I believe leaders should strive to understand the role of culture in the learning process in order to avoid "subtracting resources from youth" (Valenzuela). Understanding the differences in background can only make for a more accepting and emotionally comfortable environment, which has been proven to enhance learning (Hardiman, 2012). Regardless of national origin or sexuality and gender identity, I believe in establishing a climate with each student of care. Research has illustrated in detail the effect that caring relations can have upon motivation and learning outcomes for students (Valenzuela). By opening my classroom for true acceptance and inclusion of unique individual differences, I can also create a safe space for my LGBTQ students, as "leaders must ensure the protection and care of these individuals" (Hernandez & Fraynd).

Last but certainly not least is the compassion required for any leader when understanding how trauma may affect the learner. We know now that trauma has a significant effect on one's ability to learn (Carrion & Wong, 2012). By addressing the emotional needs of my students, I believe I open the door to allow for true learning to occur where it otherwise might not (Immordino-Yang, 2007). By regularly performing equity audits I believe I can be best attuned to the need for alternate approaches in order to address opportunity gaps. (Hernandez & Fraynd). Milner expresses his mutual belief for the importance of equity audits, as they provide "an inventory for opportunity gaps inherent in the local system" as well to "train staff in ways to overcome/dismantle these gaps" (Milner, 2010). This can be summed up best in the words of Lisa Delpit from her book Silenced Dialogue: "I believe in a diversity of style, and I believe the world will be diminished if cultural diversity is ever obliterated…I further believe that to act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same" (Delpit, 1988).

Ultimately, Gardener tells us, “There is no good education or bad education. It all depends on what you want to achieve, how, over which time period, and at what costs” (2020). I believe in the holistic well-being of the student and that this should be at the core of what we do as educators. As such, my vision for what I want to bring to education as a leader includes strong content-based instruction consistently through researched techniques along with an accepting collaborative community that values each individual participant.

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