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Reflections on travels through the Odyssey

"The teaching profession must become a better learning profession" (Caillier, 2008 p 2)

This quote from Fullan has been playing in the back of my mind since I stepped foot onto the High Tech High campus last week for the first time. In Caillier's article, she explains High Tech High's approach to training teacher and school leaders in a manner that challenges traditional programs. In other educational on-boardings that I've experienced the professional development for new staff has felt more like a request to conform and implement rather than experiment, question and reflect. I'd say that after spending a week in intensive sessions that frame the work we'll be doing this year I've seen the beginning proof that the HTH Graduate School of Education is one of reflection, research and action.

I continue to be energized by the discussion of the teacher as an innovator and designer rather than a mere "implementer" (Caillier, 2008 p. 2). If our schools are to prepare students to be critical thinkers, educators must also be exhibiting a constant display of inquiry and reflection themselves. Stacey Caillier's article challenges the traditional perception of research as an isolating' process. She continues in saying that research is often turned in to a professor or placed on a shelf " and explains, "we have chosen to make action research the backbone of our M.Ed. programs precisely because it challenges the distinctions between theory and practice, between knower and doer." I'm excited to take part in a program that promotes a model of teacher learning that mimics what we know works well for students. In the following paragraphs I will be reflecting on my observations and how they relate to the literature we read prior to arriving to the Odyssey.

Power of Observation

One observation that persisted throughout my week at Odyssey was the importance placed on inquiry and reflection. In reading the articles on Practicing Thoughtful Inquiry and Reflection prior to visiting High Tech High I really only focused on the idea of research and data collection. It is interesting now that after the Odyssey I realize that the reflection piece is actually the more transformative piece. Every day and nearly every hour of the Odyssey participants were asked to reflect. The reflection at first seemed a little extreme I have to say because it felt a little unfamiliar, I've never really been given much time in a professional setting to stop and think. I assume most of my prior bosses would consider this a waste of time. Yet the reflection piece, something I admittedly underestimated as a powerful learning tool prior to the Odyssey, became one of the more transformational pieces for me. Once I began to experience the many and frequent opportunities to reflect I started becoming more comfortable with reflection and towards the end I was able to use the reflection time more productively. Through observing very intentional and planned reflection time I was able to understand the value the HTH placed on

being a reflective practitioner and through experience I can say I actually came to value it more myself.

The real value placed on inquiry and reflection has been evident throughout the Core Values class and has been the most important and challenging part of this onboarding experience. I've observed reflection modeled very intentionally and frequently in various aspects of the course and realize the true value HTH GSE puts on reflection based on the amount of time dedicated to it. We have reflected whole-group, individually, amongst critical friends, and with partners. The reflections have been both in written responses to our critical friend's reader responses and in discourse throughout the class. Honest and thorough reflection has been the most challenging yet most transformational piece throughout the Odyssey experience so far. I believe reflection didn't stick out to me when first doing the readings because of the lack of importance placed on reflection at my previous workplace. Though I am very used to reflecting often upon my practices as a teacher this is generally an inner dialogue and in the past rarely did I take the opportunity to put the reflection to paper or present my reflections to others. In talking and writing about my reflections I have learned that there is indeed value in sharing one's' perspectives and experiences. Not only does the person reflecting get a chance to work through their thoughts but in experiencing the power of sharing reflections I was able to gain perspective about other's reflections that were applicable to my own. This practice also allowed me to gain more peace of mind as I realized I was not the only one experiencing certain emotions. I've observed that reflection is an integral part of the work that we will do this year in order to build a more conscious practice of meaningful dialogue and intentionality in our work

In my reader's reflection on the topic of Practice thoughtful Inquiry and Reflection, I mentioned how energizing I found Stacey Caillier's explanation of High Tech High's approach to training teachers through action-research. The idea of important research being "placed on a shelf" is similar to my experience of how data was used at my previous school. Data was required and collected on a regular basis but a careful analysis and discussion of what the data said about our teaching was not the cultural norm for our school. I found the focus to be more about mere collection of numbers rather than whether we earnestly assessed what our students were learning or how well we were teaching them. I agree with Caillier's assertion that an effective culture of action research in which theory and practice are no longer possible to separate can transform schools (Caillier, 2008). Such a model wouldn't be possible without reflection and inquiry. Over the past week, I've observed reflection playing a key role in both the activities organized by the Graduate School at High Tech High as well as the broader activities within the Odyssey itself. The culture of reflection and inquiry has proven to be more than rhetoric as I've witnessed the often intense use of reflection to drive home the lessons from Odyssey experiences. While I'm saddened that an educational approach as intuitive as this has become so apparently revolutionary in teacher education I'm also excited to see how my modeling of reflection and inquiry can shift my practice in the classroom.

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Practices: I learned

I was intrigued by all of the articles within the category of designing equitable learning environments. I found agreement in the fact that designing an equitable learning environment for most authors drew on validating the experiences that students bring to the classroom and using the reflection of their experiences to push the depth of learning. Riordan (1998) explains the design of an equitable learning environment as focusing on how "... practice puts students--their observations, their actions, their reflections--at the center of learning. It places teachers and students together in the position of inquirers, requiring them to share questions and authority" (p. 2). Similarly Mehta and Fine (2012) explain that, "The teacher's primary task becomes helping students explore the unknown, leaving behind the security and certainty of being the one who defines the questions and knows the answers." (p. 34). In both Riordan and Mehta and Fine's articles the equity in learning experiences comes from the educator validating the various experiences of each student and using this as a jumping off point in order to inspire deep learning.

The common thread each student brings to the classroom regardless of their background is their own experience. There is no need for the teacher to search far and wide for relevant topics when each student brings their own to the classroom. There is however a method to how a teacher can implement an equitable way to maintain structure and insure that each student's voice is heard. This topic came about in a reading within the topic of Engage in Leadership for School Change yet I find it quite relevant in the process of designing an equitable classroom from which a teacher wants to draw on the various experiences and opinions each student brings. In McDonald's Chapter 1 (2007) of *The Power of Protocol* protocols become the platform from which equity may be achieved as it allows both students and staff to voice their experiences in a safe place. I've learned through the modeling of both the Odyssey and the Core Values course that protocols are a great equalizer. In a non-threatening way the simple act of following a guide for speaking becomes a tool for equity in the classroom.

 The combination of readings along with experience of the Odyssey allowed me various opportunities and experiences to use protocols which allowed me to experience the strength of the protocol beyond the reading. Though the readings on protocol as a tool for equity in the classroom were insightful, I believe the use of protocols throughout the Odyssey truly allowed me to understand their power. Through observation and participation I was able to truly connect protocols with equity as I watched everyone in my group have a voice I realized I heard so many ideas that I wouldn't have if it weren't for the protocol. Both the readings on protocol and the experience of protocols during the Odyssey transformed my perception of protocols which used to feel forced and inflexible to me. Prior to the Odyssey I had only experienced protocols in PD sessions in which the presenter themselves couldn't explain what the purpose of the protocol was. In the few chances I had worked with a protocol the person presenting the protocol didn't require the use of the protocol and furthermore didn't explain that by using protocols we give

everyone the chance to be heard and to listen. I believe in the power of protocol after my Odyssey experience as well as the pre-readings and I feel relieved to know that I may go forth and use protocols unapologetically. I aspire to use protocols in my classroom for this purpose and in doing so I know that they "why" behind using a protocol should explicitly be stated in order to capture the protocol's ability to equalize.

Dialogue: I aspire to engage in

   Delpit offers part of a solution to some of the disparities in the educational system in her discussion of opening up a dialogue. She describes how to begin dialogue that is essential amongst educators if we are to incorporate the experience of all students and educators in its solution. In the article Delpit struggles with the "progressive" vs "traditionally" trained teachers and suggests,

> I suggest, instead, that there is much to be gained from the interaction of the two orientations and that advocates of both approaches have something to say to each other. I further suggest that it is the responsibility of the dominant group members to attempt to hear the other side of the issue; and after hearing, to speak in a modified voice that does not exclude the concerns of their minority colleagues. (2007)

This, is Delpit's request of a call to action in the form of dialogue, in which sincere listening and authentic dialog from a diverse group of educators is necessary. I believe this is the jumping off point. I'd hope that this discussion not ask what specific programs work for whom but instead why project-based learning approaches, done well, are an equitable solution to how we motivate and push each student. In a project, the mere motivation of creating, designing and exhibiting one's work may help to push students to their best level rather than one standardized level that may be too simple for some and too difficult for others.

   I'm inspired by the tone Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) take in discussing the "new wave" of leaders emerging that are challenging the status quo of what a leader is and how a leader effects positive change in schools. Mackenzie and Ackerman (2006) note this change as "more teachers lead informally by revealing their classroom practice, sharing their expertise, asking questions of colleagues, mentoring new teachers, and modeling how teachers collaborate on issues of practice." Inherently, this shift challenges the hierarchy that is generally formed in a traditional model of school leadership. This new trend is also challenging the notion of such a leader needing to leave the classroom to make such changes. While Ackerman and Mackenzie discuss the positive motions towards school leadership change they also discuss the obstacles that this new leadership is faced with as relics of the traditionally hierarchical and isolating (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006) form of leadership get pushed aside. "By surfacing tensions between the school's mission and its actual practices, teacher leaders can also discomfort colleagues and threaten administrators and teachers alike" (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006). The

article goes on to recommend that the teachers interested in making change within veteran staff avoid the "bulldozer" (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006) approach and instead that they adopt leadership skills that acknowledge previous work and build on good intentions that veteran teachers have. Ackerman and Mackenzie call this approach nudging rather than bulldozing.

I'm struck by Julian Weissglass's (1990) discussion on the impact that constructivist listening may have on a school. In 2015, most educators should be familiar with the notion that until you address the social-emotional aspects of a student other academic goals may not be reached, yet Weissglass brings up the social-emotional aspects of teachers and the impacts that they may have on a school culture (p. 351). Weissglass offers, "the depth of the relationship between feelings and educational change is rarely acknowledged by most educators" (p. 351). Weissglass mentions that the point is missed as school reform literature and critique focuses on, "teacher's knowledge or behavior, ignoring the fact that teaching and learning are done by persons with unique histories, feelings, understandings, and needs" . I'm struck by the fact that discussion on a student's social-emotional well-being is now quite commonplace and familiar to me, yet the real discussion on a teacher's social-emotional well-being rarely becomes part of the discussion. I find this oversight by school leadership ironic yet one that has a great impact on the effectiveness a leader. Weissglass offers that this lack of emotional support for educators is one factor inhibiting successful educational reform.

In many of the readings we've read for the various topics throughout this class I'm struck by the apparent inability of our educational structures to do what they preach. I believe the oversight of addressing an educator's emotional needs is a great example of this. It makes me wonder, while most educators will agree that social emotional development is essential in educating the "whole kid" how are we forgetting this aspect when it comes to leading adults? Given this,what other, very significant approaches are missing in leading adults? How can those engaged in education reform and discussion pause to reflect on why we apply and recommend certain conscientiousness for students and then completely ignore it for adults? In the end, aren't our schools developing both adults and students?

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