**Day 1 First Thoughts**

As one sets out to read and reflect on “Walk Out Walk On”, for the third time, I find myself reading it this time amid a new world context, and as such I saw myself connecting the first chapter in different ways then I did the first time. The poem on page 2 for example, is so profound right now, given the change in how we as a society are being encouraged/ forced to participate with each other. As I reread the book, we are in a reality where we are truly being pushed to see things different, where we are “no longer expecting relationships, memories, words, or letters to mean what they used to mean.” We are truly immersed in a reality where we need to be open to change, not be closed off – because we have to change, we have to adapt, we have to move forward.

Now more than ever, educators have to walk out of the doubt and the questions of darkness and take a leap of faith shrouded in hope. We need to brace each other and build community in order to learn, grow and contribute in this new scenario we are navigating together, not alone. Those who try to go alone will find it harder to find the light, for individualism is the wrong response, when we have collectively been called to stay home and navigate a new normal. The most interesting part will be how we rebound on the other side. Will we continue to walk forward, or will we revert back to the old and familiar? Will we be able to return to what was? Will we want to?

***“All systems go through life cycles”(Wheatley & Frieze, 2011, p. 10).***

We are in a unique uncharted place within society and in education right now. Resistors to change quickly, we are having to work together, to make the choice to move forward, to embrace what is, at a speed of processing that does not work for everyone. It’s interesting, because there has been a call to modernize education for a while. I am left pondering, can we view this pandemic as catalyst the system needs? An opportunity to see what we truly miss and what we truly no longer need? I believe the landscape of education will be changed forever when we emerge. I believe that we will be more appreciative of the social necessity of having physical schools in our communities, as gathering places where we grow and thrive together in each other’s presence. I am hopeful that we emerge understanding how we can find ways to individualize for our students and our teachers with greater ease, that we can adopt and change the landscape for the positive. Hopeful that we can leave the ‘dying’ parts of the system with less resistance, as we are now forced to look more carefully at what is truly valuable in education, what it is that we are craving most in these times of uncertainty.

It is interesting for when I first read the book – it was in a familiar setting as suggested it should and most likely would be by the authors. However, we are all not in a familiar setting as we read it this time around, both in our jobs, our community, as a country and even globally. The lens is different this time, because we are currently living a massive event historically and collectively. We are also living it in a time of greater global connections than ever before, but ironically becoming more insular than ever expected. Shutting down global travel, whilst feeling greater compassion for the shared human experience connecting our communities and countries in a new profound way.

Schools are the heart of so many of our communities, the core connecting institution for so many aspects our lives. School are, and really have always been a reflection of the communities they serve. However, I think in some places, we have deviated from what that word community means. We understand that teachers and students create a community of learners, but schools are also the place that so many individuals find comfort and connectedness. Many vulnerable students rely on schools to be places of refuge and security first, education second. Families rely on schools to provide guidance and support in the lives of their children. Teachers search for communities of like-minded educators who share their values and visions for learners. I know early in my career, I would often get caught up on what people were not doing, how the system was failing, on what the deficits were. I think through age and experience, I have come to understand that we need to look at schools and the institution of education through the lens of what it is doing well and then build towards possibility. We need to honour the parts that have never been broken, that have always existed, and build on through an appreciative lens, not one of deficits. Through the master’s program readings, these ideas have been reaffirmed. That we need to honour what is working and build towards better. Build off the foundation of what is strong and beneficial for educators, students and communities. If we do this, I hope that those stale parts will fall to the side on their own. I believe it is easy to get stuck with status quo when we only focus on what is wrong. Instead of being brave enough to say – this part is working, this part we can make better. I am drawn to the reference of hospice workers in the book. The idea that walk outs need not “consciously carry with us the values and practices that feel essential” (Wheatley & Frieze, 2011, p. 11).

**Leaving Home**

In the past few years, since the new curriculum in B.C. was implemented, the has been a shift and movement towards the individualization of learning for students. The curriculum redesign has allowed teachers to ‘walk out’ on old delivery styles of education and create flexible learning opportunities within a more open-ended structure. In essence the structure for learning is there, with greater opportunities for emphasis on the core competencies. Voice and choice within assignments and assessments is also a big shift in thinking, allowing for greater differentiation for learning. In shifting towards the new curriculum, we need to be grounded in our beliefs and confident in ourselves as we ‘walk out’ on old practices and work towards new opportunities in engaging students in meaningful learning opportunities.

Right now, the pandemic has forced us to look at the system in a different way, but it has brought the value of social emotional learning to the forefront. It is amazing that the three areas stressed in a continuity of learning are literacy, numeracy, and wellness. We have come to realize that the social emotional wellness of our students is key to their success, that learning cannot take place unless they honour the emotional health of our students.

The essence of creating good work for me is about surrounding myself with those who can support me through what I would like to accomplish, while supporting them through their goals as well. It is not about surrounding yourself with ‘yes’ people, but instead about ensuring that those around you will feel comfortable with sharing their perspective with you. I value the ‘critical friends’ I have accumulated throughout my career, those who I can call up when I am stuck on an idea, and I know they will provide me with a different point of view. I think it is important in all aspects of our lives to have people we know will provide divergent, respectful opinions that challenge your initial reactions to an idea or situation.

***“We have a hard time talking to each other without falling into competition and even***

***combat, into an unconscious rhythm of defense and offense that allows***

***for little openness and growth” (Palmer, 1993, p. 10).***

The healthiest schools I have been in are those that had leaders that relied on others to help them formulate decisions. These leaders were amazing listeners, when you spoke, you could feel that they were genuinely listening to what you have to say and that they were considering your point of view, even when it diverged from their own. In these schools, leaders have a pulse on the values of individual staff members. They are mindful of how they allow those voices to be heard by others. They take time to cultivate relationship with each member of their staff, not just teaching staff. I believe when a leader takes time to genuinely listen and support those around them, others trust that the decisions they have made have been well thought out. For the trust become inherent, and although you may not agree with the direction, you walk away understanding that great consideration went into the decision and that you voice was acknowledged and heard, not just pushed aside.

For much of my career, I have been comfortable with walking out on what I felt was tired and old. But more importantly, I have been one of those individuals who will walk out and try new ideas, understanding that they can benefit us in expected and unexpected ways. I have sought out like minded educators throughout my career, people willing to try new ideas, and push the boundaries of dangerous statements like ‘we do it this way because we have always done it this way.’ Through experience and time, I have learned that by willingly taking risks and walking into the unknow has great benefit for myself and the students I teach. By being one of the brave ones that often steps forward first, I have also found that I have naturally led communities of learners towards new opportunities and practice. I believe it comes from my natural curiosity and my need to always be reading, searching, finding and exploring new ways to look at my personal and professional life. I have never been satisfied with teaching the same thing the same way each year. I have felt the need to tailor and adapt based on the group of students around me. Similarly, in leadership roles I have found that I can stay true to my core values, while expanding my understanding of how I can work with others to benefit students. I have come to understand, with age and experience that the best way to evoke or inspire change is by listening, by suspending my own preconceived notions and by being open to the new insights others may provide me. When I make space to listen, I find myself inspired to ‘jump in’ to something new and uncharted, based fully on the idea of possibility.

As leaders, we can ‘walk-out’ if we are true to those around us, but also if we are true to ourselves. It is key to always be willing to learn from those around you and not shut down when your opinions are met with resistance. Listen to the community you are in, understand what they want and need. Leaders need to develop an ability to look to the community and try new ideas. Personally, I need to be comfortable with the idea that I don’t need accolades, that I just need to stay grounded in my belief that the results are greater than me. A big part of this is not just following the newest, hottest trend. If this is the approach you take, then you are just chasing the next best thing, instead of truly understanding how ideas can transform your practice and the possibilities for your students and the community you serve. As leaders, we need to walk on knowing that the ideas we are walking towards are grounded in best practice.

***“Change always starts with confusion; cherished interpretations***

***must dissolve to make way for the new” (Wheatly, 2002, p. 18)***

Failure is inevitable! The iterative process is life. I have never been afraid to fail because if you fear failure than you get paralyzed over not trying and then you take no risks and get stuck in a vicious cycle of the same. One of my favourite books as a child was Anne of Green Gables and one of the biggest lessons from that book that I have always carried with me is the idea that I will make a lot of mistakes, they key is to not make the same one twice. If you put yourself out there and our willing to walk towards new and different, you have to expect some mistakes and stumbles at some points, for it is new and uncharted territory. Life is iterative and messy and confusing at times. I believe that if we get stuck when we hit a barrier, then we lose the real opportunity to learn something new about ourselves and the world. However, I believe the key is to travel with trusted advisors, not yes people, but those who you know will propel you forward, those you know will work with you towards a common goal, but whose perspectives are all valued along the way.

Leaders add to the health of a school. I am drawn back to my earlier writings about schools as trees. Our job at leaders is not to plant a new tree. Instead it is to help add to the overall health of the tree, through observing what works and gently pruning away what does not.

**Journeying / Returning Home**

I am drawn to the idea that we collectively own the knowledge of the world, that we make sense of the world through how we interact with the objects in the world. For example, as an avid reader of fiction, I know the author has written his or her words with purpose; however, I believe that the reader helps put even deeper meaning into the text. The words of the author coupled with the experiences of the reader, meet in a perfect symphony of understanding. That is why a friend can recommend a book they loved to you, yet you barely finish it, for your experiences and knowledge are not necessarily connecting with you. A book can be beautifully written, but not draw you in, for you may not be ready emotionally to connect with said book. I believe as individuals; we develop our own truths. This is a critical understanding that I bring into the classroom, leadership and my decision making, and why I believe that choice and voice becomes so critical in promoting learning amongst adults and students.

Heart is the essence of our ability to build community and create community. Without allowing a vulnerability from ourselves we cannot expect a community of teachers or learners to truly follow us. As we journey, we have to be willing to be exposed to diverging points of view and embrace our critics, not as stumbling blocks, but instead a members of the community who are willing to be brave and share their perspectives. I believe that a key part of effective leadership is to listen to the different perspectives, and not interpret them as critical, instead view those perspectives as essential to our overall growth. Without the different voices of the community expressing their perspectives, then we can inadvertently create blind spots in our leadership. If we choose to ignore the voices that disagree with us in the moment, then we will eventually lose the confidence of those individuals. A leader does not necessarily have to placate everyone and change course because some perspectives do not agree. Instead, they need to move forward while acknowledging that they have heard someone’s concerns, and value their opinion, but at this time, this is the way that I believe that we need to go. The best leaders I have worked with don’t always agree with everyone’s ideas, but they listen to the different perspectives and don’t just jump forward with what they think is right. They take time to listen to those who may provide insight to make a decision better, or who present an aspect that they themselves have not yet thought about.

***“Our concept of a school community is one in which individuals come together as whole people, bringing their diverse perspectives, practices, cultures, beliefs, values, and traditions into the “space” that will become a community” (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 124).***

The heart of education for me is the relationships I build with students and colleagues, through empathy and active listening. Relationship building with staff and students needs to be done with authenticity. In our diverse school landscapes, it is important that we don’t attach ‘a single story’ (Adichi, 2009) to both our students and our colleagues, instead taking time to understand their unique perspectives. We spend a lot of time cultivating relationships with students, but often forget the importance of fostering relationships with each other. As educators we need to respect and understand the backgrounds of each other. If teachers do not feel understood, acknowledged and respected, they are less willing to participate wholeheartedly in school initiatives that execute the school’s vision. Furthermore, if teachers in a school do not feel acknowledged and respected for their views and opinions, they will not feel that they belong and are valued. I agree with Barth (2006) that “the nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishments than anything else”( p. 1). Furthermore, I am inspired by Noddings (2010) that by ﻿“approaching the world through the relational ethic of caring, we are more likely to listen attentively to others” (p. 391). Through active listening, I believe we can see how the beliefs of individual teachers align versus diverge with the values of the school, and we can utilize caring to find commonalities. As team leader at Yorkson Creek Middle School (YCMS), I have to sometimes navigate the inconsistency between beliefs and values and use both active listening and the relationships I have built with colleagues to build bridges between other staff members. I believe teachers need to choose to actively listen to each other, that through ‘genuine dialogue’ we can create and cultivate positive relationships amongst each other, ensuring that beliefs and values within a school stay aligned. I agree with Sergiovanni (1994) that schools can never be a replacement for family and neighborhood; however, “as schools become communities, they facilitate the strengthening of family and neighborhood” (p. 13).

***“When we listen to the whispers, we free ourselves from the limiting belief that only some people have the answers, that only some people are worth listening to”(Wheatly & Frieze, 2011, p. 224).***

So much of our work in schools is about seeking out opportunities for growth in ourselves and the systems surrounding us. We need to take time to listen and become host, by listening to those around us. Truly listening and suspending judgement. I also think we need to take time to just observe. See what is working for others and understand why it works for them. I have long been advocate for teachers visiting other classrooms for inspiration and understanding. The greatest growth opportunities come from just listening, observing and being open to new ideas and perspectives. A leader looks for the good and guides efforts for change through positivity. We do this through cultivating mutual respect. Looking at the communities potential and not its deficits.

True curiosity then leads us to think not just about the majority point of view, but also of those with alternate point of views. I am aspiring to be that person that can listen with openness. I want to be a leader that looks for the best in each situation, who strives to see the value in the diverse perspectives. Again, drawing me to the work of Block who tells us not to judge, but to listen with curiosity. It is also about recognizing who we are and not changing when there are fads. Which echoes what I stated earlier. The community needs to be ready for change and opportunity it cannot be forced on it.

***“Purpose keeps you going when your enthusiasm fades. Purpose is not the feeling, but the why that comes from your passion. Why you are passionate is the ultimate driving purpose. When you have both passion and purpose, you’re on the path to create something awesome.”*** (Spencer & Juliani, 2016, p. 172)

We are all designers, as educators, we need to create design opportunities and model design thinking (Johnson, 2017) to empower our students and colleagues to be active designers in their learning journeys. As a design thinker – I approach my learning and my leadership with a design mindset. Sometimes we just have to leap in and try something new. We need to be prepared for the hard work that comes with change. We also have to be prepared for the setbacks along the way. Viewing these as true chances to grow and change and adapt, instead of just giving up. Designers work together. We champion each other and build capacity in others. We walk towards greatness, understanding that if we work as a community, honouring each other’s strengths, then we can find a way to work in symphony. I am reminded of symbiotic relationships in nature, where certain creatures cannot survive without the direct support of each other. They have different end goals – but their survival depends on one another. School communities are similar in that we may have different needs in the moment, our end results are for the betterment of the school. We need each other to make and sustain change.

As we journey, we need to leave behind ideas that we view, and feel are restrictive. We need to be strong and resilient, moving towards possibilities of what can be. Ultimately we need to ‘hold space’ for new ideas and conversations. We need to share successes and not dwell on negative and setbacks. As leaders we need to invite all the voices to create the collective wisdom to help us journey through change.

***“We believe that when human beings are invited to work together on what truly matters to them, they will take ownership and responsibility for moving their issues and ideas into wiser actions that last” (Wheatly & Frieze, 2011, p. 191).***

I see change not as a destination, instead as a process. This resonates throughout my practice and my life. As stated before, I see all of us as part of the building of collective knowledge in the world. We add to the wisdom of each other through the spirit of wanting to learn from our mistakes and from each other. It is so important for us to deal with our own bias and perspective and be open to the multitude of perspectives available to us. The best leaders I have worked with take time to honour the perspectives of many. Holding space for them to voice their opinions and ideas. The danger lies in believing that our work is ever done and that we have acknowledged all bias and blind spots. If we take that path then we return to ignorance. That is why as a host, we need to consider that our bias and possible blind spots are always present. They don’t just disappear through time and space.

 The eight principles presented through the stories of the communities shared in the book for me are powerful and interwoven. Together they reflect a lot of learning that has occurred through the Master’s program. The idea that we can start anywhere and grow, all our voices have value, and slowing down to absorb and reflect on process and change. I struggle with picking which resonates with me more, for I believe they all have beauty in their messaging depending on the situation.

**"Once the work begins, more possibilities and interconnections become visible; people focus on what’s next, following the call for change wherever it leads them”**

(Wheatley & Frieze, 2011, p. 221)

The web of life, the interdependence of each strand on another, you need to start anywhere to follow the threads to see where change is needed to see where opportunity is possible. This web imagery resonates with me, the idea that we just need to start somewhere and follow the complexities of the web, exploring where it will take us. I think too often people get stuck trying to start in the best place. There are no ideal conditions. There is often not a best place to begin, instead sometimes you just have to start and then follow where the questions and curiosity take you. Sort of like Alice in Wonderland, where she follows the different pathways, making her way out, yet figuring out valuable lessons of self as she journeyed through and back out again. The key, I believe is to follow through with conviction. Reflect, reflect, reflect. Talk to others, listen to others, get feedback from those around us. Accept the critism, be humble in the praise. Keep growing, or as Dory from, ‘Finding Nemo’ says – “just keep swimming!” Embrace the chaos and learn from it, while pausing at times to listen to and truly value the diverse perspectives of others. Follow through, even when it feels difficult!

 Setting goals and pursuing them is essential. But set goals that are true to self and what you value. Use these goals to help you raise up the different communities of learners around us, both adults and students. In order to hounour all of these people we need to sometimes slow down, and “walk at the pace of the slowest”. Listen to why they are taking their time, support them through their own anxieties around change. Slowing down also allows a leader to think and reflect and truly hold onto their values and initial purpose. If we rush to change, we may lose valuable voices along the way – which could lead to unintended failure or complete stoppage in positive momentum.

***“A community that turns to one another creates a spirit of welcome for all its members. It relies on the fact that people want to be engaged, that they want to learn and contribute to the community”***(Wheatley & Frieze, 2011, p. 225)***.***

 This book leaves me with reaffirmation of the amazing power of the collective. Individuals need others in order to fulfill and achieve goals. Nothing can be accomplished alone, in a vacuum. Humans need each other and we need our differences as much as we need our commonalities.

I see leadership as being earned through our actions, similar to an Indigenous point of view, where "individuals were recognized as community leaders based on their demonstrated talents, experience, wisdom, and integrity," and as such "their recognition as leaders was based on community consensus and this recognition had to be earned in the eyes and within the context of the cultural values held within their communities"(Cajete, 2016, p. 368). Effective leadership is built on trust, integrity, and strengthening of relationships (Fullan, 2005). Before vision and initiatives can be implemented, trust needs to be established within a school community or organization (T.J. Sergiovanni, 2012). The building of relationships and the establishing of a culture of trust makes it possible to implement vision and for people to feel valued and understood, even under demanding conditions (Fullan, 2005). Furthermore, I believe that leadership is also not just about leading, but also about building the capacity within others. Leaders need to trust the talents of their staff and help cultivate their initiatives and ideas. The need to utilize and leverage these strengths to help them implement vision and goals. It is important that leaders work with others, collaborating and implementing vision that ultimately benefits the students we teach. As Grade Eight team leader for the past three years, I have worked with the team to create goals that align with the school goals as well as the hopes we all have for our students. I appreciate the opportunity that I have to collaborate and learn with others, and the different perspectives that we provide each other. As mentioned previously for me the heart of education is relationships I build with students, parents, and my colleagues. I try to ensure that this echoes through all that I do – as a leader in the classroom, the school, and in other endeavours I pursue in education.

**Ripples**

Twenty years of teaching has resulted in many ripples behind me. Ripples through the lives of students, who contact me as adults to tell me of the impact I’ve had on their lives. Ripples in the lives of colleagues who call for advice and insight when they want my perspectives. Ripples that I believe were often unintentional. When a stone is thrown in a still lake, we cannot predict exactly how the ripple will form. Instead, we wait to see how the rock (idea) resonates out when it hit the calm water. Our ideas are like ripples, when we present them to those around us, we cannot predict how they will respond and react. We cannot control the ripple, we can only hope that when we set out with purpose and are true to ourselves, we leave behind ideas and pieces of ourselves. How others view our actions is often outside of our control. Therefore, we leave behind us a message that we hope others perceive and hear. But how they interpret that, how they internalize that is highly personal. I know that the best I can do is to stay true to myself. To hold space to reflect on my actions and keep moving forward with better iterations of self. To accept the ripples of others into my heart and to continue to do the best work I can in both my personal and professional life. We grow together, we learn from each other, and this is best done through taking time to listen to the ripples around us.

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