

Post Conference Notes from Larry Davis and Bruce Davis regarding their session: “The Cowardly Lion Had it Right: Courage to be an OZ-Some Principal”

Following the presentation on Thursday, we were able to reflect more on the content as well as the process so there have been a number of changes as a result. We are most thankful for the WASA Conference attendees who participated in our breakout! Your insights and ideas truly are appreciated!

Thank you for the opportunity! We look forward to the next time ...

Larry and Bruce

POST CONFERENCE WRITE – UP:

First and foremost, Bruce and I are most grateful for those who shared the Breakout experience with us; your insights helped us continue to develop the project and we look forward to the next presentation as a result. The following highlights will be featured in the next version of **“The Cowardly Lion Got It Right: It takes Courage to be an Oz-some Principal within The New Teacher Evaluation System”**.

Courage: “Courage is the first of the human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all the others.” Winston Churchill

Courage: “Doing The Right Thing Versus Doing What Appears Right”. Bruce Davis and Larry Davis

The iconic characters from the classic Wizard of Oz provide lessons in leadership for principals and administrators working in today’s schools, especially within the context of new teacher evaluation systems. Specifically, the following attributes are personified: Dorothy Grace-Collaboration, Oz-Transparency, Scarecrow- Knowledge, Tinman-Compassion, and the Cowardly Lion- Courage-Tenacity.

Whether your school district chooses the Danielson system, Marzano system, or other evaluation systems, based upon our experience of over 70 years in education and over 40 plus years as school administrators, we have seen systems like these and embrace the merit of each for student learning is at the core of each program. Nevertheless, we have seen similar systems come and go and we ask ourselves “Why?”. And we come back to the following understanding: Courage to do the right thing, to follow through within the most trying times, and to make decisions which potentially may rock the school at its core, has been neglected in years past for the teacher evaluation systems of yesteryear as well as today are often sold as the “next best thing”, almost like a silver bullet. Our experience tells us that the previous systems were touted in the same enthusiastic manner but when the rubber hit the road, when principals were asked to move deep into the evaluation process, particularly with staff who are within the “basic” or “unsatisfactory” levels of performance, often these instructional leaders have experienced the feeling of being out on a limb and working without a net. This fails to assure fidelity within a very complex process.

So we believe the latest generation of principals, to truly succeed in the field with the new teacher evaluation systems, need within their tool kit the following elements: The courage to demonstrate: Grace-Collaboration, Transparency, Knowledge, and Compassion. Furthermore, Superintendents are encouraged to demonstrate the same set of leadership qualities in their supportive roles as the Principals carry out the orders of transformation and change in the trenches. More specifically:

Grace-Collaboration: Knowing that it truly takes partnership to create a learning environment supporting changes of this magnitude. Dorothy could never have made it back to Kansas by going it alone. Nor can any principal.

Transparency: Leadership through transparency and authenticity encourages an environment of trust and understanding between all stakeholders. There is a fundamental core understanding demonstrated through transparency that was not evident within the great Wizard of Oz. People read through the veil of false promises and today's students show little respect for leaders who present lies and deceit within the context of "because I am the leader".

Knowledge: Good teachers do not always make good principals. Nevertheless, good principals always KNOW good teaching. And that's where the work of Danielson and Marzano come into play. Both systems provide principals with the core elements of instruction, not that much different than what Madeline Hunter preached about 30 years ago. Also, as demonstrated by the Scarecrow, one who easily got back up after each time he tumbled and fell, we need to encourage the development of innovative learning environments honoring both risk and failure for true learning will only come from a process which encourages both. There is the tendency for teachers and principals to take on new evaluation systems with trepidation and fear when we need to encourage a playfulness with the approach as demonstrated by the Scarecrow.

Compassion: The root of courage, "cour", comes from latin and means "heart". This is where the new teacher evaluation systems will either pass the test of time or not for the creation of compassionate schools, able to withstand the turbulence of the evaluation system, will be measured by the level of compassion and understanding demonstrated by leadership. For example, as staff members face the reality of "tough love" evaluations, where the gap between their own perception of performance in contrast to their supervisors, impacts staff morale, this has the potential to create a dynamic of great strife within the school. We all fundamentally know "Basic" and "Proficient", let alone "not meeting standard", will cause concern for a number of staff members. That is why we look toward the Tinman for lessons in leadership. The development of a heart-centered, compassionate school setting will be able to withstand the challenges we will face together as the new teacher evaluation system moves from "pilot" to implementation district wide. Furthermore, compassionate principals will be called upon to facilitate very difficult conversations in this process and the ability to listen deeply will play an important role for successful evaluations to lead toward positive transformation. We would be making the same mistakes of colleagues from years past if we move through these evaluation tools with our heads in the lead and plug away with a checklist of instructional criteria and benchmarks guided by impersonal data and evidence. The culture of school is an intense inter-personal experience with emotions and personal interpretations at the core of the foundation.

Simply, we believe the new teacher evaluation systems will create opportunities for increased student learning. But we must not forget the truth, much of what we are dealing with as we move forward with new teacher evaluation systems, is a knee-jerk response to a divisive political arena, where we are called upon to fire ineffective employees and get immediate results. As such, our ability to proceed, to "do the right thing" will be much more successful if we move forward with courage and the heart to do so.

Respectfully,

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"No One Should Ever Go It Alone!"