Literacy, Social Studies, Leadership, and Supervision

1.1 High-level literacy and social studies learning

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found that "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). Instructors look to leaders to set examples of effective teaching and learning in the school environment. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders model best practices in order to ensure high levels of literacy and social studies learning; school leaders should know exactly what they are looking for when supervising teachers and know how to effectively communicate expectations. The National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association (1996) suggests framing observations of effective teaching in literacy in terms of "reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing" (quoted in Zepeda & Mayers, 2004, Kindle Locations 2689-2691). Meanwhile, social studies education must emphasize global citizenship; students should be working toward an understanding of the parts they play in a democratic society. VanderDussen Toukan (2017) asserts that "Among the many dimensions of citizenship explored…the following emerged as dominant cross-cutting themes: first, attitudes, values and beliefs; second, critical thinking, civic knowledge and understanding; and third, participation, engagement and action" (p. 9). School leaders must foster environments where all six elements of literacy (reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing) are used to promote the nine tenants of citizenship (attitudes, values, beliefs, critical thinking, civic knowledge, understanding, participation, engagement, and action) (Zepeda & Mayers, 2004; VanderDussen Toukan, 2017).

In order to foster the kind of environment that utilizes literacy to promote social studies learning, a school leader must deliberately build an expectation that multiple forms of literacy

education will be taking place in the English language, world languages, and social studies classrooms. Whether it is Spanish 1 or AP U.S. History, the classroom and the school day should be designed to promote active, student-driven discussion (speaking and listening). VanderDussen Toukan (2017) notes:

> There is simultaneously debate about how authentic such 'citizenship education' can in fact assume to be in formal, 'inauthentic' schooling spaces that are inherently authoritarian, and that most of a young person's democratic experiences in fact take place outside of school, where they can exercise greater autonomy and horizontal relationships (p. 3).

To promote high-level literacy and social studies learning *in* the classroom, a school leader must help to arrange the school day in a way that allows students to exercise greater autonomy and horizontal relationships *inside* the building. The use of Harkness tables or a circular seating arrangement should be encouraged to maximize student participation (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1993). Even the breakdown of the school day can be reframed around student-driven discussion: longer block periods that allow for individual work, partner work, and group discussion; fewer periods a day to eliminate disruptive transitions and reduce student stress; and a rotating schedule that allows for different classes to take place at different times of the day when students may be more or less alert. It is important for the school day to model democratic values, nurturing participation from all students so that every voice is heard and is given equal weight.

This takes us to the matter of *choice*. The ability to exercise autonomy throughout the school day gives the student a voice in her education, and having a voice in a process represents

a core democratic principle. Offering students more choice throughout the curriculum—perhaps choosing their own books to read during free reading time or giving students their own choice of topic for a research paper—can increase investment in learning and give the student more authentic ownership over his or her learning processes (Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2014). Furthermore, students should have some say in how they are going to be assessed. “Providing students choices in how to demonstrate their understanding engages them and encourages this active participation” (Erekson, 2014, Kindle Locations 144-145). Assessments should range from term papers (writing) to oral presentations (speaking, visually representing) to discussions (speaking, listening).

Furthermore, Zepeda and Mayers (2004) suggest that a “principal needs to be aware the writing is a recursive process, not a linear one” (Kindle Locations 2820-2821). School leaders should understand that the writing process is iterative and that to effectively promote literacy, teachers should let students work through multiple drafts of their work, evaluating the students on process as much as on product. Since literacy and social studies are tied together in that both require analysis of text, argumentation, and representation, we can say that process matters as much in the history classroom as it does in the English classroom. In high-level social studies learning, school leaders should be looking for higher-order questioning and thinking, analysis of primary and secondary sources, engagement with the material, representation of multiple perspectives, and connection with daily life.

Making connections between what a student is learning in the classroom and contemporary life is essential to generating the engagement piece. And now, more than ever, school leaders in the United States are tasked with bridging the divide between knowledge acquisition and practical application to daily life. Jacobs (2010) writes:

> In our 21st century, there is still a prevailing attitude that to be intellectual is to be effete. Jacoby makes the stark point that the tradition of the rugged individual who makes it on his own is more widely regarded if that person is not educated. Intellects are scoffed at in the United States. They are viewed as snobs or outsiders in the worst type of stereotyping (p. 16).

In the post-truth era—where deference to facts is regarded as elitism—it is ever more important for school leaders to stress the relevance of social studies education as it relates to the lives of our students.

This takes us back to the role of leadership in school instruction. A school leader must model those best practices that she hopes the faculty will use in the classroom. It is possible for a leader to model choice in the classroom by allowing teachers some latitude in choosing how and what they teach. A school leader can and should always encourage teachers to grow professionally and to stay abreast of current teaching strategies. However, "excessive emphasis on group cohesiveness and conformity can interfere with effective thinking processes" (Neck & Manz, 1994, p. 933). A school leader wants to get the most out of her faculty, so she should be conscientious about telling her teachers what to do. Just as it is so with students, teachers who can exercise greater autonomy—who have more *choice*—will be more invested in their own teaching.

That isn't to say a school leader should simply sit back and let the school run itself. Rather, a school leader should work on fostering distributed leadership among the faculty (Hallett, 2007). John A. DeFlaminis says, "People support what they help to create." A school

leader must work on developing leader-teams that can tackle different aspects of school life in order to draw out and make use of the best qualities in each faculty member. Given the opportunity, many teachers would prefer to have some say in the way they are managed and assessed. Here the freedom of choice should be exercised with some regularity.

1.2 Building a positive supervisory relationship

In order to build a strong supervisory relationship with the faculty, a school leader must first understand the norms that are already in operation among the faculty and then establish new norms, preferably ones the faculty helps to create. A school leader cannot simply arrive on the scene and expect to bend the school to her will. As Adamson (2010) points out, “every teacher knows that what works in one school doesn’t necessarily translate intact and with comparable results to a very different setting” (p. 1). So it is imperative that a school leader begin her tenure observing and asking questions of the faculty in order to get a better understanding of the school culture. There may not be a written order to the school, but there is an order nonetheless (Hallett, 2007).

If a school leader is to earn the trust and loyalty of her faculty, she must give the faculty ample room to grow as teachers and teacher-leaders. A school leader may have a vision for a school. Just stating the vision does not make it come to life. Requiring faculty to modify their behaviors to better support the vision won’t work either. Earl and Katz (2006) write:

> Mandates may create an awareness that changes are necessary, but real change depends on people in schools engaging in new learning, individually and

> collectively, to refresh their knowledge, understanding, and skills and to deal with and take charge of change (p. 28).

Here we get into the territory of choice again. As I've already argued, giving faculty permission to take charge of their own growth will foster cooperation and enthusiasm for change. Teachers must feel as though they are part of the process, and providing ample professional growth is one way a school leader can help teachers develop.

Wallace (2010) argues that "the principal's primary role is to…build a culture where teachers are expected, and expect themselves, to learn and grow professionally" (p. 46). A school leader should model growth by staying abreast of the latest pedagogical developments. She must know the "why" behind her vision, and should have evidence to support her claims. By modeling pedagogical savvy, a school leader sets the tone for the teachers to also take pedagogy and instructional best practices seriously.

One of the hardest jobs of a school leader is giving constructive feedback to teachers. School leaders should visit classrooms with one of two goals explicitly stated prior to the observation: (1) to coach the teacher or (2) to evaluate the teacher. Separating coaching and evaluation makes the reception of feedback far more successful (Stone & David-Lang, 2017). Stone and David-Lang suggest that "Although evaluation conversations may take place once or twice a year, coaching should be ongoing and regular throughout the year" (p. 49). In order to build a strong supervisory relationship with teachers, a school leader must try to provide feedback to teachers in a non-evaluative manner when the goal is to coach the teacher. Keeping a scoring rubric can actually make teachers less receptive to the comments and feedback (Stone & David-Lang, 2017).

Marshall (2012) argues that "Nobody likes to be criticized, but at the end of the day, virtually all teachers want the truth, and it's manageable when it's spread out over 10 visits and chats, with criticism interspersed with plenty of genuine praise" (p. 23). In this model, the school leader visits classes for short periods of time several times throughout the school year and follows up with feedback, both warm and cold. This model is best for coaching teachers, and should be considered separate from evaluation. Whether a school leader is coaching or evaluating a teacher, her observations should be announced ahead of time. Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) argue that classroom visits tend to be more effective if they are planned with the teacher being observed in advance of the observation. By planning observations in advance, the school leader is able to effectively outline the goals of the visit, and the teacher will know to expect feedback. A school leader does not want to jeopardize the trust she has with the faculty by popping into classrooms at random and catching teachers off guard (Hallett, 2007).

1.3 Conclusion

In order to build a positive supervisory relationship with her faculty, a school leader must be able to articulate a vision and then provide enough resources and professional development to inspire the faculty to make changes in alignment with the school leader's vision. By not insisting on changes immediately and by observing the unwritten norms at play in a school, a school leader can begin to shape her strategic plan around those policies and traditions that are already in place. A school leader can also engage the faculty in setting new norms so that expectations are clear. The more say the faculty has in generating new norms, the more likely teachers are to support them. Remembering that choice creates ownership, and a distributed leadership model provides multiple avenues for autonomy, a school leader should be careful not to demand

conformity, but rather insist on hearing the independent ideas of individuals. A school leader should also make a clear distinction between coaching and evaluating. Announcing visits in advance and providing targeted feedback can make the teacher more receptive to criticism. Finally, a school leader must model best practices for the faculty.

In order to promote high-level learning in literacy and social studies, a school leader must emphasize the importance of using reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing to teach citizenship (attitudes, values, beliefs, critical thinking, civic knowledge, understanding, participation, engagement, and action). A school leader should arrange the classroom and the school day to best approximate a democratic environment where every student is given a voice. Circular seating arrangements and longer block periods promote discussion and student-driven learning. The more choice the students have in the curriculum, the more likely they are to invest in the process of learning. And a school leader must also find connections between the information she is trying to convey and the students' own lives. Relevance is important to teachers and students alike. Finally, a school leader must be open to dialogue. "Through dialogue, people come to recognize that not all situations have one right answer" (Soetoro-Ng & Milofsky, 2016, p. 2). A good school leader will always see multiple answers.

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