

Introduction

"Hey, why aren't you guys in class?" the teacher shouted down the hall as he saw us come out of the bathroom.

"It's ok, we're seniors!" I replied as mouth muscled judgment aside.

My friend snickered, ducked around the corner, and flew down the stairs two at a time. I didn't run. I figured the teacher would chuckle and shoo me off to class. But as he got closer, I realized I had stepped in it. He didn't think I was clever. I knew most of the teachers in my large public high school of 2,000 students, but not this guy. He must have been new. I couldn't rely on charm, or history, or connection to talk my way out of it. He took me down to the principal's office and had me wait outside while he went in to talk with Mr. Essler. A few minutes later, he emerged with a self-satisfied smirk on his face and bid me into the room.

"John!" Mr. Essler exclaimed, "What the heck are you doing here?"

The teacher's smug look drooped into constrained rage as he witnessed a greeting much warmer than he had expected.

"It's ok Mr. So-and-So; I've got it from here," Mr. Essler said as he stood and stepped out from behind his desk. He dismissed the teacher and closed the door behind him. "So, how are things looking for college? Is it Boulder you're heading to?"

John Essler was my high school principal, and he lived around the corner from me. That made it convenient for us to TP his front tree on Halloween - we only had to sneak through one neighbor's yard to get to my friend Phil's back door and down to his basement undetected. And my dad was a member of Mr. Essler's faculty. They had known each other for a long time and worked closely as my dad was the school's union representative.



As a kid, I remember wanting to be a lot of things when I grew up, but I don't think I ever imagined becoming Mr. Essler. He was a decent guy, so it was nothing against him. I wasn't particularly rebellious as a teenager; this was as close as I got to being in trouble through four years of high school. I just never imagined myself setting foot in a high school after I got out of that place. I didn't have a bad time there. School was fine. It just wasn't for me.

I went on to college, and eventually I fell in love with school. But it was the ideas that hooked me. It was 20th-century Russian Literature and Deviance in U.S. Society that pulled me in. Then it was

anthropology, Latin American history, Marxist revolutions, and the nation as an "imagined community" that lit my fire. When I finally found my way back to high school, I was a history teacher, full stop, and I didn't really want to be anything else. So how did I end up as a high school principal? I ask myself that question pretty frequently.

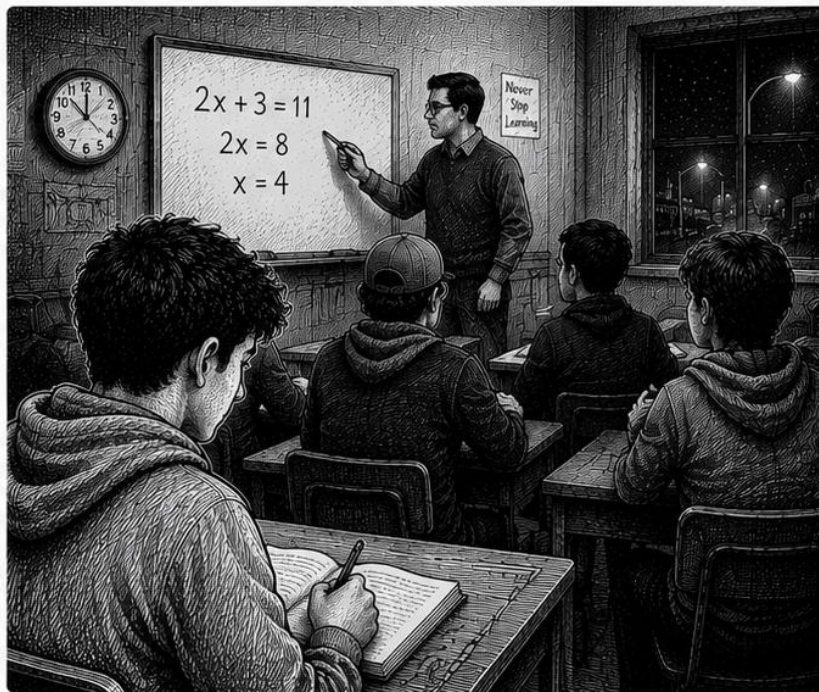
It was a journey, for sure. But my work has come to mean a great deal to me. I find enjoyment, fulfillment, pride, and meaning as a school leader. I have learned to value more and more of the school experience, like the people I've come to know deeply, and the lessons buried deep within myself: the hidden curriculum.

This is a portfolio of an educator becoming. I have never stopped learning and growing, though my trajectory has shifted many times.

Core Competencies

Richard Haly's Night Class

I fell in love with learning in the spring of 1995. Richard Haly's night class was different than any class I had taken. I would later learn that it wasn't entirely unique, but it was novel to me at the time. It was called a seminar, and he extended the kind of respect and agency to our motley crew of dropouts that he would have offered a small group of graduate students. That meant that he made space for our ideas. He wanted to know what we thought, and he treated us like intellectual peers. In all my years of schooling, my teachers mostly wanted their own words to come out of my mouth and pen.



Richard was a scholar of Aztec poetry. The Aztecs recorded their thoughts and emotions in pictographic scenes, usually carved in stone and brightly painted, so their poetry is also a fine art, according to our Western conception and distinction of such things. One day in class, I made an observation about a figure in the shape of a turtle, commenting on its similarity to a drawing of a deity. Two years later, while I was taking another class with him, I went to visit Haly during his office hours. As I got up to leave, he called me back and showed me an endnote in a journal article he

had just published in which he cited that idea to me! I believe that was my first official academic citation, and it inspired me.

The change wasn't immediate. I still had a long way to go as I clawed my way back into school, changed my major to economics, and battled disabilities and bad habits. But something had shifted. I was interested. I wanted to do well. Ideas began to captivate me, and my mind expanded...no, exploded. The change to econ meant arts and sciences core curriculum: German language credits, Russian literature, more economics, and with it, more math than I could handle. By the time I realized I was mathed out, I had earned the minor in econ, completed the core requirements, and only had thirty credits to go – just enough for the major in anthropology. So as I finished my fifth year and my friends graduated and moved away, I changed my major and earned straight As for the first time in my life.

Archaeoastronomy

In the spring of 1999, as I approached graduation, Haly invited me to accompany him on a National Geographic expedition to Tlaxcala, Mexico. Above the valley east of Mexico City, stands La Malinche, Mexico's fifth-tallest peak, at 14,636 feet. Across the arid Tlaxcala Valley, beneath the towering summits of Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl, which stand guard over Mexico City and the whole of the country, researchers had found a cave strewn with fertility figurines. The small to medium-sized clay statues held tiny babies in their protruding abdomens, clearly representing pregnant mothers. Twice per year, Venus rose as a morning star directly above the peak of Malinche when viewed from the cave.

Our work sought to understand how local inhabitants incorporated this natural phenomenon into their ritual practices. We also wanted to know how they had blended Catholic beliefs with ancient myths that pre-dated the Spanish conquest. About 1.7 million contemporary Mexicans still speak Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. Haly was a Nahuatl speaker, and therefore invaluable to the team.



During our two-week expedition, we climbed the peak and surveyed the surrounding hillsides for caches of broken pottery and obsidian flakes used for ritual bloodletting. We spoke with Nahuas, especially the abuelas and abuelos, who remembered and continued more of the ancient practices than the young people. The trip meant more to me than just the research, of which I frankly understood little, given my inability to converse. But I learned so much about Mexican history and culture in the National Museum of Anthropology and in my conversations with the professors. I learned about myself and my limitations when I came up against some rancid chicharrónes at the evening meal following our summit. Several days of "Oh...mi estómago!" complaints to the nurse

followed, which was all the explanation I could muster in my broken Spanish, amid the diarrhea, vomiting, and cramping. But I made it through. And I kept going.

Conversation with Karina

A decade later, on my first trip to Chile to explore dissertation research topics, I met Karina. She was a friend of my friend William at Syracuse University, who had lived in Santiago for a year when he was an undergrad. I needed friendly faces at that moment in 2008. Karina and I had a nice dinner in the Providencia neighborhood where she lived, and as we approached her home, she turned to me and asked, "So what exactly are you doing here?" I was confused because we had spent the evening talking about Chilean history and culture, including the current state of the Mapuche political movement and its past, in which I had explained the research I was pursuing.

"What do you mean?" I asked, "I'm trying to figure out if the project I have in mind is viable, so I'm spending time in the archives to get a sense of what is contained in several collections of materials."

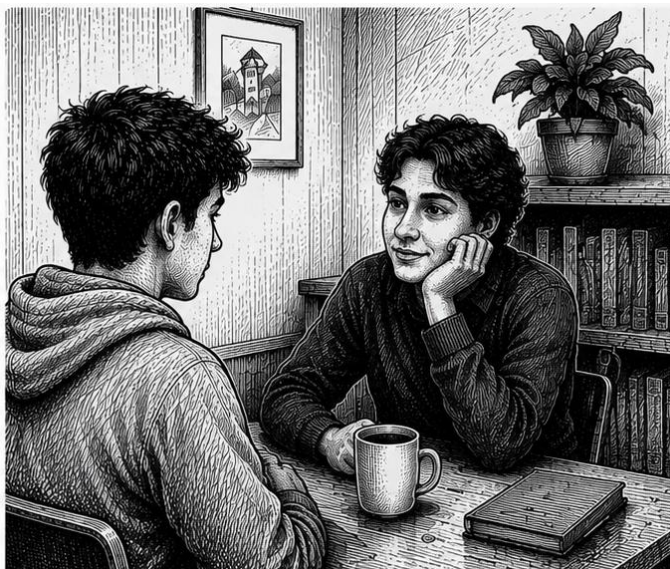
"No, I understand that," she said, "but what I don't understand is why you would come all this way to study our history. Why not study your own history in the United States?"

I paused. I flipped through a half dozen explanations for why I wasn't that interested in the history of the United States, which included a fair amount of disillusionment with our foreign policy in the 2000s, and a general sense that I knew that history pretty well, having grown up there. Before I could answer, she continued.

"I mean, why Mapuche history especially?" she asked. "You don't know anything about being Mapuche, or even about being Chilean. And how could you possibly contribute anything of value to something you know so little about?"

I paused some more. Eventually, I said, "I think I might be able to learn something about myself by learning about people's experiences that are very different from my own."

I hadn't really thought about it the way I said it to Karina, but I later realized that much of my



fascination with indigenous peoples and the history of cross-cultural contact in the Americas was driven by the sneaking suspicion that some kind of key to myself was hidden out there in the world. And the further and more exotic the places I searched, the more likely I was to find that treasure. I know now that parts of my search were naïve and other parts were problematic in a culturally imperialist kind of way. But the core of that idea rings true.

School, education, and intellectual curiosity hold at their bottom a search for the self. Who am I? How do I fit into the world? What can I possibly add to it?

Programmatic Expertise

Indicator
Has developed a set of knowledge and skills relevant to area of school leadership.
Implements a practice of ongoing professional development to remain current with area of expertise and/or emerging job responsibilities.
Maintains a network of professional peer connections outside of EPS.

We might imagine Programmatic Expertise as a house or another building. At its base is laid a foundation of knowledge and skills that provide a platform for future growth. Upon this sturdy bottom, the structure's frame is developed, one two-by-four at a time, laid out so that the space inside is organized to make it inhabitable and useful. Like any building, our house is situated within a larger landscape and is, in fundamental ways, connected to other houses and utilities across the surrounding terrain. Power, water, and information are pumped into the building, making life inside interesting and allowing the person living there to grow and thrive.

The Foundation

The Upper School Head at Manlius Pebble Hill (MPH) hated the teacher he hired me to replace. I didn't know it at the time, but the two of them fought like cats and dogs. Peter Wozniak, or Dr. Woz as the kids called him, was a PhD in Russian history and a former professor who captivated students with animated lectures as he championed the kings and queens of Europe. Chris Hempel had been a founding principal of one of the first Big Picture Schools, a network of alternative high schools where learning was structured around internships, and student time on campus was led by advisors who were purposefully NOT trained in any particular academic discipline. The other finalist for the job was a friend of mine, Matt Twomey-Smith, who was also a friend of Woz and had worked at the school on and off for a few years. In all honesty, I think Chris probably favored me because I wasn't Matt.

Many other teachers on the faculty struggled with Chris too, so it wasn't like Woz was an outlier. Chris had never been a classroom teacher, and he couldn't really relate to or understand the challenges they faced day to day. He had cool ideas. He started a senior thesis project that became a capstone within the Upper School experience, and he introduced a modified advisory program to the school, which grew in substance and importance over time. But he wasn't one of them. He didn't speak the same language. And honestly, he didn't really try. He used to tell this tired story about how the best swim coach he ever had couldn't swim to save himself from drowning. It might have even been true, but they couldn't hear it.



I don't think it's possible to lead a group of people without having some kind of credibility that they respect. By the time I started teaching at an independent school, I had taught for five years as an adjunct professor, teaching and research assistant, and mastered a field of knowledge. When I became a division head, I had taught in the upper school for four years. And when I came to

Eastside Prep, I had been an Upper School Head for five years. I gained experience at each stage, and while that was valuable in and of itself, it also built credibility.

Experience in the thing one is leading people to do is not the only form of credibility. It can also be built on shared knowledge or expertise in a related field, even if that field is distant. Credibility often comes from interpersonal connection, lived experience, or many kinds of affinity. But it has to be relatable, and the people one leads must have some respect for it. Credibility serves as a foundation for the many and varied skills used daily in a leadership role.

The Structure

As one transitions from a role of doing to one of managing, supervising, and leading, one encounters new kinds of challenges that require new skills. Some skills are transferable, but even those need refinement and shaping as one adapts to a new kind of work. Much of the learning happens on the job. Some come from trusted mentors and colleagues. As I transitioned into school leadership, I found it essential to adopt, build, and maintain a practice of ongoing professional development. Reading has formed a core component of my professional growth from the beginning.

When I was a graduate student, I had to immerse myself in contemporary writing related to my field of study. At the time, that meant I read broadly about 20th-century Latin American history, especially the ways that nation-building projects were inherently racialized. This reading prepared me to propose, research, and write my dissertation, the story of an indigenous political movement

that contested the Chilean nation-building project. The reading taught me two things: the field of knowledge was finite and could be mapped, and the field was constructed of discourse, a gradually unfolding, written conversation between thinkers.



Before I had that experience, I imagined knowledge as boundless and limitless. But human knowledge is constructed, one sentence, chapter, or trilogy at a time. And it has limits. There are things we don't know yet. And it is imperfect. Some of the things we think we know now will turn out to be false, or at least incomplete, as the conversation unfolds. My exploration of the geography of knowledge now includes several countries I never inhabited in school.

From the moment I began teaching high school, I realized I needed to know more about learning disabilities and differences to truly meet my students where they were. I had to learn about the ADHD brain, how to chunk and scaffold instruction, how to differentiate assignments and assessments for different kinds of learners. Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences became a central hub that connected ideas in this landscape.

Also in my first years of teaching, I came to realize that my job included a great deal of emotional labor. At first, I couldn't figure out why I was so tired when I came home at the end of the day. After all, I had only walked around the classroom, teaching was really just talking, and I did it for only three hours a day. But I was feeling things, and so were my students. We were feeling our feelings together and exchanging energy that sometimes energized but often depleted us in the process. So I started learning about emotional intelligence and how it was developed. Daniel Goleman, the Six

Second Step Emotional Intelligence Network, and Marc Brackett's work at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence were essential in this phase.

You might be able to see from this description how this reading about emotions fits within Gardner's intra- and interpersonal intelligences. It's a set of nested ideas, really, and as I continued, I learned about myself while learning about students, teachers, how to work with them, and how to lead.

One component of self-discovery led me to the realization that I have a history of trauma within my family. For a year and two summers, I read voraciously on the subject of trauma, trauma's physical effects on the body, trauma recovery treatments, and eventually about trauma-informed teaching practices, a relatively narrow field to date, that last one. Over the past year or two, I have become fascinated by the concept of coaching as a method and skill set for leadership, and I've been reading about and experimenting with these practices with several colleagues.

This work doesn't happen in isolation. All the thinking inside my brain is a form of dialogue and extending that dialogue outward to include other thinkers puts vital nutrients into the soil to grow the little idea plants. Coaching, for example, began five years ago with my involvement in the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS) Emerging Leaders Institute (ELI). But that story has another tributary, so let me back up to the year I transitioned into school leadership back in New York.

Connectivity

I didn't really know anything about leadership when I became a leader, so I had to learn fast. At that time, the New York Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS) held a three-part workshop series for new division directors called *Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire*. It was designed and delivered by George Swain, a friend of my buddy Jim Eagen. George was formerly the Middle School Head at Poughkeepsie Day School, and Jim had been the Middle School Head at MPH when I started teaching there. Three times that year, I trekked down to Manhattan for a workshop where I connected with about a dozen other folks from around the state who were also in their first year of school leadership. By the second visit, the cohort would become a lifeline as things fell apart around me back in Syracuse.

Our school was undergoing a financial crisis and major restructuring, as you will read about later on in the story. Suffice it to say, I had not made my way through even half of the faculty observations that first year, when the bedrock beneath my school began to shake, and major faults opened up all around me. I had to pivot, and pivot fast, to simply care for the students, teachers, and parents I was leading amid the uncertainty surrounding us. Having a group of sympathetic, understanding, knowledgeable, yet comfortably detached, people with whom to process what was happening sustained me and helped me survive.



The support was both practical and emotional, if a distinction can even be made between the two under such circumstances. I didn't know George before that experience, but he became a kind of mentor to me and an important professional connection. At the time, George was the Director of Accreditation for NYSAIS and responsible for supporting schools and coordinating the committee

that visits schools and carries out the association's accreditation process. Two years later, as my school prepared for its accreditation visit, I was asked to lead the self-study phase. George placed me on a visiting committee at the Stony Brook School on Long Island, helped me prepare our self-study process, and built a team to come to MPH and conduct our accreditation. Through that work, I learned so much about how schools are run from the process of preparing, organizing, evaluating, and presenting the accreditation.

When I moved across the country to join EPS, George introduced me to Betsy Watkins, the NWAIS Director of Accreditation, and recommended that she put me on a team. Betsy later joked that I was the easiest recruit she ever had, volunteering before I even arrived in the state. It took a few years for that connection to get me on an NWAIS visiting committee, because the association builds visiting teams with people from schools with an upcoming accreditation, so they will have recent experience with the process, which is always evolving. But the tree bore fruit in other ways more quickly.

Five years ago, Emily McGrath, the NWAIS Associate Director and leader of the association's professional development efforts, asked me to serve as an Emerging Leaders coach, which I have done ever since. The ELI program guides aspiring school leaders through a yearlong experience where they participate in a series of workshops and guided exercises as part of a cohort, and simultaneously pairs them with an experienced school leader who coaches them along the way, helping to identify goals and priorities and discern new directions that they might like to chart for their careers. I have found this work incredibly rewarding and fulfilling. It's a nice way to step out of the day-to-day management and firefighting that are part and parcel of divisional leadership, and to play a supportive and meaningful role in someone's professional journey.

My work with NWAIS has since expanded to include serving on the planning committee of the annual Leadership Institute and hosting the Division Heads and Assistant Heads Virtual Roundtable. That work is fun and invigorating, and it also informs my work and leadership within EPS, but coaching is probably the best way to close the loop on the Programmatic Expertise category and illustrate the value of connection with a network of peers. Over the past four years, I have had the great privilege of working with Verity Sayles as she transitioned into school leadership as the Associate Head of Upper School. This year, I've also begun to apply coaching techniques in other areas of my work, including support for discipline leads, framing teacher observations in new ways, and thinking about ways to better support Resident Teachers and new faculty as they join the school community.

I also helped to connect the Upper School Heads at the seven peer schools in the Seattle area several years ago by starting an email group and organizing some gatherings. We've had a few lunches, answered each other's questions about school problems and processes. And I've hosted groups from other schools on campus, most recently from the Bush School, and previously for a breakfast and informal workshop led by Sam Foote on Restorative Practices and Student Discipline.

Leadership Skills

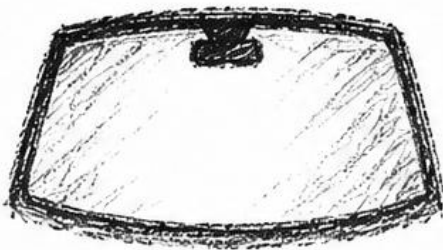
Indicator
Develops and articulates a compelling vision to guide projects and teams.

Sets aspirational and achievable goals; adapts to circumstances and adjusts goals as projects unfold.
Monitors progress and implements measures for accountability.
Makes decisions efficiently and effectively, navigating the tension between expedience and circumspection.
Cultivates leadership skills and supports the professional growth of team members.

If Programmatic Expertise is a house, Leadership Skills might be imagined as the family vehicle that takes people out into the world to lead lives of engagement. From wood and plaster to steel and plastic, the materials that build a solid home are different from those used in a vehicle. Even a pickup truck can carry only so many two-by-fours and sheets of drywall, and a house can't be packed up and relocated. If one is to succeed in subsequent career stages after transitioning into a leadership role, new skill sets must be acquired. We need a new vehicle entirely.

Windshield and Mirrors

From the driver's seat, the whole road opens up before you. Depending on the shape of the road and contours of the land it traverses, one can see somewhere between a hundred feet and several miles. One surveys the horizon, looking as far ahead as possible, then brings the gaze back to the front of the vehicle and scans from side to side to spot obstacles and predict their path. It is important to check the side and rearview mirrors to gain a sense of the car's position within the surrounding environment and to monitor moving objects on all four sides.



In my time as a school leader, navigating the environment as the driver described above, I have developed far more ideas than one could execute individually in many lifetimes, and that is especially true for any project that necessarily requires bringing many people along. I have sometimes joked that a 10:1 ratio of bad ideas to good ones is an aspirational target. But as I've gained experience, I can more quickly see which ones are which and why, so I can avoid wasting time developing projects that will be hard to get off the ground or garner support. Over the past several years, the incorporation of restorative practices into student discipline has provided an example of both a vision and its limitations, as well as my partial ability to implement and champion the work.

Following the pandemic, we began to experience more disruptive and harmful bias incidents among Upper School students. Responding to the incidents was difficult for many reasons. On one level, the infractions themselves were usually verbal, stemming from something offensive that one student said to another or, occasionally, to third parties, which made it difficult to verify the report if a student denied having made the offensive remark. If they did acknowledge the statement, students would often explain it away as a misguided attempt at humor. Recognizing the identity factors at play, students and their parents would often respond defensively, even aggressively, to deny or minimize the harm caused - classic shame responses. Meanwhile, students and faculty

became more and more frustrated with what they perceived as a deteriorating school climate in an era where racial, ethnic, and gender-based discrimination was being confronted more firmly.

Traditional responses to student discipline, such as detention, demerits, or other forms of retribution, were counter-cultural in EPS's high-trust environment. Yet these incidents were eroding trust rapidly. I began to explore restorative justice models of school discipline. At first, I experimented by offering students pathways to restoration, like formal apologies, reconciliation through dialogue, and even campus projects to restore faith and trust. In some cases, these efforts worked. On the whole, injured parties and the community at large viewed such responses as weak and sought more substantial penalties, while the offenders felt they had been wronged by the potential for embarrassment and shame associated with confronting their behavior.

I convened a group of teachers, counselors, and equity/inclusion specialists to advise and help me develop a model for a more systematic approach to restorative justice. I led faculty conversations about proactively establishing a restorative culture in advance of harm and injury, so we could "restore" our community when harm occurred. I partnered with Verity Sayles as the Assistant Division Head to expand upon the number and kinds of follow-up we could do. Meanwhile bias reports continued, even expanded in number and severity. It felt like we were chasing a speeding car, unfettered by speed limits or safety concerns.

In the past two years, as Verity's role expanded in scope and title to include more student discipline work, at the same time we hired an EICL Director to lead our work combating bias in the school. Now, through an emerging partnership with members of the Well-Being Team, it feels as though we are finally making headway in developing a more systematic approach to restorative practices at EPS. I would hasten to note that my personal involvement with this work has actually diminished as the efforts have expanded. Success was only possible with more people, more time, and greater shared purpose and execution. While I am pleased to have contributed to the project in my own modest way at the beginning, all the credit belongs to those who came later and took a nugget of an idea and shaped, molded, and carved it into something useful.

Navigation Screen

When I was a kid, we had no money. All of our vacations were road trips, and they usually involved sleeping outside or on the living room floor at a family member's home. Given the distance between our family and us, these trips included long days in the car, and sometimes detours around traffic, accidents, and road construction. In those days before Waze, my dad would pull out a paper map, unfold it across the steering wheel, and try to plan a way forward as he steadied the wheel with his knees. My, how far we have come, with computer screens providing turn-by-turn navigation and real-time updates from the center of the dashboard!

As important as a driver's vision of the road ahead, and the metaphorical portrait of the destination in their head and the ability to articulate that to others, a leader must be able to chart a course to that destination and navigate around obstacles and challenges that emerge once the journey is underway. To my knowledge, no technology has yet been developed that makes this process as user-friendly as the



nav screen in your car, although artificial intelligence may help you produce a map more efficiently.

Over the years, I have developed a sequence of annual steps that help me design, establish, and execute a handful of large-scale projects that the Upper School faculty can work on together. Each spring, I initiate a conversation about what's working well and what challenges we face as a division. I survey teachers to solicit feedback on my personal practice and to propose projects we can undertake in the upcoming year. Several years ago, one such project focused on how our students responded to grades and the problematic interactions that ensued when students challenged teachers' assigned grades.

We began the following year with a revised introductory statement to the Assessment and Grading section in the Student Handbook that framed grades as a form of feedback. That language also made clear that while students are encouraged to ask their teachers for clarification of grades, they were to consider the teacher's explanation as the final word and not engage in argument or debate. While that language helped me follow up with a few students in acute cases and presumably offered teachers some language to rely upon in contentious conversations, it by no means put a stop to the pressures students felt to achieve, nor the arguments prompted by those feelings.

The next year, Sarah Peeden joined EPS as the Middle School Head. Sarah took an interest in this project amid a number of initiatives we collaborated on to create alignment between the divisions. Sarah pushed us to take a step back from the grades themselves to consider the assessments they reflected, and even before that, the learning objectives that the assessments were intended to measure. In the process, we spent an entire year working with the faculty to map our learning objectives and a subsequent year to move forward and explore alternative metrics by which forward-thinking schools measure and report student progress. Subsequently, "Reimagine student assessment practices to ensure mission alignment and student well-being" became a strategic priority in the school's five-year strategic plan.

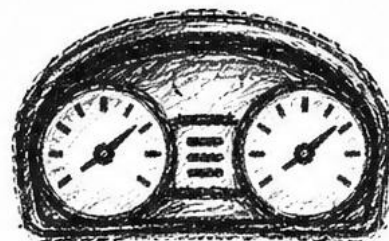
Sarah and I, along with other school leaders and the faculty at large, became interested in further exploring competency-based assessment and the tools developed by the Mastery Transcript Consortium. So, in the third year, we developed our own sets of competencies, specific to each discipline, to gain familiarity and facility with this alternative assessment scheme. In the fourth year, Sarah synthesized the work of the various disciplines to collate one set of competencies that could potentially be implemented school-wide. Meanwhile, Jonathan Briggs, Director of Strategy, Technology, and Innovation, and Matt Delaney, Director of Academic Design and Integration, developed a curriculum-mapping tool that provides essential information to advance the grading and assessment project.

I am currently working with two community partners to pilot a competency-based assessment as we develop student internships that may one day carry academic credit. Our Independent Curriculum Facilitators have indicated interest in experimenting with the competency model for the student work they supervise. I have no idea if the school will ever fully implement or transition away from a traditional "seat time" credit model and the A-F grading scale, nor do I know if a competency model would be the solution if we did. In fact, it has been important to our work to reassure faculty that there was no such foregone conclusion that we were working toward. But the ability to set reasonable goals, reassess, and then modify the next phase of the project has led to some very interesting and innovative work on this core component of the school experience.

Instrument Cluster

Back when car hydraulic systems were more sophisticated than the electrical system, the driver had to read gauges that measured the engine's health and performance. One had to watch the tachometer to make sure the revolutions per minute didn't go over the "redline," or the engine might explode. If the water temperature climbed too high or the oil pressure dropped too low, the engine would lose vital lubrication and/or overheat, and the parts could melt together, leading the engine to seize. Nowadays, the vehicle's central computer monitors these systems and illuminates a blinky light to make the driver aware of imminent failure. No such system is built into the mechanics of a school, so the leader must develop their own systems to monitor health and safety within the machine and learn to read them carefully.

One such system in the divisional leader's toolkit is the process, timing, and format of their classroom observations. While there are a handful of widely shared systems that leaders can borrow from or implement in full, those "store-bought" systems tend to be comprehensive and therefore cumbersome, in my experience. Over the years, I have experimented with a handful of different strategies. I first moved from large and complex toward simple and straightforward. In recent years, I've been shifting the system's focus towards teacher-centered goals and towards offering feedback that teachers want, because I believe teachers usually have a strong sense of what's working well and are already taking steps to improve what isn't. Along with this change, the system has pulled complexity back in, but the teacher's focus seems to make it work better.



In my early years as a teacher, I was observed and evaluated with a form that included many checkboxes for the observer to mark, and, if you were lucky, a sentence or two to explain what they had seen. I found it less than helpful as a teacher, but I didn't really know an alternative, so I began my divisional leadership with a similar model, although I deleted several fields from the form I inherited. In my second year as a division head, I visited Soroe Academy, the oldest school in Denmark, and my school's sister school. While there, I spent a day shadowing the school's rector (equivalent of the head of school), Kristian Jacobsen.

Kristian was an experienced school leader and was well known in Denmark as a school reformer. He had been placed at Soroe by the national education ministry to breathe new life into that storied institution. The Academy's roots extend back to the 12th century, when it was founded as a monastery and school for the training of monks. Over the years, it had experienced several declines and rebirths, and Kristian was in the process of revitalizing the fairly traditional pedagogy of many long-tenured teachers in the school. In the course of our time together, he shared with me his "five dots." Although Kristian's English was excellent, he didn't seem to know the vernacular for a "bulleted" list, so he used the word "dot," which has stuck with me ever since. "Kristian's Five Dots" made up the core of his educational philosophy and leadership practice. Everything he did was oriented toward implementing those principles for every student, by every teacher, in every classroom. They are:

- Safe and positive learning environment
- Clear, adapted, and differentiated learning goals
- Feedback for teacher and students

- Variation and structure in teaching
- Student engagement

The simplicity of this structure appealed to me, and try as I might, I really couldn't identify many other aspects of teaching that didn't fit into one of these categories. Although I never fully copied Kristian's rubric, I did find myself thinking with these ideas and searching for ways to distill my practice into irreducible components. Over several years, I found that I could offer teachers three categories of feedback that just about everything fit into. The first was an accounting of activity and time. This became the lesson outline and a record of how time was used. Second, I could provide feedback on the instructional design, that is, the way the teacher put together a series of activities or conversation points to guide students through the lesson. If the Agenda identified the lesson structure, Instructional Design offered commentary on how it worked and why, or why not. Third, I tracked Student Engagement to reflect on how students engaged with the teacher, the material, and one another. Were they active, passive, listening attentively, distracted, disruptive, or some combination of those things?

While this simplified practice works well for me, I was challenged to observe and debrief with 45 Upper School teachers more than once per year. I also began to hear from teachers that they were seeking deeper and more sustained kinds of feedback. One year, Sam, Matt, Sarah, Bart, and I experimented with a "distributed observation" model in which we each took on a handful of teachers and visited their classes in a series of three observations. This year, I collected resources from several models and asked faculty to review them, identify a handful of criteria they would like me to look for, and complete a pre-observation template they shared with me in advance of my visit. I paired this new tool with a series of "mini observations," unscheduled drop-ins lasting about 10 minutes, to complete 5 or 6 impromptu observations in a class period.

This year's experiment has received mixed reviews. The template and sample documents were new, and people had a hard time understanding what I was asking for, which therefore made it difficult to make the experience personally meaningful. This innovation hasn't solved the scale problem, and a faculty of 45 is probably too large for one school leader to meaningfully observe, much less evaluate. Looking ahead, I have some ideas for merging the distributed model with the teacher-centered model through a portfolio that teachers would maintain and update year to year. This might also be a valuable link between my annual practice and the less frequent PDP experience, providing material and insight to seed that work once the PDP cohort is assembled.

While the PDP is a purposefully growth-oriented model, it does provide substantial accountability for a teacher's performance. Although the annual observation is primarily about monitoring performance and understanding a person's practice, it is sometimes perceived as evaluative and can therefore be somewhat intimidating for teachers. In addition, there are times when major performance concerns need to be addressed systematically. So in collaboration with Sam and Sarah, I have developed a formal Performance Improvement Plan to guide such work when it is necessary. This work is difficult and sensitive, so I endeavor to be firm, yet gentle, and overwhelmingly supportive when walking through such an experience with a teacher.

Of course, there are dozens of smaller, more quotidian forms of accountability that inhabit my practice on an ongoing basis. When I learn of something unusual or potentially problematic, I try to lead with curiosity in a personal conversation. In more significant circumstances, I may follow up a conversation with an email to create a reference point and document it. In each of those, I endeavor

to speak and write with clarity and compassion and affirm my ongoing support. I find the concept of a "warm demander" is a helpful aspiration.

Pedals, Shifter, and Steering Wheel

A modern car is a complex system of interconnected parts and subsystems. Operating a vehicle requires multiple inputs from the driver, each one connected to a different system. Sitting in the driver's seat, the driver manipulates the accelerator pedal, which is connected to the engine and provides power; the steering wheel, which links to the chassis and controls direction; and eventually the brake pedal to slow or stop the vehicle, sometimes quickly to avoid a crash. Most transmissions today handle the shifting automatically, but in a previous era, the driver had to manually control the interface between the engine and transmission with their hand and foot. Some still prefer this method for its simplicity, efficiency, and effectiveness, and for the pleasure of driving with both hands and feet. Operating a vehicle connected to so many different systems requires dexterity, coordination, and the mitigation of competing extremes.

In a school environment, a leader must similarly make numerous decisions, sometimes daily and in



the midst of other duties, that are all interconnected. In addition, one must navigate an array of omnipresent tensions, often between competing goods. One of the most central is the goal to include many individuals and constituencies in decision-making processes, while moving expeditiously within a fast-paced organization to stay nimble and responsive. Independent schools, including teachers, parents, and students, have high expectations for inclusion in conversations about institutional change and the institution's ability to adapt quickly to individual and emerging needs without bogging down in bureaucracy. Throughout my time as a school leader, I have endeavored to find ways to speed up and streamline regular tasks and functions, while remaining patient

and thorough with big questions and large-scale changes.

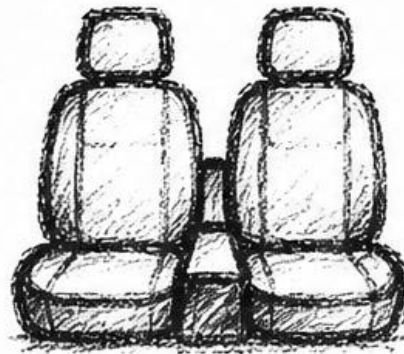
One such example is the annual process of developing a staffing model for classes in the upcoming school year. This project spans about three months, from January through March, every year, and determines the classes the school can offer students and the sections that comprise each teacher's core responsibilities. As such, it is both a regular, annual process and one that feels high-stakes for everyone involved. Recognizing that, I have historically implemented the process in four parts: 1) building a preliminary staffing model to determine which courses we can offer, 2) holding a series of individual meetings with each teacher to ask their preferences and priorities for those offered classes in the upcoming year, 3) reconciling the number of student requests with the preliminary staffing model, and 4) circling back to any teachers whose lines have changed in the course of the previous steps to discuss and reconcile preferences with needs.

Last year, I tried to improve efficiency by postponing the second step until after we received student requests, then meeting with every teacher in a single stage instead of two. I reasoned that I had most of the information I needed to move forward in the process before connecting with teachers, and that the most crucial needs for those meetings (from my perspective) stemmed from sorting through a handful of misalignments driven by shifting student demand. However, this annual conversation is an important touchpoint between teachers and their direct supervisor. It's not only

about which classes they will teach the following year, but it is also an opportunity for me to hear how things are going with current classes, changes and challenges teachers are facing, and for most teachers, the one significant moment in the year where they can express the bigger picture, longer-term directions they want to pursue in their teaching. In a small number of cases, I made poor choices because I didn't have recent information from teachers. More broadly, teachers and I missed out on this important moment in the winter to check in with each other. By the time we met later in the spring, the schedule was largely complete, and many teachers felt I had made decisions unilaterally, even when their needs and goals were met. I learned a valuable lesson from this experience, and it was a helpful reminder that, in schools, the process is often as important as the outcome.

Passenger Seats

Most cars, especially those suited to be utilitarian family vehicles, seat more than two people. Even a modest economy sedan can seat three across the back bench seat, and minivans and some SUVs seat seven or eight with "third-row seating." From the "way back," as we used to call our family station wagon's rear-facing third seat when I was a kid, it's really hard to see the road ahead, and one is quite removed from the act of driving. When children are young, we place their small bodies in car seats, and then booster seats in the back because it is safer. As they get older and bigger, they can move to the front seat, which, for a time, may become a contest between siblings for that privileged space next to the driver.



As teenagers approach the driving, most take a driver's begins with classroom and/or internet modules. small group of students for a actions and talking through Finally, the teacher moves to they may have an auxiliary brake pedal for emergencies, while the new drivers take turns practicing, first in a parking lot, then on quiet residential streets at slow speeds, and finally on busy urban or suburban highways. The student is gradually introduced to driving, practicing their skills in less risky, somewhat protected spaces.

age at which they may begin education class. Such a class learning, virtual or in-person, Eventually, the teacher takes a drive, explaining the driver's the decision-making process. the passenger seat, where

A transition to school leadership, and the development of leadership perspective even for teachers not in formal leadership positions, is similar to the move forward in a vehicle, from back seat, to passenger seat, to driver's seat. Perspective changes, and the road looks different when it is right in front of you, especially when the wheel is in your hands. There's even a common phrase for the act of calling shots from outside of the zone within which one can have a decision-making perspective: back-seat driving. In my work as a divisional leader, I endeavor to empower teachers to make their own decisions by broadening perspective through a gradual process of exposure, sharing insights, and my own prior experience, and by cultivating decision-making ability through an established process.

Previously, I wrote about the valuable experience I have gained as a leadership coach within the NWAIS's Emerging Leaders program. In that work, a coach is paired with an emerging leader for a series of monthly video calls throughout the year. In the past five years, I have worked with clients in

many different phases of the transition to leadership; some are considering whether they want to move into formal leadership positions, some are considering how to make such a move, whether within their current school or by applying for jobs elsewhere, and some have recently accepted leadership roles and are in the process of learning how to navigate this challenging transition. Within this range, I find that people need different kinds of support, but in all cases, I can be a neutral, non-judgmental conversational partner. I mostly try to listen to truly understand what a person is experiencing or struggling with, especially to gain awareness of deeper emotional experiences. Then I offer myself as a sounding board for their ideas, sharing any related experience I've had, and I try to gently help them move forward on their journey. This kind of coaching is relatively unstructured. There is a lot of personal connection and relationship building involved.

Over the past year, I have worked with one of our Discipline Leads to help structure and streamline their discipline group's meetings and decision-making. The lead had been working hard to make space for all voices in those conversations and to respond to the sometimes-competing preferences and priorities within the group. As such, the group was struggling to advance conversations efficiently, and some members perceived conflicts within the group as unproductive. We began by discussing the group's past experiences and the leader's intentions and guiding philosophy. We then read portions of Elena Aguilar's *The Art of Coaching Teams* together, conducted a group survey, and reported back the results. It was eye-opening for some group members to learn that others felt stifled and shut down within the group, because, of course, that was no one's hope or intention for the group. Finally, in a subsequent meeting topic, we implemented a formal decision-making protocol from the book to advance the process in a way that was both inclusive and structured, and to conclude within the finite time available. These measures did not resolve all issues, but they helped the Discipline Lead see that there were options beyond their previous experience with which to experiment. That perspective and experience built confidence and capacity for future growth as a school leader.

In a similar way, but over a longer period, I have worked with Verity Sayles, first as Assistant and then as Associate Head of Upper School, to develop divisional leadership capacity. Verity began her tenure by taking over the Advisory program and working with the team of Grade Level Coordinators (GLCs). That work required a lot of organization, calendaring, and coordination, as well as team building with GLCs and leading them in building team capacity with their respective advisor groups. For the most part, Verity kept me informed of the steps she was taking, and I occasionally offered advice or shared a perspective from past experience. This work developed her confidence and credibility in the eyes of teachers. In subsequent years, Verity gradually took over more student discipline work, which is more delicate and complicated due to the combination of high visibility, heightened emotion, and time constraints. In that work, we partnered more closely as she gradually took on more responsibility. First, we discussed ways she would intervene in routine issues, such as academic integrity violations, skipping class, or leaving campus without permission. In higher-profile incidents, we worked together to investigate infractions and follow up with teachers, students, and parents. Over time, Verity gained the experience, confidence, and credibility to handle even high-stakes disciplinary cases alone or with minimal support from me.

In each of these cases, there is a pace and a process required to help a teacher or emerging school leader develop leadership skills as they grow professionally. It begins with modeling and working alongside one another. Through that work, I can identify and explain the process and its rationale, which helps a person see the underlying method and choices as they are made. Gradually, they begin to select and implement their own methods, guided by their own philosophy and values.

Relational Cultivation

Joining the Faculty

Baxter Ball was a giant man, figuratively and literally. The school had deep roots extending back 150 years, but in everyone's living memory, he built it. When Baxter took over in 1990, the little suburban country day school that absorbed a bankrupt military boarding school had all sorts of problems. Fundamentally, the two schools didn't belong together, and it showed. The administrative suite was located in a rundown farmhouse, and the theater was in an actual barn. The whole 16-acre campus educated fewer than 200 students. By the time I joined in 2010, "the little merger that could" had crested 600 in total enrollment and become the most prestigious private school in Central New York.

I'm a pretty affable guy, I think. But I couldn't tell beans from apple butter when I started teaching. And sometimes my mouth moved faster than my brain. My first day came before the students'. There were many systems to learn, from grading and reporting, to lunch accounts and attendance. I ate my first foot sandwich during the attendance session.

"You mean I have to spend the first five minutes of class counting kids and checking boxes in the computer system?" I asked, the indignation in my tone framing words more like a statement than a question. "Don't you realize how important the first five minutes of a class are? I'm trying to create an experience. It's like the opening scene of a play. And you want me to take roll? Why can't I pass around a piece of paper and enter it at the end of the period? That's what I've always done in my college classes."

"Well, uh, we need to make sure the students are all accounted for," stammered the part-time, contracted, technology coordinator who was leading the session on this single day of orientation for new teachers. Apparently, knowing where the children were was part of our *in loco parentis* responsibility for the minors under our supervision. Attendance became the first item on the list of things I had not thought about when I took a job teaching high school after five years of professing college.

Later that day, over a lunch of three cheeseburgers, Baxter put it to me directly, "So I hear you've got a problem with attendance."

"Well, not exactly," I said sheepishly, trying to figure out how deep a hole I had dug on my very first day. "I just want to make the best experience for students, and it seems like wasting the first five minutes fiddling with the computer would stall out the class before it starts."

Baxter laughed and slapped me on the back, his delight expanding the more I squirmed. "You're



not wrong, ya know, but we gotta keep track of those kids. They'll wander off if you don't watch 'em," he chuckled as he ate half of his second burger in a single bite, mayonnaise dripping onto the third. I got the sense that he liked me.

For a guy in a position of authority, Baxter seemed to really like people who challenged authority, I suppose because he had that streak in himself. After New York State passed a law making school campuses smoke-free, he would take meetings in his car so he could chain-smoke as he drove teachers around the block a few times and discussed whatever they needed. Everyone knew you had a meeting with Baxter because your shirt smelled like stale cigarettes for the rest of the day. Not exactly your typical buttoned-down headmaster.

Baxter's health caught up with him later that year. He died of a heart attack in February. The Saturday afternoon memorial was bigger than commencement and filled the gym and the standing room at the back of the aisles. I remember one tearful eulogy when a former student described the moment when Baxter stood in the doorway of his home, refusing to let the boy's father take him because he had been drinking. "Go call the police," Baxter told him, "You're in no condition to parent this child," the now-grown man recalled.

Baxter's legend continued to inspire, and haunt, Manlius Pebble Hill School for the nine years of my tenure there. After he died, enrollment began to decline. The whole place had sprung from his persona, charisma, and the deep relationships he built with people - it was a beautiful human mess of things. Baxter's way was great for building a dream, but a harder way to run a business. And it was the business side of things that eventually caught up with MPH, at about the same time the cheeseburgers and cigarettes got Baxter.

Financial Crisis

Three years and two headmasters later, I had built a decent reputation for myself at MPH. I was no Baxter, but I had solid relationships with students and colleagues. I was known as a teacher with high expectations, and therefore a hard grader, but kids liked my classes because they were interesting and fun, and because it feels good to grow. I had also impressed the new head of school with some ideas I developed to support indigenous students in our Oneida Nation scholarship program, as well as the work I did as chair of a faculty committee that liaised directly with him on major issues. So, when the Upper School Division Head position opened, D. Scott Wiggins encouraged me to apply.

Most of my ideas for the school were academic in nature. As enrollment declined, so did our array of course offerings. And the ones that remained were not creative, inspiring electives but rather the core curriculum we felt that we had to offer, including a pretty standard list of AP courses that every public school in the surrounding area taught for free. I proposed that we ditch the AP curriculum and build our own. This was a hot idea in independent school circles at the time, and it resonated enough to get me the job.

With my transition to school leadership underway, we approached the holiday break in mid-December. On Thursday afternoon, Scott sent a message to the school that the traditional holiday *wassail* was canceled, and instead we would gather on Friday afternoon for a meeting with the board chair in the church basement across the street. No one could recall a meeting held there, nor imagine a reason for doing so. Perhaps a surprise party? It didn't seem likely from the tone of the email.

Once gathered, Scott thanked us for coming and handed the microphone to Pete Carmen, President of the Board of Trustees and Chief Operating Officer for the Oneida Indian Nation and the Turning Stone Casino that they operated. Scott and Pete were both lawyers by training, and their carefully chosen words and flat, stern affect evidenced their background.

"I'm afraid I have some troubling news," Pete began. "We are facing serious financial challenges. We'll need to make some changes pretty quickly, or we won't be able to finish the year. But don't worry, we've got a solid plan," he said in a half-hard pivot.

"Wait, what do you mean 'won't be able to finish the year?'" someone asked as soon as Pete paused to open his PowerPoint deck.

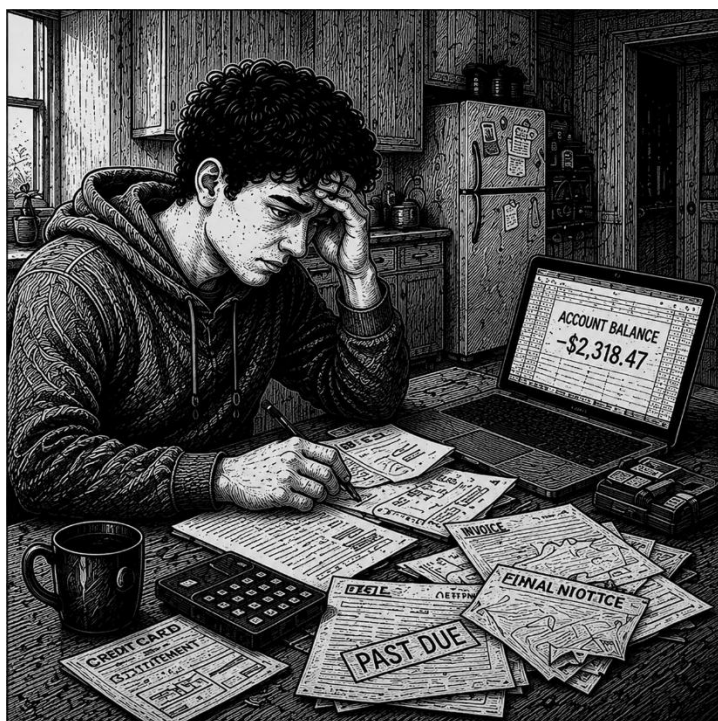
"Well, as you know, our enrollment has been declining over the past few years," Pete answered. "That means our tuition revenue has decreased too. We've tried to cut costs in several areas, but we're quickly exhausting our reserves. At the current rate, we project that we'll run out by April."

"And what would happen at that point?" came the next question.

"Well, unless we take some quick action, we wouldn't be able to make payroll, so you'd have to work for free, or we'd have to close," Pete replied, knowing he shouldn't laugh but realizing that might have come across like an absurdly timed joke.

Silence.

"But let me share with you our plan," Pete continued. He went on to outline *The Way Forward*, the board's plan to raise 2 million dollars, reduce the faculty by half, and trim the student body from 425 students to 155. That would right the ship, Pete said, and put the school on a sustainable path forward. Scott said nothing.



More silence.

As the presentation transitioned to questions and floppy, insulting attempts as reassurance, the teachers went in two directions: anger and despair. It felt like a wake. Mercifully, the meeting ended after two hours and we went somberly on our way home for the holidays.

In the New Year, we began to gather and plan. There were secret evening meetings at several faculty homes; hushed conversations in hallways, whispered through tears, as people channeled their rage into social media. The *Post-Standard*, Syracuse's newspaper of record, picked up the story. An anonymous group of students started a website called *The Wiggins Way*, and

things turned nasty. Scott was gone by the end of January. The leadership team had been in the dark along with everyone else, so we held some credibility for a time. But eventually the hard choices started falling and we were on the wrong side of them. No one cared about numbers. These were people, after all.

This was my entrée into school leadership. I set out to invigorate the curriculum and somehow became a pastor. In a time of collapse, people's capacity for change craters. They need hugs and casserole; a cup of tea and a listening ear. Leadership is care and feeding.

Personal Growth

Indicator
Articulates a professional biography that is aligned with role, duties, and school community.
Exhibits self-awareness and emotional intelligence.
Displays patience and resilience navigating complex tasks and competing goods.
Invites and receives feedback, takes personal responsibility, and accepts accountability from others.

We all start out as little more than a human body. We can't feed ourselves and the messes we make are incessant. Along the course of life, we figure out the basics, and sometimes a lot more. We develop awareness of our physical, emotional, and spiritual selves. We explore our surroundings and learn about other people. The best of us find ways to relate to others with selfless concern and compassion. But when the sh*t hits the fan, we go back to our bodies. That's where we need to feel safe and protected. Our bodies store the trauma we experience, which bubbles up when the temperature rises for the rest of our lives. In my experience, everything I've learned about leading other people started with some kind of lesson about myself, so the human body provides an apt metaphor for a discussion of personal growth.

Head to Think

There is so much to say about my head that I hardly know where to begin. Maybe I should say that I spend too much time up there, spinning in circles, rehearsing and replaying conversations, basically just talking to myself. Another way to go at it would be write about the relative safety and comfort I find in rational, linear thinking. It's not the pattern that my brain naturally follows, but it's always seemed like a worthy goal and provided me with something to work toward. A third approach could be from the angle of limitations or irregularities, but although I experienced those from the beginning, I only came to understand my neurodivergence much later in life. But since this section is a condensed biography within a much larger, more nuanced, and more complete one, I'll try to focus on mapping the contours of my brain as they relate to my professional trajectory.

As the reader probably realizes by now, I was only partially engaged with school as a learner through most of my education. I was curious and showed promise in elementary school. Things started to fall apart in middle school as I attended four different schools between the fifth and ninth grades. In high school, I was able to find success without bringing books home and completed most of my graduation requirements by eleventh grade. As an undergraduate, I was disillusioned with studies and barely scraped by until I found a passion and a teacher to challenge me. Throughout those years, I found writing particularly challenging and I struggled with procrastination, task initiation, and all manner of executive functioning. I have always been a reader who reaches the end of the page and realizes my mind wandered off somewhere in the middle and has to go back and re-read the second half. Those are the signs of an ADHD brain, but I wasn't diagnosed until I was in my thirties.



The decision to become an educator was motivated by a desire to do something for students that my teachers (Richard Haly notwithstanding) were unable to do for me; to ignite a passion and drive to pursue innate curiosity to the max. After exploring alternative high school models and several teaching experiences in higher education, I found the goldilocks conditions in independent schools: curious kids, smart and creative teachers, supportive parents, unfettered by administrative bureaucracy. The teaching was challenging, but rich and rewarding too. I learned to find balance between individualizing instruction and developing a system that was sustainable for me and the majority of students. I started thinking about the systems we create in the classroom and how those were nested within school systems and within society more broadly.

My transition to school leadership came at a time when my school and all of its systems were in flux. I was excited by that emerging landscape and wanted to be a part of shaping the future. I saw an opportunity to make a better experience for more than just the 75 or so students in my classes, but the institution as a whole. Once I arrived in a leadership position, I quickly came to realize there were more systems operating simultaneously than I had imagined. Of course, the structure was built around the academic program, but adjacent to that were networks of relationship among the faculty, bonds of trust and expectation between the school and the parent community, and the institution's standing within the broader community, especially a local university. And while I could navigate that landscape with the powers of reason that I had trained through my own education, there were so many feelings floating around, with which I frequently seemed clumsy and inept.

Overlapping this phase of my professional journey, I began to realize that my own children exhibited some neurodivergent traits and needed more support than academic programs traditionally provide. While my daughter simply learned to read over a two-week period in kindergarten, my son learned by decoding one excruciating word after another. And when my daughter reached middle school and encountered homework, she stalled, avoided, and lost track of assignments to our shared family frustration. Formal evaluations, diagnoses, and accommodations followed, but the challenges presented by school persisted.

I was drawn to Eastside Prep for many reasons, but chief among them was the recognition that the school had created an engaging, creative, and progressive academic experience that was accessible to a wide range of learners. I could see my children thriving here, and it seemed like a place where learners like us could continue to grow and find success. The school's flat curriculum,

without tracking or ability-based placement, and the faculty's commitment to differentiation and collaborative learning inspired me.

In my time here, I have come to realize that our lofty aspirations carry with them a great deal of challenge. Any shared experience is inherently designed with compromises built in for people at the margins and extremes. At Eastside Prep, we do an excellent job of accommodating individual needs through personal dialogue and flexibility. Sometimes that carries a cost of inconsistency and a kind of labor intensity. As Terry used to say, "it's harder to teach at EPS" because we go the extra mile to include everyone and meet their unique needs. Consequently, I have focused much of my energy on developing and implementing support systems that provide a balance of structure, accountability, and flexibility. I never want EPS to lose the ability to meet every student where they are, but I also want school systems that carry a greater proportion of the cognition and labor required to support them. This is my head at work.

Heart to Feel

Do you recall that scene from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* when the Grinch's heart grows three sizes? High up in the mountains above Whoville, his sleigh packed full with stolen presents and perched precariously on the precipice of a tall peak, the Grinch hears the townsfolk begin to sing. At first he's confused, and "with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling: 'How could it be so?'" The narrator tells us "he puzzled three hours till his puzzler was sore," until finally he "thought of something he hadn't before." What happens next is open to interpretation, but "in Whoville they say, that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day."

While Dr. Seuss covers this scene in one stanza and ends his story in just four lines with the Grinch returning the gifts, bringing food for the feast, and carving the roast beast as soon as "his heart didn't feel quite so tight," three different depictions are presented in the film versions. In the original 1966 cartoon TV special, Grinch's face, scrunched in confusion as he puzzles, quickly melts into a warm glow as the sound of singing rises to his ears on the mountaintop. In the 2018 feature length animated film, Pharrell Williams narrates "and the luscious sound swelled, reaching up to the skies, and the Grinch heard with his heart and it tripled in size." But in the 2020 live action feature film, Jim Carrey clutches his chest, a la Redd Foxx in *Sanford and Son*, and falls to the ground writhing in pain.



While I would take exception with anyone else calling me a grinch, I must admit that his transformation rings with a truthful tone when I reflect on my development of self-awareness and emotional intelligence. And while I wish that I had passed quickly from puzzlement to warm and fuzzy glow, I relate most to Jim Carrey's anguished mountaintop temper tantrum. In the end, although the 2018 film is the worst of the bunch and I hate the editing they did to Seuss's poetry, learning to "hear with the heart" is really the essence of what this growth has meant for me.

In my first years of teaching, the emotional fatigue I felt was profound. My heart muscle had not been exercised nearly as much as my head muscle, so it didn't have any base fitness. But I learned to listen, not just to what students were saying with their words, but with their affect and actions,

and regular practice built capacity. The transition to school leadership brought more stretching and growth, and as I have described in relating the financial crisis at MPH, I encountered circumstances that called for deep heart-centered leadership. At EPS, the pandemic was another such time.

As we transitioned to remote operations in March of 2020, and in the year-and-a-half of remote and/or hybrid instruction that followed, there was analytic and critical thinking required, to be sure. We had to make up rules and guidelines that offered practical solutions to very concrete challenges faced by students and teachers alike. But just beneath the surface a steady fear buzzed and animated every conversation and interaction. The whole world was falling apart, it seemed, and here we were trying to keep math and Spanish classes afloat. At about the same time, George Floyd's murder set in motion a national reckoning with racial injustice and the #BlackAt Instagram campaign called out racism in independent schools across the country, leading some to famously argue that "Private Schools have Become Truly Obscene" and that if they really cared about the values they espouse they would simply close, as Caitlin Flanagan wrote in *The Atlantic* in April 2021.

I will say more about the substance of my diversity, equity, and inclusion work in a later section, but here it is important to acknowledge that there was a deeply personal component of this work for me. It took me some time to realize how and why I frequently felt inadequate and ill-equipped to lead in these areas. My own identities, historically privileged as a white cisgender man, have saddled me with guilt and shame that I had to work through on a personal level before I could deeply engage with the work at school, with teachers, students, and parents. Both the personal and professional dimensions of this work continue and they are by no means complete. However, I do now have awareness to see how they impact me and prompt me to respond in particular ways.

In the end, self-awareness is a gateway to emotional intelligence, but it only opens the door, we still have to walk through. As a person, as a parent, and as an educator, I have worked long and hard to slowly and methodically build a broader emotional vocabulary, practice identifying and understanding felt emotion, and developing tools to regulate emotional responses. I believe this work is crucial in all aspects of school leadership, both working with adults and with adolescents. Mountaintop experiences like the Grinch's can be profound and life-changing and they make for a powerful signal that the protagonist has changed at the end of their developmental arc. But in the real world, in my experience, this change happens slowly and develops out of persistent, methodical work in the trenches. I need practice and repetition for change of character to stick.

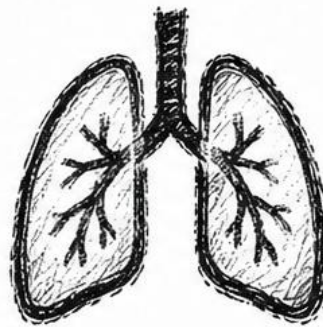
Lungs to Breathe

When an EPS employee completes five years of work, they have historically been recognized at the end-of-year champagne toast with the gift of a small doll. In a previous era, this doll was selected from the Plush Toys "Little Thinker" line to represent an aspect of the employee's professional role or demeanor. A brief scan of the Unemployed Philosopher's Guild website shows Frederick Douglass, Albert Einstein, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg among the miniaturized greats - you know, serious people. When I reached the five-year mark, Sam Uzack, in a combination of whimsy, wit, woo, and wisdom that only he can muster, switched the selection to Funko dolls, which feature an enormous caricaturized head. For me, in recognition of five years of labor and "for racing around campus like his *ss is on fire," Sam bestowed upon me a Funko Dale Earnhardt.

Now Dale Earnhardt is a respectable figure in some circles. He was known to be deadly serious about racing cars in left-hand circles across the American South, and he even started a few pit row brawls to assert his dominance of NASCAR's Winston Cup Series back when big tobacco could still sponsor stuff. Known as "the intimidator," a *nom de guerre* that referenced his unsmiling gaze, concealed by aviator glasses, as well as the ever-present threat of fisticuffs, Earnhardt was not to be trifled with. What was I to make of this tribute to my school leadership?

It sobered me. I don't mind being lampooned, and much of our humor at EPS feels a bit like being roasted on Comedy Central. But this one cut because there was truth in it... an uncomfortable truth. I suppose that's also why some found it funny, but I did not. It made me realize that I was perceived in a way that I was ashamed of. I did not, and do not, want to be an intimidating brawler of a school leader. People don't grow under that kind of leadership. They don't take risks when they're afraid. And while they might comply, they rarely feel good about it. Joy withers and dark clouds envelop the land.

School leadership can be challenging and frustrating. As a divisional leader, I am frequently called on to resolve conflict and solve intractable problems. I find such challenging aspects of the work rewarding, but I don't always experience, much less express, joy as I go about those parts of my day. I'm good at persistence and I bounce back from failure like a wobbly Weeble. As I have learned about my emotional responses, I have much greater recognition of emotion as I feel them, and I have come to accept that I do not conceal them on my sleeve, my face, and with my whole body.



my feelings well. I wear
sometimes project them

If I was going to become a calmer, more would need to address those feelings at interrupt their expression. The event precipitated, among some other personal into the physiology and psychology of year I read widely about affect theory, post-traumatic stress, ways that trauma physiological changes in the body, and somatic treatments for recovery. I learned about polyvagal theory, contested as it is in the medical literature, and the ways that the autonomic nervous system stimulates fight, flight, and freeze responses and the body's return to stasis after such a reaction. I learned to feel these things in my body and gradually implement strategies to regulate and compensate for the elevated energy that accompanied so many of my interactions throughout the day.

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Riding my bike to school in the morning releases healthy endorphins that improve my mood and help me start the day positively. I sometimes take a few minutes to lay down and close my eyes right after lunch, not so much to nap as to simply slow my body down. If not a rest, sometimes a walk around the block can produce a similar effect. And riding my bike home again in the afternoon helps me flush the accumulated stress hormones from my body and sleep better at night. I've become a bit obsessive about sleep in recent years, tracking my stats with my watch and watching how my heart rate variability (HRV) declines over the course of the week and rebounds after a slow-paced weekend. I'm still working on healthier eating habits, particularly trying to reduce my sugar intake, which can be an easy shortcut to sooth emotional distress for me. And at the bottom of all this physiology is the breath.

Respiration brings oxygen to the body, enabling the basic chemical reaction that allows a human to go on being. In homage to that fact, a great many literary references and spiritual traditions center on breath as a core, irreducible function of the human experience. In the Abrahamic traditions, God animated the first human by breathing life into his nostrils, and Their sacred name in Hebrew (YHWH, or Yahweh) is surmised by some to be a derivative of the sound of breath entering and exiting the lungs. Meditation, in both the sacred Buddhist and western secular forms, often initiates by focusing the mind on the breath, including the manipulation of breath with counting, pauses, holds, and intentional releases (box breathing, for example). Breathing is unique in that it is both an unconscious, autonomic function, and one that can be intentionally controlled and altered.

In the last several years, with varying degrees of success, I have made intentional efforts to slow my pace during the day: in meetings, walking across campus, physical movements, and patterns of speech. When I sense that emotion is rising in me or another person, I bring attention to my breath, lower my voice, relax my body, and slow my speech. I am beginning to find that this has a positive and accrued effect on my state of mind. I recently left a difficult meeting and realized sometime later that I wasn't thinking about it the way I would have in the past, with circular thoughts and internal conflict.

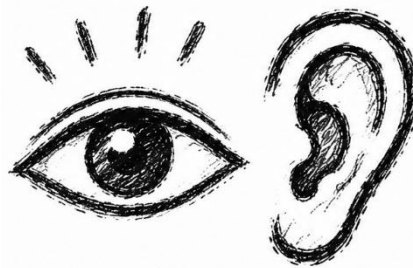
I don't know how many people have noticed these efforts from the outside, or even if there is a palpable change externally, but I have begun to feel it on the inside. A wise friend once said to me, "My state of mind is the most important thing to me." At times when my state of mind is uncomfortable, agitated, or in distress, I have begun asking myself, "What would I do right now if my state of mind was the most important thing to me?" If I take the action that arises in response to that question, I almost always set myself on a path toward patience and resilience.

Eyes to See and Ears to Hear

Unlike the head, heart, and lungs, the eyes and ears are actual sense organs. One might assume, then, that their operation in requesting, receiving, and responding to feedback would therefore be straightforward. I find they are not, and for me, this category of personal growth is hard and humbling. I hold myself to high standards. I have a strong inner critic evaluating every move inside my head. One would think that would make feedback easy to digest, or at least make me familiar and therefore more comfortable with it. And yet, I find it is an acquired skill, requiring willingness, humility, courage, practice, repetition, and lots of partnership and trust. I make myself do it, and I've become a better school leader for the effort, but it ain't easy.

In reality, we are all receiving, processing, and responding to feedback all day long. However, much of this information is subtle and filtered through our own subjectivity. In order to make good sense of this information, one needs to first build awareness of their own emotional state and the information one already holds. What do I already know about this person or conversation I'm about to engage? Am I comfortable talking with them? What is our history? Do I anticipate conflict or disagreement? Are we able to communicate freely and easily with a foundation of trust and mutual respect? Has trust been frayed or relationship strained? In addition to this anticipation, I continue to monitor my feelings and emotional state throughout the interaction, whether it's personal and one-on-one, or a large meeting with a group of people.

Tuned into our own senses and feelings, without perseverating or becoming distracted by them, we begin to look and listen for information from others, and we find a wealth of data all around us. We activate our eyes and ears as sense organs and focus our attention on the information they are gathering. Is the person to eye contact? Do they seem they sitting in the chair or what standing? How does this discussing? Is their affect or could be causing such a to pause and ask how a some feedback in the moment form of information gathering is familiar to most classroom teachers, who are constantly reading the room to monitor student engagement, adjust to student needs, and accommodate individual differences as they teach.



whom we are speaking making nervous or at ease? How are is their posture when connect to the topic we are demeanor changing? What change? It may be appropriate person is feeling or request about how you are doing. This

As helpful and important as this real-time interpersonal information is, there need to be points where one requests more formal and explicit feedback. It is important to consider school culture, context, and related practices when setting out to ask for such input. At my previous school, we developed an evaluation protocol for teaching faculty that was carried out by the division head as supervisor. As soon as the system was developed, the school went through a crisis and the process was only partially implemented. After things stabilized, we picked up the effort and quickly realized that while we had a robust system for evaluating a teacher's performance and providing them feedback, there was no equivalent system for school leaders. So I took it upon myself to develop and pilot a system. I based it on the 360-degree method, which asked for input from supervisors, leadership colleagues, and direct reports. Gathered anonymously, I found that much of the feedback, while expressly about my leadership, reflected pent up frustration that no one in a leadership position had asked for such feedback until that point, not to mention the frustration and hurt from several years of turmoil and instability. It was hard to hear, and even harder to know what the lessons really were and how to respond to them.

Since arriving at EPS, I have gradually developed a cycle of requesting faculty input, in three distinct domains, at least once each year. I ask for feedback on my personal work and leadership because I want to know how I'm doing. I ask for feedback on our divisional program and culture because I want to know how things are working, recognizing that not everything that happens is a direct result of my action or inaction. This gives people a chance to reflect on their personal experience with students, colleagues, me, and the school more broadly and to share that perspective. Finally, I ask people to help me identify areas of focus for our collective work in the upcoming year. All of this information, and especially that from the third category, helps me to build an annual work plan over the summer and share it with folks in the fall, to plan and execute medium and long term projects over the course of a year or more.

When the feedback comes in, I have developed a method for myself to read and most effectively absorb the information shared. It involves reading survey results three separate times, in three distinct phases and settings, to thoroughly parse the information and work through my personal reactions to it. First, I find myself a comfortable time and place, away from campus, usually on a weekend with a good cup of coffee and a delicious pastry, to make an initial first pass through the results. I look at the numbers, graphs, and charts to identify patterns and areas of concern from the relative altitude of aggregate figures and percentages. I then read through the comments and allow

myself to have whatever reaction feels appropriate. I don't take notes or write anything down. In this phase I can't help myself from responding in my head to what feels unfair, inaccurate, or incomplete, and I can pretty well expect to have several imaginary conversations on the way home.

With the second pass, necessarily a minimum of several days later (preferably a week), I take notes. First, I summarize the data trends. Next, I summarize the narrative comments, translating each section into my own words, but including direct quotes when they seem relevant, poignant, or irreducible. On the right side of the page, at an angle and adjacent to my bulleted list, I draft a series of brief responses. At this point I try to move past my initial emotional response and craft well-reasoned and non-judgmental statements that either affirm, reject, or qualify the feedback and what I might do with it.

In the third pass, again with some considerable time elapsed since the previous phase, I re-read my summary and responses. I check it for accuracy with the original numbers and text, but I don't re-read the entirety of the raw material. Then I check it for bias and my own wounded pride in what I have written. Where does it sound defensive? What have I written off as unfair that actually has a kernel of truth in it that I can use, even if there may be mitigating factors? What hurts because it's true? At this point, I am getting to the point of the inventory where I can begin to read the feedback impersonally, as if it weren't about me. But I need time and several stages to separate myself from the task at hand. I am just too sensitive and fragile otherwise.

Finally, it is critical to share a summary of findings with the people who generously offered me the gift of feedback. I need to let them know that I've heard them, and share a plan for what I intend to do with that valuable information. In some cases, I am very concrete and direct with a detailed plan for future action. In other cases, I acknowledge that something is hard for me and ask for grace and time to make mistakes, learn, and grow. I believe that this process, opening up, exposing weaknesses and making vulnerable the tender places, is an act of courage and self-compassion. As a result, I get stronger, gentler, and better in the broken places.

Interpersonal Skills

Indicator
Communicates ideas efficiently and effectively - verbally, in writing and/or through other relevant mediums.
Listens deeply and intentionally to understand and consider multiple perspectives.
Utilizes earned respect, compelling arguments, and relational trust to influence others toward shared goals.

Families come in lots of different forms, from nuclear to extended, some with same-sex parents, adopted children, or families of choice determined later in life. The point is not to examine the individuals who make up the unit or their identities, rather to look at what holds them together. Families have many different relationship styles too, some that are influenced by personality or culture. But despite many differences, a healthy family needs a few key behaviors to function

effectively and support the growth and well-being of members. Those core aptitudes, implemented regularly enough to become habits, are similar to the interpersonal skills that a school leader needs to support the well-being and performance of faculty, students, and every member of the school community.

Family Dinner

Many families find that a regular family dinner serves not only to feed the people, but also to connect them and facilitate communication. My Uncle Phil used to call the time after the dinner "family meeting," so that he could talk to my cousins about serious stuff on a full stomach. Uncle Phil was pretty smart! Similarly, at EPS, our regularly scheduled Monday morning email communication and Wednesday morning division meetings provide opportunities to disseminate information. To really drive home a message and be sure that everyone receives it, an email announcement, followed by a meeting announcement, and perhaps followed by a third email announcement in SamAntics or the Weekly Newsletter, provides wider coverage and the benefit of repetition.

In my own family, I have found that some of the best, deepest, and most meaningful conversations happen in the car, whether we're on a long road trip where we finally get around to real talk after 14 hours on the highway, or the everyday trips to school when the kids would ask an honest question from the back seat when I least expected it. While proximity is close in the car, you're usually not making direct eye contact, which strangely opens up opportunities for the expression of fear, doubt, excitement, or other feelings. At school, students and teachers regularly approach me for a conversation after a meeting, in the hallway, or in the LPC over breakfast or lunch. It seems that the casualness of those "flyby" meetings provides a level of security and comfort to at least broach a



delicate conversation, even if it may not be concluded in the few moments we have for interaction. And mealtime meetings provide the "full belly" effect that Uncle Phil was after, and the limited eye contact of the passenger seat convo. After all, you have to be sure you don't spill Javi's eggs down the front of your shirt before school even starts, so don't take your eyes off the omelet!

But when a topic is particularly delicate or even modestly important, I will usually try to schedule a meeting to discuss. Whenever possible, I am sure to share the topic of the meeting in my email invitation, otherwise people's minds may run to a worst-case scenario and worry that they are being summoned because they're in trouble; the "principal's office effect"

impacts teachers as well as students, I'm afraid. The in-person meeting has the benefit of communication in multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous modalities. It gives both parties full access to verbal, visual, and auditory processing of words, facial expressions, and body language, and full access to nuances of tone, volume, and other subtleties. I find it's harder to be misunderstood in person, and if I am, I can sense it and clarify.

When I anticipate that a meeting will be challenging, either because the stakes are high, or because I foresee some kind of conflict or disagreement, or because other emotions may influence the

course of the talk, I will prepare a few notes in advance. I try not to over plan, because too much detail in the notes makes them hard to read and gives the impression of a more formal intervention. Sometimes it's convenient to have something on a computer screen, and sometimes having the computer open inhibits the open exchange and personal connection, so this approach is context specific. Sometimes the notes are just for planning in my head and I don't need to have them in front of me.

In especially difficult circumstances, I may anticipate that I want to follow the meeting with an email that documents what we discussed. This is a tactic to bring accountability to the exchange, either for myself and some kind of follow-up that I've offered, or to the other person, like if a change of behavior is necessary. Sometimes I will write the follow-up email before the meeting as a way to plan and rehearse what I intend to discuss in person. After the meeting, I will review, edit, and send the email promptly. The prework helps me prepare, helps ensure that the necessary topics are covered, and shortens the turnaround time on sending the email afterward because I already have a draft prepared.

One final note about particularly challenging topics. I take great pains to lean into difficult conversations, especially those that present some interpersonal awkwardness, and to host them promptly. It's important not to rush, and occasionally situations resolve themselves with a modest and prudent delay. But in most cases, I find that awkward conversations just get more awkward and difficult the more they are delayed. I also find that such meetings, and they are usually in person, necessitate me bringing all of my skills to bear, including the intrapersonal ones reviewed in the previous category. I need to be especially careful to monitor and regulate my own emotional state if there is a chance for heightened emotion in the other party. And to gauge their state of mind, I need to watch and listen carefully for changes in affect.

Really Listening

In any kind of partnership, but especially the kind between people who build family, it is important that partners really listen to one another. While words convey important information, they have limits too. When you come to know someone over a period of years and share lots of experiences together, you can kind of anticipate how they're feeling about things in ways that supersede the definition of the words being used. Think of the meaning embedded in a look between your parents or grandparents. They speak volumes. But it takes time, practice, and skill to write those volumes.

Have you ever had a conversation with a person who, after making their point, continued to drone on for another five minutes? Was that a frustrating experience? I once read that halfway through a conversational exchange, the listener anticipates the rest of what the other person is about to say and begins composing their own response in their head. Then, clued into the secret, I began to notice my mind doing just that. And then I realized that the frustration I felt with the over-exemplified, drive-home-the-point conversationalist wasn't their fault, it actually stemmed from my own mental practice of tuning out once I thought I had the gist of their point. I was frustrated because I had to hold onto my carefully scripted reply and I was spending my mental energy on that task rather than listening all the way to the end. So I wondered what it might be like if I listened all the way to the end instead, and I began to try.



First, I felt more present. I took away the expectation that I would be quick to jump back with a reply, which felt like it reduced some kind of self-imposed pressure. This freed me to listen more and better. I compensated by pausing briefly to compose my reply after the other person had finished, which had the effect of slowing the pace of the conversation and signaling to the other person that I had really heard them and was deeply considering what they had said. I realized such exchanges felt better, to both of us, and that I was actually learning more by slowing down and focusing my attention in this way.

Truly listening is a skill that can be cultivated. It includes specific behaviors that are identifiable, concrete, and can be practiced. To listen deeply, one needs to tune in with their whole body and mind to try and discern all that is being said. What is the context of the conversation? What talks preceded it? What do you know about this person and what do they know about you? Try to think of a person who makes you feel like they've really heard you, a conversation you had where you felt like you got it all out, or a person who you dread talking to because it feels like they're not listening. What was the other person doing or not doing in those exchanges? I'll provide two examples from my own experience to illustrate.

The first is a parent I once knew at school. This person had a way about them that I would describe as serious and imposing. I had the opportunity to interact with her many times, and in social exchanges, usually standing up at some kind of a mixer, she smiled, her body was relaxed, she moved her head from side to side; she appeared comfortable and that made me comfortable talking with her. I can picture her now in my mind, standing on the TALL rooftop, head tilted slightly, leaned toward me, talking casually in a friendly exchange. In meetings I had a different experience. She sat stiff in her chair, body upright, facial expression flat, very little movement. She appeared to listen intently but gave nothing back: no affirmation of what I had said, no nodding in agreement or shaking of the head in dissent. I can picture myself beginning to squirm in my chair, becoming increasingly uneasy as the conversation unfolded. She was in no way unpleasant or disagreeable, she just didn't give me much to communicate that she was hearing me. It was like my words traveled into a void with no echo bouncing back.

By contrast, consider my boss, who is the best listener I know, and from whom I have learned much on this subject. Always in motion, this person is. When I say something, he nods to acknowledge, not necessarily to agree. If I make a significant point, he speaks it back to me to confirm receipt of the message. And when I conclude, he summarizes before transitioning to his reply. Often, he won't offer a full reply in the moment, letting me know that he wants to consider the idea, think it over, and get back to me. His body position changes throughout the exchange, sometimes sitting up and leaning in to engage, other times leaning back in ponderous thought, but always relaxed. I don't always leave fully satisfied because I don't necessarily get what I want, but I always feel like I have been given a full hearing and that I had the opportunity to express myself and make my feelings known.

And that is the goal of listening: for a person to be heard; to empower them, trust them, acknowledge their thoughts and feelings and perspective. There is one final component that often goes beyond the conversation itself, which is extending the same to other stakeholders, and that's where things get harder. If I am to truly and authentically respect a person's perspective, I need to extend that same respect to every member of the community, and their perspectives are always at

least slightly different. So if listening is to be true and meaningful and more than just performative, a school leader needs to take what they've heard, intentionally gather more perspectives, and find some way to reconcile them in a decision. That's the hard part.

The Ties that Bind

For those who have raised children, we have come to know firsthand the incessant questioning of the two-year-old. At least once in this phase of life, most children will take their caregivers on a conversational journey, asking "Why?" after each logical explanation. At some point the parent begins to wonder if they are being toyed with, as if the game is seeing how far the adult will go with their logical responses to the increasingly illogical question. For me, that became a game too, and when I was at my best as a parent, I would happily play along, sometimes making my replies increasingly absurd to elicit a laugh from my kid and thereby find the bottom of that well of questions. But when I was not at my best, when the frustration of a long day had preceded the exchange, or when I felt like my child was being naughty, I might resort to that most fatal parenting error, the assertion of authority: "Because I told you so!"

I knew as those words came out of my mouth that this was not the kind of parent I wanted to be; that I wanted to reason with my child, explain things to them, and have them make good choices for themselves when presented with enough, or the correct, information. But I was human, and so were they, so sometimes we simply disagreed. Our perspectives were too far apart to bridge with shared understanding because we were viewing the situation from different angles. And it was in those moments that I didn't always know what to do. There are so many life lessons in parenting, but the leadership lesson derived from this silly example is about how, as school leaders, we cultivate and hold authority, on what basis it is constructed, and the dangers or limitations of positional authority.

We have established that a leader must be skilled and thorough in their communication, which includes not only speaking and writing clearly, it also means listening well. These are the tools we use to motivate, inspire, and respond to people we lead. The purpose to which we apply those tools is "influence others toward shared goals." I would submit that if we are not trying to further a shared goal we are not really leading. So how then, if not through positional authority alone, do we influence others?



There are many trite sayings about how respect needs to be earned. Rather than quote one, allow me to explain how I think this happens. People in leadership positions must recognize that they are being watched and evaluated, even in moments when attention seems to be focused elsewhere. Students, parents, and teachers will listen to the school leader's words. They will observe their actions. And they will scrutinize the alignment between the two. If the actions don't line up with the words, if a leader does not appear to be living up to the ideals they espouse, respect is lost. This is about core qualities like honesty, integrity, and character. And it is important to recognize that respect is very slowly accrued through consistent, steadfast, and reliable action, but can quickly be lost in a moment of misalignment.

While there are many ways in which a leader should attune to the felt emotional experience of an individual or a group, reason and logic remain important components of the influence one exerts to

inspire and align a school community. If one cannot explain one's actions or requests, they carry little weight. And while this may seem straightforward at first blush, it can be particularly challenging for a school leader when some of the reasons for their actions cannot be made known to those with whom they are seeking alignment. Students have rights and needs that are protected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Teachers are entitled to privacy and confidentiality that is protected by employment law. A leader needs people to share information with her, and in order to share candidly, people need to trust that the leader will remain discreet.

Just like respect, trust is slowly earned and quickly squandered, so it must be cultivated carefully and protected steadfastly. It is possible to say to someone at a critical juncture, "I'm sorry I can't share all the information that I'm basing my decision on, so I need you to trust me in this situation," but only infrequently. In a more general sense, if a leader cultivates broad trust through the alignment of their words and actions, and they show that they genuinely care about individuals over the long haul, trust can be utilized to cultivate shared purpose and actions.

Even when all of the above is kept front and center, when the leader works to persuade logically, demonstrate care and concern, and earnestly builds trust and respect, there are times when we are not able to build consensus or agreement about our goals. What is one to do in such a circumstance? It may be better to yield, to give way, to acquiesce, or perhaps postpone to a more distant future, the controversial decision in the midst of unresolvable conflict. This is not surrender or defeat, though it may feel like a loss in the moment. It is a humble recognition that without earned respect, a compelling argument, or relational trust, all one has is positional authority. And "because I said so" is not enough if one aspires to lead with character and compassion.

Team Dynamics

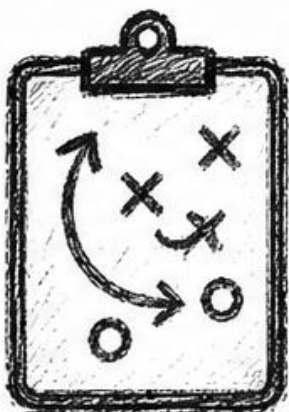
Indicator
Plans and leads meetings effectively.
Identifies and resolves conflicts among and between teams.
Creates a culture of inclusivity, responding appropriately to differences of ability, identity, perspective, and interests.

I will do my best to at least avoid the most tired sports metaphors in this section, but please indulge me a few. After all, the word "team" is right there in the title, so I can only write my way around it so much before I will start to feel like I'm just avoiding something. In order that partially mapped and poorly constructed analogies do not become my only rhetorical device, I will define team here as "a group assembled to work together toward specific shared goals with a performance orientation." By that I mean to distinguish a team from a community, or the family unit I was describing in the previous section. In those latter two types of groups, the orientation is toward more permanent and durable bonds, and sometimes specific performance goals should be sacrificed for the preservation of individual belonging, group cohesion, or relational trust as I have just argued. In a school setting, a team could be considered a subgroup within the larger collective, and an individual might work (or play) on several different teams at the same time. They might also rotate

onto, or off of, specific teams over the course of time, and that does not, or at least should not, diminish their value or belonging within the community.

Game Plan

Planning and leading meetings is a bit like the preparation and orchestration of a game. Consider football. Coaches and players watch film of their opponent's previous contests to get a sense of their players, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses. Then the coaches plan a strategy for the game; they might even script the opening drive or defensive set. Of course, plans will evolve as the game unfolds. The team may even start the second half with an entirely different strategy, but they think about how they will begin before the kickoff.



The meeting agenda is the equivalent of a game plan. The school leader drafts a set of topics or activities that indicate how the group will spend their time together and distributes it to the group ahead of time. That way participants can mentally prepare and bring needed supplies or information to the meeting. I find the agenda is more effective if I include time targets, even if we need to diverge or extend the allotted time, beginning with an estimate of how much time something will take helps the group stay on task and move on when necessary. In addition to sharing ahead of time, I like to publicly display the agenda during the meeting to help me and the group orient ourselves to the tasks before us throughout the meeting. There are some activities that increase a team's effectiveness with periodic implementation, but the agenda should be present for every meeting.

The leader's role in running a meeting is to facilitate the contributions of the team members. That means the leader may need to say some words at the beginning to set the stage, intervene periodically to maintain or adjust the course of the conversation, or summarize and check for understanding as the group develops their thinking. However, the leader of the meeting cannot be the only person to speak, and probably shouldn't be the person who speaks most. Instead, the meeting facilitator should work to include all voices in the conversation. To do so, she or he may use structural devices, like timers or "around the room" responses, or more subtle and subjective techniques like inviting a person who appears quiet or pensive to contribute their thoughts at an opportune moment. In this way, "facilitation" is not a passive activity; it requires constant monitoring and intervention, but it is done in a way that elevates the contributions of others in the room.

Less frequently, a leader should solicit feedback from the team. While this is a super important component of a well-led and well-functioning team, the team needs to see their feedback implemented for change, which requires time between rounds of feedback. For permanent or established teams, an annual feedback rotation is sufficient. For ad hoc committees, teams in transition, or teams whose work is more intense or time-consuming, more frequent repetition is advisable. I'll return to this topic in the third section below to describe how to solicit feedback, how to report it back to the team, and how to use feedback as a mechanism for building trust, inclusivity, and belonging.

While the feedback described above is envisioned as a formal survey of some kind, there are other, more frequent ways that team members can and should have input into the team's goals and projects. One way to do that is to invite team members to contribute to goal setting at the beginning or end of a cycle. Another is to create mechanisms for team members to suggest agenda items and/or lead portions of meetings periodically, possibly in a rotation. This practice shares some leadership responsibilities, empowers individuals, generates buy-in and shared purpose, and provides opportunities to develop leadership skills. There will come a time in the lifecycle of most teams when the leader will step aside and a new leader will emerge. In many cases, that leader will come from within the group, so this practice begins to prepare the group for that eventuality in ways that are likely to smooth the transition and maintain effectiveness through periods of transition.

Five Minutes for Fighting

As I compose this section, my hometown Buffalo Sabres are up two games to one against the Boston Bruins in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. I played hockey in Buffalo as a kid. My buddy Justin's dad was a defenseman and later coach for the Sabres, and Tim's dad was the play-by-play announcer, now a member of the NHL Hall of Fame. Hockey is personal for me, and there is plenty of conflict involved, so it provides a frame for introducing conflict resolution as a necessary component of managing dynamics within a team. That said, it is a better counter-example of what not to do than it is a paragon of virtuous or enlightened problem solving.

Hockey players have to protect their net from the opposing players, who are trying to slip the puck past the goalie. The goalie, clad in forty to fifty pounds of protective gear to protect them from 100-mile-per-hour slapshots, not only gets bombarded with hard rubber projectiles, the opposing team frequently rushes and crashes into the net, potentially pinning the goalie against the crossbar or otherwise inflicting serious injury. So the skaters protect the goalie at all cost, especially the defensemen. As the opposing forwards camp in front of the net, the defensemen push and shove them out of the way and interrupt their stickwork. If the opponent interferes with the goalie, enters the crease, or heaven forbid makes contact with the goalie, the forward is likely to get more than a shove. In some cases, players drop their gloves, grab their opponent's jersey with one hand, and pound away at their face, head, or helmet with the other. This prompts the fans to cheer like mad, and some of their favorite players are the tough guy "enforcers," whose role within the team is to stand up for their teammates and start fights if anyone gets out of line.

Fighting is not technically allowed in hockey, and dropping the gloves will land a player in the penalty box for a five-minute major, as opposed to a two-minute minor penalty like tripping. But it is the only professional sport I'm aware of where a player is not immediately ejected, fined, and perhaps suspended from future games for openly slugging an opponent. The consequence for breaking most rules in hockey is a temporary ostracism from the team and the contest by sitting all alone in a little box on the opposite side of the ice from the coaches and the rest of the players. It's kind of like a time out for grown-ups. Both fighting and banishment have long been strategies for resolving conflict in the sweep of human history, and wars, violence, and excommunication still serve as last resort measures at the level of state, nation, and church. Fortunately, schools have many better ways of resolving conflict than



fighting or excommunication. Nevertheless this history and comparison is worth keeping in mind when working through conflict, especially to help understand the level of heightened emotion presented by fear, threats of violence, or exclusion from the group.

Conflict in schools is much harder to spot than in a hockey game. Students, teachers, and parents are more likely to withdraw in silent opposition than drop their gloves, or express frustration by clenching their jaw before they raise a clenched fist. In order to resolve a conflict, a school leader must go through several steps to first identify and then understand a conflict, before ultimately negotiating a solution. This process will sometimes unfold for an extended period of time, thus raising the potential for a period of awkwardness, discomfort, or reduced performance while the conflict is being resolved.

The first step, spotting the conflict, bears some further discussion. When a team is functioning well, communication is clear, people say what they mean and understand each other. If they don't, they ask for, and receive, clarification. There is a positive energy flowing between participants, and people usually leave a meeting feeling more energized than drained by the experience. When there is underlying conflict within a team, we find the opposite. People tend to speak with oblique references and passive constructions. Their sentences contain few clear subjects and largely inactive verbs. People and things are not named. The air in a meeting smells stale, if not sour, and people leave feeling drained without accomplishing much or perhaps really understanding why. For a leader, it can sometimes be easier to spot this when coming into a team fresh or as an occasional participant. When one is the member of such a team and experiences buried conflict, the feeling can become normalized over time and we may accept it without giving it much thought.

The leader's perception is the first diagnostic tool, and their emotional intelligence will be the most operative kind of smarts throughout the experience. Simply asking "What's going on here?" may be tempting, but the response takes courage and carries risk, and is therefore unlikely to surface the problem. So one should consider some kind of survey or other practical and systemic mechanism for gathering information. Personal conversations are likely to yield more candor than group ones, and the leader will rely upon the relational trust they already have to open doors. Meanwhile, they should exercise caution to build and maintain further trust with team members.

It is difficult to proceed much further than this without specific circumstances to carry our analysis. To illustrate two possible pathways, I will imagine two distinct scenarios that provide examples of how one might proceed. In the first case, a level of dysfunction has become endemic within a group, not because of any particular issue or interpersonal conflict, but rather because the team did not have clear values, priorities, norms, or shared philosophy. In this case, the "conflict" is not acute, and therefore no specific negotiation will resolve it. Instead, the leader must start from a foundational level to create shared purpose, practice, and principles. The "forming, norming, storming, and performing" progression can be helpful here, and usually a team begins to work toward a solution by locating themselves on that continuum and taking a partial step backward before again progressing.

If the conflict is acute, for example between one or more members of a team, or when a contentious issue has divided the group, the leader can proceed more substantively toward a negotiated or compromise solution. In most cases, team members will be only partially satisfied with the outcome, and potentially greatly unhappy in a way that resentments need to be identified and released. This may be personal work for one or more members of the team, or group work for

the team for a period of time going forward. The leader's task is to identify the kind of conflict and then the follow-up work that is needed. In most cases, the more systemic approach described in the preceding paragraph will be necessary, or at least helpful, to some degree following the resolution of an acute conflict.

The Win-Win

And here is the place where we intentionally drop the metaphor. In very important ways, a school team is NOT the equivalent of a sports team. In competitive athletics, for one team to win, another must lose. Another way of saying it is that sports is a zero-sum game. School teams play positive-sum games, where it is possible for all involved to benefit mutually, even if not always equally. In order to perform efficiently and effectively without competing against one another, the school team emphasizes cooperation, collaboration, and synergy. And to do so, the leader of a school team optimizes the performance of a group by fostering diversity of thought, identity, and experience, and accounting for the many benefits that such an array of talents bring by creating space for each person to fully be themselves.

There are many ways to think inclusive school team, and each different adaptations to make space for this analysis, I will limit neurodivergence, and role or discuss these broad categories of generalize by necessity. However, reduction of the analysis, let us generalization, understood to be a tendencies within groups, from stereotypes, which are narrow and determinate prescriptions of group tendencies to individual people. This distinction is foundational, important, and it can be difficult to discern in many cases, therefore let us exercise caution and care as we take the risk of engaging difficult and sensitive topics that have divided human beings for generations, and perhaps since the beginning of recorded history. It is precisely those historical precedents that we must work to improve.



about building a diverse and element of diversity may require them inclusive. Given the limited its scope to three: gender, professional domain. In order to the human experience, we must in order to avoid slippage or distinguish between a broad and flexible description of

To work against the insipient tendencies of the stereotype as we introduce some common manifestations of gender for our analysis, we can acknowledge that in western society, women have traditionally been assigned roles that trend toward emotional and physical caregiving, raising young people, and tending relationships within the family and outside of it. Meanwhile, men have been discouraged from expressing emotion and assigned roles that accumulate material and social rewards outside of the family, and offered a privileged position within it. As a team forms and begins to function, the weight of this long legacy may exhibit pressures, often unseen by some and felt acutely by others, to push people into particular roles that align with these historical trends. The leader's job is to remain aware of those tendencies and guard against the inequity they produce and sustain. Instead, the leader should endeavor to make space for people with all manner of gender expression, support individuals to access resources and opportunities, and contribute from their areas of strength.

Much has been written about how learning environments are tuned toward feminine expressions of gender, especially as female-identifying students have come to outperform and outnumber boys in

secondary and higher education. In faculty teams, we often find that tasks like note-taking and the preparation of course or meeting materials are assigned to women, while men take up more airtime in meetings and are more likely to be recognized and promoted for their contributions. Those tendencies create and sustain gender-based inequity and discrimination, pushing women's contributions behind the scenes and making men's more public. Therefore, a school leader should take steps to spot and correct such trends. In order to become effective at doing so, they may need to undertake some personal identity work to better understand the associated dynamics, impact, and feelings. Because the impact and operation of gender creates different sets of circumstances for men and women, their personal work on the topic may differ. I have found, as a white cisgender man, that I have to process feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment to effectively confront and dismantle the patriarchal system of gender oppression that is always operating in social systems.

Alongside the gendering of our social landscape, lie the natural variations in human beings' neurological capabilities, captured and distilled within the concepts of neurodiversity and neurodivergence. In these terms, "diversity" references and normalizes the broad spectrum of neurological function, and "divergence" refers to variation from statistical norms within the human population. The term "neurodivergent" is typically used to refer to minority neurotypes, including formal diagnoses like Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, and Dyslexia/Dysgraphia/Dyscalculia. Although such conditions carry challenges for those who have them, they also represent significant and distinctive strengths.

To illustrate the importance of focusing on the neurological strengths associated with different kinds of thinking, we might consider the differences associated with linear and non-linear thought patterns. Linear thinking is predictable, structured, and efficient. It is good for solving logistical problems and challenges related to coordination of large groups or variables, but sometimes linear thought can miss big picture or collateral issues. Meanwhile, non-linear thinking is associative and divergent. It captures ancillary or related topics and is useful in understanding and solving problems related to complex and interconnected systems, and incorporates ambiguity well. Almost any team working within a school requires a combination of linear and non-linear thinking. Therefore a team leader is wise to build her team with a diverse array of thinkers and incorporate roles and tasks associated with each.

Finally, because school systems are complex, diverse, and interconnected, the team leader must consider the various roles and perspectives of each member of the team to more fully understand the direction from which they might approach and solve problems. For example, a committee on school curriculum is likely to include members of each academic discipline, who understandably think about the learning experience very differently. The PE classroom, which in many cases is a gymnasium, weight room, or athletic field, is a very different environment than a science laboratory. And the kinds of thinkers that gravitate toward Fine Arts and Literature might be quite distinct from the more linear and sequential curricula of mathematics or world languages. In addition, due to a whole range of historical and contextual factors, the disciplines may have distinctly different gender representation and operation among their constituencies. So one can quickly see how our example curriculum team would need to reckon with differences of gender, neurodiversity, and representation of roles and interests simultaneously.

Lest the reader become discouraged or overwhelmed by the complexity of such a scenario, we should conclude with a way to move through these challenges, which can be found by grounding actions, decisions, and participation within a field of shared values and mutually agreed-upon

norms. For example, the leader might work with the team to establish shared commitment to "including all voices in every discussion," or "prioritizing equity in all decisions." The group might even generate methods for incorporating those values into the regular practices of the group, like building a mechanism whereby any member of the team can add items to the agenda, or by developing decision-making protocols to ensure that even if one disagrees with an outcome, the outcome was fair because it derived from a process that each member contributed and agreed to. Such processes may at times be laborious, ambiguous, complicated, and even frustrating. In short, the school team might be as messy as the rest of the human experience. And we can find beauty and promise within just such a mess.

Values-Driven Practice

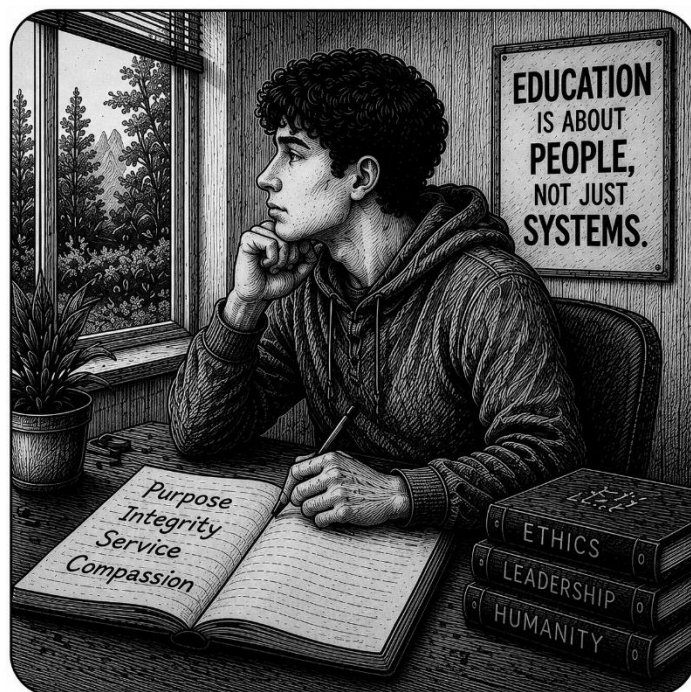
This is Personal

Lots of educators talk about becoming a teacher to offer the next generation a better experience than they had in school. That was true for me too, and then some. I was able to make school better for the next generation of my own family. And along the way, I got to witness the magic of them growing up, one milestone at a time.

I started teaching the year my daughter started kindergarten. That year, our neighborhood elementary school closed for a two-year reconstruction and asbestos remediation project. Their plan was to bus the kindergartners 45 minutes across town to a hastily repurposed medical facility. When I learned of this plan, the image of my little five-year-old boarding a big yellow bus with eighth graders to trek across town flooded my mind. So when I got the offer to teach in a nearby private school it was more than just a job. It was relief. It was a solution to a very pressing problem. It was an opportunity for my whole family.

One evening, in the spring of that first year at Manlius Pebble Hill, I was reading Ruby a bedtime story. As I began to tire and considered leaving off for the night, Ruby wouldn't have it. So she started sounding out the words and stringing them together. Before I could realize the significance of what happened, *she* was reading *me* the bedtime story.

A few days later, the school released its quarterly teacher comments. As I read through Ruby's, Ms. Wells wrote about the development of her "pre-reading skills." A few days after that we had our parent-teacher conference, so I asked her, "What do you mean by 'pre-reading?'"



"I know," she said with amazement. "It's like she just learned to read one day, all of a sudden!"

Apparently that happens sometimes in early childhood development: big breakthroughs, threshold moments. Ruby was fortunate. It was harder for Will.

A couple years later, at the same spring conference, Kelly Wells was Will's pre-kindergarten teacher. Because his birthday was late in the cycle, we were considering whether he should move on to kindergarten or spend another year in pre-k. Kelly was showing us examples of his work when she pulled out a handwritten alphabet. There was a nice capital A, followed by the lowercase version, then the pattern repeated with B, but left off with only the uppercase C. I admired my son's fine work, then asked what I thought was a logical question.

"How far did the other kids get?" I queried.

Kelly looked at me with a slightly twisted face that conveyed puzzlement. "What do you mean?" she followed.

"I see Will wrote three letters. Well, two-and-a-half really. How many did other students write?" I clarified.

"They wrote the whole alphabet," she said plainly.

"I guess we'll be doing another year of pre-k," I stated.

"Yeah, I think that would be a good idea," Kelly said, smiling gently.

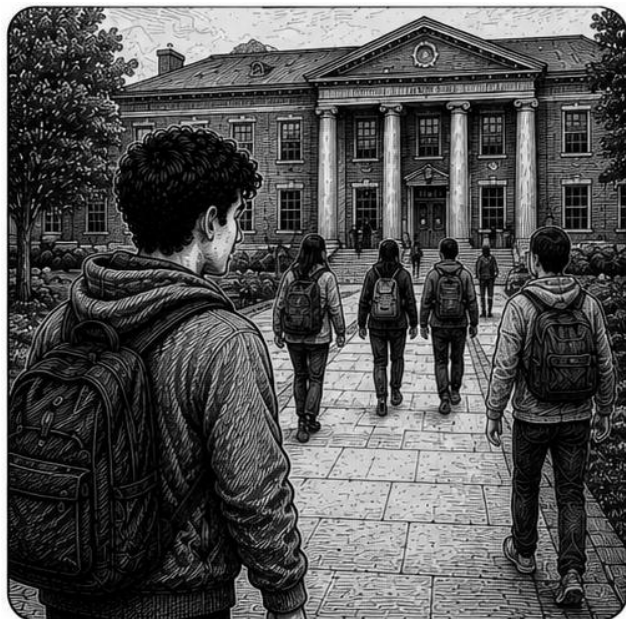
There would be no reading breakthroughs for Will. He learned to read by slowly decoding one painful word at a time. And right beside him was my colleague, Colleen Congel, pulling him from class for breakout literacy support. She counseled us as we wrestled with the ADHD diagnosis and concomitant medication question. She educated us, as parents, and me as an educator, about the ADHD brain, how it functions, and how to support its growth. We also learned how much emotional development, and damage, can accompany such a diagnosis. In the process, I became a better parent and educator simultaneously.

For every year until now, I have gone to school with my kids. I feel so fortunate to have enjoyed that experience for 16 years. The best parts of my work in independent schools have been the opportunity to watch my kids grow up right in front of my eyes, and the rich relationships I've developed with my colleagues/children's teachers/parents of my students, which as the slashes indicate, were the same people. When you live and work so closely with people, you get to know them pretty well. They get to know you and your kids know one another. People matter in ways that transcend the formal nature of your relationships as colleagues. Those relationships became rich and dense and meaningful in ways I never anticipated, didn't know I needed, and have come to cherish. So this work is personal for me. It has been from the start, and it's only gotten richer and more meaningful as I've gone along.

Coming to EPS

Halfway through my visit day, on a Tuesday in early October of 2018, I walked in to the lunch interview in LPC 102. Around the table sat a dozen faces, mostly laughing or smiling, turned to the

people next to them or addressing someone across the table. It was a lively scene, with laughter and conviviality. It looked like a dinner party among old friends. As they noticed me, one by one, attention turned for the "interview." I was on the spot. They had questions. But I felt welcome. I felt "a part of." It felt like a fun place to be.



I also felt the mutual affection in the room. I could tell that these people liked each other, and that they knew one another in the way that only comes through years of shared experience. They had been through tough times and come out the other side. They had probably hurt, or been hurt by, someone in the room, but they had done the work of repair and their relationships emerged stronger for it. These people worked together. They collaborated, and they respected one another. They felt like colleagues from the start.

As I learned about the school, I was drawn in by Eastside Prep's founding educational principles, including inquiry, experience, and integration, which grounded the pedagogy. I found those represented in the diversity of

course offerings, especially where student choice was centered in integrated humanities courses. I learned about our intention to be a school where all types of kids could learn together, celebrating neurodiversity as a bundle of disparate strengths rather than a collection of disabilities. I found that principle reflected in the school's curriculum, which had no tracking, AP classes, or honors distinctions, as well as the robust learning support program, anchored by Guided Study Hall and a team of Learning Specialists whom teachers respected and regularly consulted. This felt like a place for me, as a teacher, and my kids, as learners.

I arrived in late June, about a week before my contract started. Terry told me, "the best way to get to know the Senior Leadership Team would be to join our end-of-year meetings." So for that week I sat in, a bit disoriented, as the team processed the year, incorporating teacher feedback from the end-of-year survey into summer project plans. The energy was high, the pace blistering; these were smart people working hard, but enjoying themselves and one another as they did it. On Friday we had a dinner, which culminated in a series of toasts. Sam teared up as he delivered a heartfelt tribute to Bart, who was transitioning from Upper School Head to Associate Head of School, in appreciation for Bart's leadership and mentorship over many years. In his response, Bart self-deprecated to invite a roasting, which was happily obliged by everyone at the table. Dr. Gary Chapman identified five basic love languages, but I found a sixth at the SLT dinner: sarcasm.

Student Leadership Council

I spent the summer getting to know teachers. I had coffee, tea, and quite a few lunches in Kirkland. Some folks met halfway between school and their somewhat distant places of residence. Melissa Hayes invited Will and me out on the coach launch to watch a rowing practice on Lake Union on a gorgeous August afternoon. And as the summer waned and classes approached, I held my first student meeting.

The previous spring, the members of student government refused to stand for election. They were fed up with what they perceived as an outdated and self-centered system, where students chose to run for the recognition of a title so they could list it on their resume without even trying to fulfill campaign promises. Past presidents and vice-presidents, they told me, had not been interested in service. This group wanted a model that centered servant leadership, a flat organization where students worked together for the betterment of the school, not personal recognition. But the work of changing a government structure is long and hard. It requires planning, communication, coordination, and public approval. There had not been time for all of that work in the spring, so we started the project in the fall.



I met with those students weekly for several months as we discussed their goals and priorities, developed a process to call a "constitutional convention" of sorts, and worked to communicate our progress to students and faculty. There were bumps along the way. In one public meeting a group of students shouted them down, accusing them of obstructionism and an authoritarian takeover of the government. Some of it was critical thinking in action. Some was meant to be in jest, a kind of political theater. And some feelings got hurt. But the Student Leadership Council (SLC) was born and it has endured.

Those first five students formed three committees, Community Outreach, Events & Student Culture, and Athletics, with two co-chairs for Outreach and Events. Since 2019, students have expanded their government to nine positions, adding a co-chair to Athletics, two co-chairs for the Equity, Inclusion, and Compassionate Leadership committee, and one chair for Fine and Performing Arts. The work of student government has expanded under the leadership and partnership of Karla Harris and Verity Sayles. As Student Life Coordinator and Associate Head of Upper School Karla and Verity promote and support student collaboration by modeling it with their own work.

Camp Seymour

Eastside Prep begins each school year with two orientation days in the first week of school. The ninth grade tradition is an overnight retreat at Camp Seymour, a YMCA camp on the Hood Canal. It is a beautiful setting with great facilities: a large dining hall overlooking the water, an outdoor amphitheater, and cabins spread across the wooded hillside, connected by a network of trails. The first day ends with a campfire as the sun goes down, and I was invited to say a few words of introduction to the gathered freshmen.



I was brand new. I didn't feel like I had much to tell them about EPS, and I didn't want to talk about myself. At the same time, I recognized that almost half of the students before me were new to the school also, ninth grade being an entry point where we add 40 or so students each year. So I asked them a question instead.

"I'm new to this place," I said. "Just arrived in Seattle this summer. Some of you are new too. So for those of you who went to EPS in middle school, what do you think us newbies need to know about your school?"

A pause ensued. I wondered if I had opened a door I should have left closed. But then a quiet student way in the back slowly raised her

hand. "People are kind to one another," she offered hesitantly. Several heads nodded in agreement.

Then from the left side rose another hand. "We work together a lot," she said, explaining the collaborative group projects in classes. More heads nodded with a little more enthusiasm. They were gathering steam.

Finally a boy stood up from the right, raising his whole body to address the group. "This is a place where you can geek out on anything you think is cool and no one will judge you for it!"

Kindness, collaboration, and geeks without fear of judgment; that was the moment I knew I had made a good decision to bring my family to Eastside Prep. That's the kind of school I wanted for my kids. That's the school I wish I had gone to. We were home.

Educational Philosophy

Indicator
As a result of training, experience, and relational influences, has built and maintains a coherent educational philosophy.
Draws upon personal values and philosophy to guide decision-making and approaches to leadership.

Derives a sense of self, purpose, and personal meaning from vocation.
Personal investment in work is apparent to team

There's an old saying, "If you don't know where you stand, you'll fall for anything." A similar maxim exists in leadership, "If you don't know who you are, you won't know what to do." Every day, so many factors, so many decisions, so many challenging interactions and circumstances, come flying at a leader in a fast-paced organization like a school. A leader needs footing and roots in the firm soil of lived experience, personal values, coherent philosophy, and principles of action, to thrive, and at times, survive. It's ok to work these things out as one goes. In fact, that's the only way it happens, but it has to happen. A leader needs self-knowledge. Developing one's educational philosophy is a little like a journey across the vast landscape of a human life. In this section, features of the terrain serve as illustrative metaphors.

Country

When I would teach world history students about the development of modern political units, I would write three words up on the board: country, nation, and state. In some usage, we use all three words to refer to the same thing, but I would explain that each of these three, like most words, can mean different things in different contexts. While one use of the word "country" refers to a modern national state, another refers to geography, like "north country," "out in the country," or "country music." The modern nation-state, then, is a merger of territory, people, and political unit. It hasn't always been that way, and one way of teaching world history is to show how the world got that way. My aim in this section is to articulate who I am as an educator, and briefly explain how I got this way. Here I hint at it by describing one way that I think like a teacher: as historian. But there is more. Each is a feature of the landscape.

I am a pragmatic progressive educator. I believe in the principles of progressive education: experiential, student-centered learning that considers all aspects of a child's human experience, guided but not directed by the teacher, who helps a student learn to think for themselves within the context of a collaborative community, as they navigate an integrated world and think within, across, and between disciplinary boundaries. I also believe that the school experience, even a progressive one, includes discreet skills and habits of mind, which are useful not only academic contexts but throughout life - things like planning ahead, organizing thoughts and materials, analytical thinking, and writing. In addition to thinking across disciplines, one can and should learn to think within them.



I have written elsewhere about how I was inspired by a particular teacher, within the context of a particular social science and its developed methods, at a unique moment in my life. To some degree, each of those things existed at other points too. I have thought long and hard about how and why that particular combination worked for me in that moment, and I am left with mostly mystery. The point, I think, is that we keep trying, keep searching, keep building and accumulating knowledge and skill until we get to the point where we find inspiration, breakthrough, and

transcendence. There is no exact formula to create it. Finding academic purpose and meaning is more like alchemy than science. But I know that each factor - teacher, subject, and time - contributes to the breakthrough.

So the ideal academic setting includes elements of progressivism, centering the student, with practical tools that we know to be useful in varied circumstances. Those two sets of features exist in a generative tension, holding each other, as if by gravity, like twin moons circling each other, circling their planet. What happens if one set of features overwhelms the other? If one moon develops too much mass it pulls the other into itself, perhaps destroying them both and sending their material crashing into the planet or spinning off into space.

An academic environment that is too student-centered, relational, or holistic in its orientation lacks shared experience, standards, and metrics by which to measure or compare. If the student, or one particular educator, is the only judge of quality or value, the experience devolves into a kind of self-centered navel gazing. The student may feel good about their work, but they don't really know where they stand in relation to the world outside of themselves, much less outside of their school. And when they enter that world, they lack direction, resolve, and resilience.

A school that is too traditional, that is to say, only focused on objective metrics and confined to established wisdom and conventional thought, does not provide the spark of curiosity or kindle the flame of intellectual inquiry. A student never learns to ask or answer their own questions. Their experience is replicable. It may even be efficient and highly quantifiable. But it offers little meaning to the student because they have no voice or agency. And when they leave a school setting, they struggle to apply the skills they have accumulated toward a purpose or to imagine how the world might be constructed differently.

The school I try to create, the one in which I learn best and the one that I believe best serves the most students, is one that combines the best attributes of each and balances them in a generative tension. Like the nation-state, the people and the polity inform and construct one another. Like a fertile valley, rain falls, it may even flood periodically, but then the sun bathes the land and feeds the plants, the animals, the people, and again the soil itself.

River

Snaking across the landscape runs a river. Water flows around rocks, falls over boulders, and cuts into hillsides along its course. The river shapes the landscape as it goes, wearing grooves into the soil and moving rich earth downstream, forming and transforming topography and ecosystem. Along the way, the river follows one simple rule: down. The river is called by gravity: down. Water seeking its source: down.

Unlike the river, I have more than one value. I am called to do many things in the course of a day, a week, a year. But the many are reducible to several core values and principles. For the purpose of illustrating how "purpose and values shape decisions" in my day-to-day leadership, I will share three. I believe these to be rules that govern the human experience of growth. As the physical world is governed by constants, like gravity, so is learning and community behavior.

Support includes adaptation and accountability.

I believe it is kind to provide structure and accountability to students and teachers. In fact, structure and accountability should be baseline conditions, with adaptation added when and where it is needed. Too often in schools, we use the word support as a synonym for flexibility and forget about the second factor. We start from, or move too quickly toward, a position of shaping and



molding and flexing around a person's perceived or expressed needs, without deeply considering the complexity of a person's needs, and how the identified need is often a secondary need. To truly meet a person's needs, we should instead support them in the process of developing self-awareness and identifying the many layers of human experience.

A brief example illustrates this principle. The tendency of adolescents to push boundaries is as old as time. Teens are evolutionarily programmed for this behavior, and it is a natural part of human development to seek

the limits of what is culturally and socially appropriate. Adults may perceive boundary pushing as an aversion to authority, when in fact, it is an attempt to find and clearly understand the limits of authority. While the behavior may be perceived as risk-taking, and it may be legitimately risky, teens are seeking the safety and comfort of knowing clearly where the boundaries lie. And the healthy, constructive adult response is firm, gentle, and consistent reminders, not a continual creep of expanding limits.

Students have many needs, some of which are precursors to others.

Educators want their students to be happy and healthy and whole. And I think we might all agree that wellness requires that a series of human needs be met. Abraham Maslow articulated these as a hierarchy, often represented visually as a pyramid. When we formulate plans to support students, parents, or teachers, we must remember how several categories of human need are arranged in a series (or hierarchy) and attempt to build strong foundations at prior levels.

When working with parents, I have come to understand how scary it is to watch your child struggle and what an awful feeling of powerlessness one has when they are unable to meet the needs of their child for belonging or effectiveness in school. Parents have a primal need to care for and protect their children, and the learned and lived experience of providing for all their children's needs across stages of child development, from newborns to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. When children enter school, and especially as they transition through adolescence, parents become less able to provide for basic needs, especially when it comes to social acceptance among peers and competency with increasing and expanding cognitive demands. When a parent arrives in my office concerned about bullying or missing assignments, they often present as angry. But to support them effectively, I have to remember that behind their anger or frustration is fear, and meet them in that place where they need calm and steady reassurance that "this too shall pass," and that the current moment of challenge is a necessary phase in the progression and fulfillment of their child's expanding series of needs.

Relationships grow stronger through harm and repair.

I don't always get it right. I make mistakes. Sometimes those mistakes hurt people and lead to conflict. Mistakes can be corrected; harm can be repaired; relationships are built as this process unfolds and is repeated. We often think and talk about trust as a key component of relationship and partnership; it most certainly is. However, we underestimate the resilience of relationships to endure breached trust, if and when it is properly repaired. What's more, relationships are actually made stronger through the process of harm and repair.

Think of your best friend or life partner and ask yourself a series of questions. What feeling comes over you when you hold their image in your mind? How long have you known that person? What have you been through together? What parts of those experiences were hard? Did they ever result in conflict or periods of separation? How did you overcome those? What is the relationship between the series of experiences you've shared and the feeling that you now hold?

When I ask myself those questions, I am able to see that my most valued relationships have endured periods of frustration, conflict, and separation. The value that they now carry results, not only from the fun and affinity we shared, but from the constructive and sometimes painful combination of hurt and healing. I feel confident that I can count on that person when everything falls apart because it has, and then we put it back together. Since schools are organizations that bring lots of people together for inherently limited periods of time, we too often take a short-term view of people and relationships within the school, and therefore don't invest the time and energy required to resolve conflict and repair relational harm. In fairness, this is hard work, and both parties must be willing to deeply engage consistently over time. We can't all be best friends, that's why best friends are singular. But as we navigate many lesser relationships, we can be guided by the aspirations we develop with our besties.

Mountain

Why do people climb mountains? "Because they are there," the saying goes. I like a challenge. I like the feeling of stretching myself. I know that I'm growing and getting stronger when my muscles are a little stiff and sore. My body tells me I did a hard thing. The mountain is a universal metaphor for challenge. People climb mountains to test themselves, and many parts of school feel like mountains to me. The world is made of many mountains.

I struggled in school...a lot. When I was in middle and high school, even though I had friends, I didn't feel like I belonged. Even though I got good grades, I didn't feel smart. Even though I was curious about things, I didn't work hard to find things out. How could that be? When I got to college, I got excited about ideas in a way I was not in high school, but I didn't have the skills or the habits of mind to fully explore them and learn deeply. In mountain climbing terms, it was like arriving at the tree line, where forests and meadows turn to ice fields and rock faces. I arrived with only the boots on my feet and a small day pack. I didn't have the equipment or the skill to reach the summit.



When I came to the classroom as a teacher, I had finally, sort of, figured out how to learn deeply. I say "sort of" because while I found success in college and graduate school, I had not yet finished the terminal degree and I still struggled with direction, doubt, and procrastination. But I was

determined to provide my students with two things no one gave me as an adolescent: inspiration and discipline. I infused my classes with those two things, ambitious as they were, and when I didn't live up to my own standards, the imposter syndrome set in. Teaching well is a continuous striving toward the top of the mountain. Each day, the teacher plans to execute the perfect lesson, but most of them fall short. Once in a blue moon the teacher feels the wind blow clear and strong across the mountainside, each student stepping with purpose and precision, roped together in synchronicity. I had some moments like that.

Transitioning to school leadership, the peaks seemed higher and the pitches steeper. High school teachers are trained critics, practiced in the art of scrutiny and fiercely independent. Parents have high expectations for a positive experience and are known to get feisty when their children struggle, as students sometimes should if challenged appropriately in a prep school environment. Beginning as a teacher, but accelerating as a leader, a third dimension of ascent opened up for me: an emotional terrain.

To be clear, there was always an emotional component of the school experience in play for me, I just didn't recognize or understand it as such. I've said before, when I began teaching, I found myself physically fatigued from the emotional labor of leading a classroom and interacting with students. As a school leader, that field was amplified. It felt like the stakes were higher and I questioned myself, my decisions, and my impact on the institution on a larger scale. It was also at this point that I began to think systematically, scientifically even, about emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning. I started to see and understand the field I was navigating more clearly.

Parenting two neurodivergent children in the same school where I worked coincided with my developmental arc of emotional growth. My children began to struggle in school, and I struggled to support them as a parent. I have spent my entire life in school. I've made it my business to educate children and support the adult parents and teachers who raise them. And there I was wandering about, lost and confused and scared. I felt like a failure. I felt like an imposter. I tried to bring the skills I had honed in my own educational journey to bear in this newest phase of challenge: inspiration and discipline. It felt incomplete because I was really only able to sprinkle in some emotional acumen across the surface of our experience.

In the last ten years I believe the emotional field has become more deeply engrained in my school work: as a parent, a school leader, and as a learner. I more fully respect and understand the importance of emotional safety, intelligence, and maturation across many dimensions of school. This transition has not come without its own set of doubts, insecurities, mistakes, and many, many growth opportunities. I still don't think or act intuitively in this dimension, so I'm slower to find my footing as I process emotion through the front half of my brain. But I'm making progress and committed to continual growth.

At the end of the day, I work in schools because I love to learn. I never want to stop learning and growing. So what do you do when you get to the top of the mountain? You take a moment to enjoy the view from that summit and then start down again.

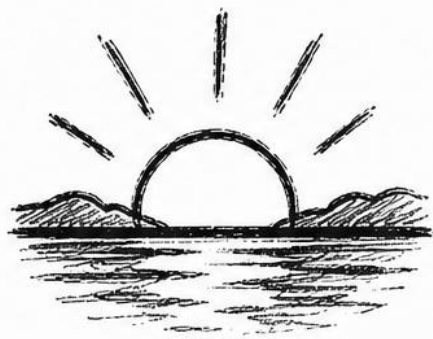
I have recently encountered a thing called "the path of descent," which many people begin to experience as they cross a threshold into the second half of life. At the moment, I'm exploring this idea, wondering if it's happening to me, and feeling my way tentatively along the first few kilometers of the trail. It's about feeling full enough, a gradual release of the striving and determination that

compels many of us forward in the first half of life. It's an acceptance of what is and what has been. And it feels good and whole and peaceful. I like it.

Sunset

This past fall, I walked the Camino de Santiago with my cousin, who is probably the person who has known me the best and the longest in this world. It was a momentous journey, filled with personal meaning and significance. But it happened in the middle of October, as school was in session. I hesitated to even ask if I could go. And when I was approved and supported in going, I struggled to know how to present this experience to the faculty. It felt personal, and I've had a hangup about separating the personal from the professional. It didn't seem appropriate.

The Camino walk is a religious pilgrimage, perhaps the most historic and significant in the European Christian tradition. It follows old Roman roads across Spain and Portugal, to arrive at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where the remains of St. James the Apostle are reputedly housed. Along the way, pilgrims follow the footsteps of many thousands of pilgrims who have walked those roads since the Middle Ages. Our particular pilgrimage journey was a cohort experience, guided by my cousin, who is a pastor in western Canada. The journey began six months before with a retreat in San Diego where I met the fourteen other pilgrims, three guides, and several others who would lead our journey. Each month afterward, we shared assigned readings and half-day Zoom calls with a faculty of elders who guided our preparation, study, and reflection. The experience was intended for white, male Christians in leadership position to discern how we can use our positional authority and socio-historical privilege to live and work out God's calling in our lives.



This was a richly personal experience for me. It helped me understand and heal from several personal tragedies that I have experienced in my lifetime. It also helped me take stock of my life and career, think about the parts of my work that are most personally rewarding, and which contribute the most and the best to the collective needs of the school community and society at large. The concept of two halves of life framed our considerations, a notion explored by authors Richard Rohr and David Brooks, which suggests that as human beings approach the sunset of their careers, family lives, and working years, their priorities begin to shift. It's almost as if the hue cast by the setting sun changes the colors of our perception, and pursuit of career accomplishments begins to give way to other matters of more personal significance.

I could go on for several pages about the particular ways that this idea resonated with me, but that's not my purpose in sharing it here. Instead, it illustrates a way that I have begun to think differently about the separation of personal and professional as a feature of school leadership. On one hand, I had not previously shared my faith with many people at school, but that was unavoidable in explaining my absence for the Camino trip. But when I did, I received supportive comments and gestures, including an appreciation for opening up. It also led me to share one of our books with colleagues and start a reading group centered on an exploration of patriarchy and the way this system of domination hinders men from developing and expressing healthy forms of masculinity, a subject that is relevant to our school community and the ways men and women partner in collaboration and other shared aspects of working life.

For most of my career, it has been important to me to lead by example, to work hard alongside the people I lead, and to "get my hands dirty" in our shared practice. Sometimes that means initiating a project personally or putting myself out there in the experimental or pilot phase. Other times it means working long hours, answering emails and taking phone calls in the evening or on weekends, or showing up for plays, concerts, and sporting events. I viewed my continued teaching practice as another expression of this personal value. At EPS, I try to join Orientation and EBC trips in some capacity, in part to share the experience with students, but also to show teachers that I'm willing to do some of the less comfortable aspects of our work alongside them. I have also frequently reflected that my experience as a parent has made me a much better teacher and school leader, and that my work as an educator has made me a better parent. But sharing the Camino with colleagues was a different level of transparency and vulnerability for me as a leader.

I have tried to carry that learning through the year and it became an organizing principle for the development of this PDP. I hope my words carry earnestness and sincerity in addition to vulnerability and truth. As I transition into the second half of my working life, and walk toward the sunset, the dying light falls on work and personal life together. I no longer want, or need, to keep two halves of my life separate. I want an integrated life, and I don't think that will come at the expense of my effectiveness as a school leader or my health and happiness as an individual. To the contrary, it seems to make them both richer.

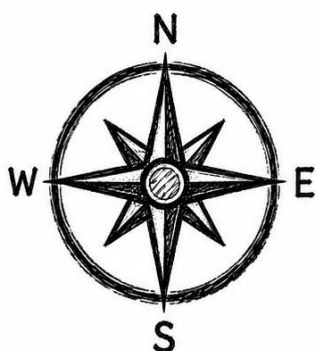
Community Values

Indicator
Prioritizes collaborative approaches to projects and problem-solving.
Supports and implements the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and compassion in projects and interpersonal relations.
Leads with curiosity, wonder, and inquiry, withholding judgment until decisive moments arrive.

Values guide our thinking and decision-making. If our philosophy is the country we inhabit and traverse in the course of our professional journey, then our values are a map of that land. They help us look ahead and plan. They guide our responses to emerging conditions. When we are lost or confused, we pull out our maps to reorient. They point us in the right direction and indicate how far we have to go. They may even tell us which route to take and whether that road is long and curvy with detours and stops for gas and snacks, or whether we take the broad highway to most quickly and efficiently reach our destination. And just like maps, especially old historical ones, with pictures of sea monsters and blank spaces for uncharted waters and the unvisited interior, our values are works of art. They inspire us to strive and be our best selves. They fill us with pride and sorrow. They hold inherent beauty and move us toward greatness.

Rose of the Winds

Most human cultures and languages contain four cardinal directions to give people points of bearing in space. Many traditional cultures include references to features of the landscape, like a coast line or mountain range in the construction of cardinal directions. In contemporary western society, we commonly call these cardinal direction north, south, east, and west. Although these bearings are conceptual, they point to concrete directions, like the origin and destination of prevailing winds, the path of the sun and moon across the sky, and the migration of the sun at midday over the course of the year. Western maps contain a little star, like the one on a Mariners cap, that orients the map to the cardinal directions. Since the Age of Exploration in European history, this star has been called by several names. Seafarers once called it the "rose of the winds." Now that more people travel by car than boat, we call this the compass rose or star.



At Eastside Prep, we have several shared values that serve as our compass rose. Because they are four, we may easily recognize our critical thinking, responsible action, compassionate leadership, and wise innovation mission points as cardinal directions. I can even imagine the TALI shorthand arranged around the star, with "Better World" written in the center. When it comes to curriculum and pedagogy, we might think of "inquiry, experience, and integration" as cardinal directions. These values orient us to our work and purpose, and serve us well as we navigate a complex world, with nuance and ambiguity all around us.

When I describe our school to candidates in an interview, or tell people what I most like about working at Eastside Prep, one of the first things I point to is our collaborative spirit and practice. But collaboration is not easy. Working together collaboratively requires sacrifice, compromise, lots of discussion, and plenty of time. It takes longer and stretches us more. We believe it produces better outcomes, if not always for us individually, then certainly for the program and the student experience as a whole. Sometimes collaboration requires us to set aside our individual goals, or at least a portion of them, and make time to listen to one another very intentionally.

In the last couple of years, I have been working to coordinate aspects of our academic program for juniors and seniors. As students approach their final years in secondary school, we target several parts of the program toward specific goals, including College Counseling, Independent Curriculum, and Advisory. This year, we are piloting an internship program and in the process of developing a set of competencies to document student progress in the hopes that we might be able to quantify and evaluate student progress sufficiently enough to award academic credit to the experience. These efforts require collaborating intentionally with several members of the Senior Leadership Team, including Jonathan Briggs, Matt Delaney, and Bart Gummere. Looping Advisory into the mix includes Anne Duffy, as the 12th grade GLC, and our internship partners include Colleague.ai and alumnus James Rimmer at the Snoqualmie Mill real estate project.

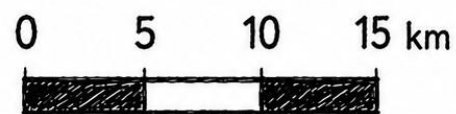
As a division head, I work with Sarah Peeden to align and create equity between the Upper and Middle School divisions. We frequently reference shared calendars of division meeting topics to ensure that we're covering similar ground with faculty. We take care to consider how individual projects impact each other's work, as comparisons between the divisions are persistent and inevitable. In addition, we develop shared projects, like the multiyear effort to re-evaluate grading and assessment practices and the more recent development of a curriculum mapping tool with Matt and Jonathan.

Sometimes we find the limits of people's willingness and capacity to collaborate. In recent years we have encountered resistance from teachers in their co-teaching assignments, where we need more than one teacher to staff the five or more sections of a given class. Teachers sometimes prefer to have a class to themselves, which may reduce prep time by eliminating meetings and providing greater autonomy and individualization of a course. We have found that without shared staffing, we lose a measure of intention and coordination in the vertical alignment of our curriculum. Students have more varied experiences and expectations placed upon them as they move from year to year in a course progression. Although it is sometimes a big request for teachers to share courses, Sarah and I make the ask because it represents our north star value of collaboration, and we make certain to live out that value in our own work.

Collaboration is hard, and we don't want to make things harder unless they produce better results. We believe collaborative efforts bring more insight and critical thinking to a project. The act of aligning insight, interests, and perspectives makes the outcome work better, for more people, in more circumstances. And the sharing of perspective builds community ties, boosts inclusion, and increases belonging. If we only built a program from one perspective, it would be less likely to work well for people with different experiences, aptitudes, and identities. When we, as leaders, ask people to expend more effort, we need to not only be willing to do our own work in this way, we should be concrete in our thinking and clear in our communication about what benefits will accrue from that effort.

Scale

Somewhere in the corner of most paper maps sits a little set of horizontal bars that indicate how much distance is equivalent to a given unit of measurement. A city or regional map may equate one inch on the map to one mile in real space. A state or national map could signify 25 or 100 miles per centimeter. Reading a map is an act of interpretation, and the scale provides the reader perspective to help them understand the meaning of what they're looking at.



For me, equity and inclusion work is a little like using a scale to read a map. As a white cisgender man, most of the world is structured to center my identity. I experience privilege every day, in countless ways, many of which I am rarely aware. In order to build my awareness, I have to read the world around me with intention, understanding, and perspective-taking. It takes effort on my part to unpack the historical, social, and personal privilege I carry, and it's hard work to consistently remind myself of the very different lived experiences of students and colleagues that I'm working with. To illustrate, let's examine three primary identity categories that shape student and faculty experience within the school.

Race

As a graduate student, I learned a lot about how race has operated to structure the human experience in the Americas. In the United States, the combination of a largely homogenous white settler class, indigenous genocide and erasure, and the forced migration of millions of enslaved Africans constructed a binary white-black racial imagination in the historical consciousness. Across Latin America, the story was more complex. Indigenous and African majorities and a long

history of racial mixing led to the celebration of indigeneity and Blackness in some national communities, and racial identities became more subtle, fluid, and varied. In all cases, my understanding was built historically and with abstraction. Grappling with the ways in which race shapes the experience of students and teachers at EPS, and learning how to affect positive change as a school leader, has proven harder for me.

Our student population is quite racially diverse. In fact, more than half identify as students of color, although a very small percentage identify as African American. So to be a Black student at EPS is an uniquely isolating experience. Meanwhile, the parents of many students of color migrated from South and East Asian, where racial history, legacy, and dynamics are different still. At times, equity, inclusion, and compassion have been hard to uphold equivalently within this demographic and cultural context, especially with student disciplinary cases. I find myself simultaneously trying to educate, hold accountable, represent, and uphold our EICL values in very contentious situations, where harm coexists with shame, and fear of marginalization within a "cancel culture" coexists with the ongoing marginalization of under-represented students in our elite prep school. As a white school leader, I cannot speak from the "I" perspective about marginalization in the same way that either the offender or the harmed are experiencing it. But I recognize my role and responsibility, so I lean into discomfort, work to educate myself, and partner with those who know more than me whenever possible.

Gender

Navigating gender within our community is similarly challenging and personally significant to me. In feedback I have gathered within the division and from school-wide conversations, two predominant concerns arise. First, the gendered composition and dynamic of the Senior Leadership Team has been identified as a point of inequity. As a member of that team, I recognize the concern, and wrestle with ways to improve. Second, gendered dynamics within teaching partnerships leave some women feeling like they are tasked with a disproportionate amount of menial and organizational tasks, like preparing shared resources, PowerPoints, and assessment materials. As a man, I recognize that I am caught up in these dynamics, in some ways complicit and in other ways inescapably trapped. I can't negate or change my identity, so I'm left to figure out how I might use my identity and associated privilege to positive effect.

Last spring, an opportunity presented itself. As part of my Camino preparation, we read bell hooks' *The Will to Change*, which presents patriarchal masculinity to the reader in a very understandable way, which I found illuminating and uniquely empathetic to men. hooks makes no excuses for men and confronts the manner in which patriarchy harms women. But she also shows how within the construction of patriarchy, men are denied essential aspects of the human experience, notably the ability to feel and express emotion. So the reader is left with an understanding of how patriarchy is bad for all human beings. It amplified my own urgency to smash the patriarchy, and I thought it might have a similar impact on others in our community. So this year, several teachers and school leaders have joined me in a book group to read, and meet monthly to discuss, hooks' important and impactful work. She, as a Black woman, has helped us learn and better understand the masculine experience of patriarchy and improve.

Class

It is difficult to talk about class in an environment where a teacher's annual salary is the equivalent of two students' tuition costs. Consequently, I don't think we talk about class enough in our school. Many of our families are extraordinarily wealthy, and while money is one component of class, there are deeply-engrained beliefs and lenses through which people view the world that are associated with wealth, and therefore differ depending on the size of one's bank account(s). What's more, class aligns with, or against, other historically marginalized or centered identities that people hold, thereby complicating our efforts to build diversity, equity, inclusion, and compassion within our community.

The EPS partnership with Rainier Scholars highlights some of these issues. As a function of their mission and purpose, Rainier Scholars come from families with low income and parents who do not hold a college degree. Many families migrated to the United States within the lifetime of the Scholars themselves, and live in impoverished sections of the Seattle Metropolitan area. Therefore race, class, nationality, neighborhood, and in many cases gender combine to make the experience of a Rainier Scholar maximally different from that of an Eastside family with an income high enough to afford tuition. How, then, does a Rainier Scholar enter and leave our community? How does their time here shape their educational experience, or their view of the wider world? How does it shape their view of themselves and how they fit into that world? What can we do to prevent, or at least limit, harm associated with these several overlapping and mutually reinforcing systems of domination?

I don't have overarching answers to these questions or solutions to the associated problems. I believe that we will only succeed in working toward a better world one small step and decision at a time. And I'm committed to working toward a better version of the human experience for every member of our community. I believe that a focus and emphasis on our shared humanity is the only thing that will bring people to work together for a mutually better future. We can all find something of ourselves in one another. We all need love, purpose, belonging, and security, just like we all need air to breathe, water to drink, and food to eat.

Legend

When I was younger, maps were functional and necessary to get you where you needed to go. Before my family would take a road trip, we would stop by the local American Automobile Association (AAA) office for a TripTik. As a Triple-A member, you could describe your origin and destination and they would produce for you a flyer size collection of maps that routed you one leg of the journey at a time. In addition to mapping the roads, the TripTik provided a series of suggestions for fuel stops, restaurant and potty breaks, and roadside attractions. But the TripTik's main advantage was that it didn't require the navigator to unfold the map across the dashboard as the driver demanded, "Well, was that our exit or not?" from a quarter mile past the offramp. I haven't thought about getting a TripTik for years because now I use my phone to get me where I need to go, but out of curiosity, I checked out the AAA website and it turns out they now have a TripTik app. I'll give it a try on my next road trip. I should've guessed there was an app for that too.

Even if I don't need a map to direct my travel in most circumstances, I still love to look at a map and wonder. It helps me form a mental image of a landscape or a region. I have a giant map of the Northwest Coast on the wall next to my desk. Vancouver Island is set in the center, with the Salish Sea spread out to the east and south. The compass rose indicates the map is tilted right, at least as it orients to the earth's axis, and the latitude and longitude lines fan out diagonally. I can see how the land drains through the many waterways, and routes across the major sea lanes are depicted with red segmented lines. Underneath the scale, which explains distance in both miles and kilometers since the map includes portions of U.S. and Canadian territory, sits the legend. The legend tells me the thin-dashed red lines represent ferry routes, while the thick-dashed lines mark the cruise ship routes. Other symbols indicate parks and wildlife areas, marine and seaplane facilities, historic sites, and even shipwrecks. The legend helps me decode the markings, but in the blank spaces, plenty of wonder and imagination remain.



So it is with much of my work as a school leader. As Socrates is widely quoted, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." I wouldn't go quite as far as the ancient master, as all of the preceding text attempts to articulate the things I have learned from my life in schools and work as an educator. I believe there is much wisdom to be found. But at the end of the day, or more to the point in a given moment, I have to hold humility in the front of my mind as I approach every situation. I can be guided by research, best practices, and past experience, but unless I'm approaching a new situation with curiosity and asking questions, I'm setting myself up for mistakes and potentially harm, to individuals, relationships, and the community ties and culture of the school.

It is important to open every project with questions, lots of questions. Who does the project serve? Who do we need to contribute? How will it be implemented over time? If we are updating or replacing an existing system or structure, what will be gained or lost in the transition? Who is currently very invested in the system and how might they respond to changes? Why don't we ask them? As we proceed through the questions, answering one at a time, we document our findings, report back to those we've surveyed, and provide an update on progress and changes.

When approaching people, I try to set aside assumptions that I may have about their thoughts and feelings. Even if I've had 20 interactions about similar issues, I ask them again, honestly and openly, to give them the opportunity to form and express their opinion anew. If someone responds or approaches with strong emotion, I pause and tell myself their feelings may be informed by more than the issue at hand or my presentation of it. "Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about," helps me cultivate compassion and detachment, and prevents my own emotions from spiraling escalation.

As I gather information, I will necessarily have to fill in gaps, as some true feelings are hard to access by leaders in schools. Positional authority sometimes discourages folks from communicating directly and clearly, so it helps to have an ear to the ground. But distinguishing the teacher discourse from gossip and the rumor mill is an inexact science, so before I act on something I hear third hand, I try to confirm it by approaching the source as directly as possible.

Inevitably, the moment of decision will arrive. And when it comes, I must be willing to act and stand by it. As soon as a decision is made and communicated, I begin to hear feedback, and I am much more likely to hear from those who oppose a decision than from those who support it. So I need to stand firm for a while to let the initial reaction pass. In time, I will reflect more deeply on the decision and manner in which I arrived at it. Here again, I need humility, open-mindedness, willingness to admit mistakes, and latitude to reconsider if warranted.

It is my sincere hope that the entire text of this PDP may serve as a kind of legend to the map of school leadership. Each domain, category, and indicator is a symbol representing the most salient features of the leadership landscape. But just like a map, it is a representation of leadership, not the actual thing. The leader must navigate the actual terrain, by land, sea, or air. The leader inhabits the space, encounters the people, observes the landscape in the changing light. It is only by doing that one can know, and as a result, recognize the limitations of that knowledge.