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**Final Narrative Outline**

*Major Insights About Leadership*

1. Emotional Intelligence

Learning about emotional intelligence was fascinating. The concept makes sense, it really does, but it had never occurred to me that emotional intelligence could play such a large role in the success of leadership. Daniel Goleman’s writing on emotional contagion was particularly intriguing! I’ve known about illness contagion, sure (I like to say that not a day goes by in kindergarten that my apple doesn’t get sneezed on) but emotional contagion? It just makes so much sense. I have fallen victim to other’s emotions, and I’m sure I’ve also set the emotional tone many a time.

Learning that the most emotionally powerful/communicable person controls emotions in a group was intriguing! In thinking about leadership, it is interesting to ponder the relationship between communication and efficacy, and emotional positivity and efficacy. Emotions cannot be transferred by mere articulation, yet there is such a weight on communication in leadership and functioning organizations. I liked the idea that emotional intelligence can be learned through practice. That makes it an approachable tool through which leaders can connect with their followers (and also get more in tune with themselves).

1. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership showed me the affects of trusting your followers. Prior to this course, I never viewed leadership as a give and take, but servant leadership opened me up to that idea. Dr. Kent Keith states, “Servant leaders love people, and enjoy helping them.” This, in coordination with the TED talk and the rest of Keith’s article, made me realize just how service-oriented the profession of teaching is. I do not teach kindergarten for the power, fame, nor money—I teach kindergarten because I love it. I love the entire experience: the immense effort and presence it takes to lead a group of small children, and the huge reward when a student learns to read or write.

Learning about servant leadership also showed me how stark a contrast it has from power-based leadership. In conjunction, I realized that my workplace is quite safe: I feel neither imminent threats nor constraints. This was the first (of many) moments during this course when I thought… wow. How lucky am I to have Greens Farms as my introduction to the world of teaching.

1. Kouzes & Posner’s Ten Truths About Leadership

The very first truth, “You Make a Difference,” really struck me. I saw this firsthand in kindergarten. This truth hit me when I was reading signed holiday cards from my students. One student named Sadie signed her name in her best lowercase letters. That’s when I realized that Sadie was lifting up her pencil when writing the “d” in her name. The lines were disconnected in a way that I had grown familiar with in teaching handwriting, and I then realized it was *I* that taught Sadie how to write her “little letters.” I was the one leading Sadie through her understanding of the alphabet’s handwritten appearance. And her disjointed letter “d” showed me that I needed to be more present for the little things in class, such as this technicality. This was astounding—to realize how much power I had in forming our students. It showed me that I really did make a difference.

A subsection in the “You Make a Difference” truth was that of knowing that everything you need, you already have. This was confusing and calming all at once. Confusing, because sometimes I feel like I really don’t have what I need to solve a problem (and likely am not alone). These moments of confusion, though, almost always show me what I need to do in order to rectify or translate the situation. In that sense, this truth was calming. Even though it may not seem like it in the moment, whether in challenges faced as an educational leader or as a person living my day-to-day life, it is reassuring to know that I have all that I need inside.

1. Transformational Leadership

Learning about transformational leadership helped illuminate the necessity of leading with a vision. In coordination with that, as transformational leadership is so connection-based, communication is pivotal. In my discussion post about transformational leadership, I wrote about how its emphasis on connection will impact my role as a kindergarten teacher. More specifically, how authentic connection is needed. Another idea that I pulled from learning about transformational leadership is that great leaders inspire others. They lead by compelling their followers to follow, by gathering their spirits and energizing their efforts towards a greater cause.

1. Change Leadership

The discussion about change leadership was definitely my favorite. I watched Simon Sinek’s entire TED talk (not just the first seven minutes…), and found what he was saying to be captivating. His repeated line, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it,” rang in my ears even after I finished watching. What Sinek presented in his TED talk gave me a sort of “A-ha!” moment, realizing that most organizations go from the outside-in in regards to products, ways, and purpose. Yet, the most purposeful and compelling way to lead is inside-out, starting with the “Why” and ending with the “What.” It is easiest for us to think decisively about what we know for sure, but the most benefit comes from exploring the uncharted territory. That is what leads us to figuring out the core of our purpose.

Another aspect of change leadership that I found hugely helpful to learn about was that of adapter types. It was great to see a visual (in Sinek’s TED talk) of the various types of adapters. It made me more aware of the position each individual is in during a transition in an organization. It also made me realize that leaders must reach out to each of their followers, no matter where on the bell curve they fall, and connect with them.

The most poignant learning in regards to change leadership was realizing that I get asked, “Why?” on a near-daily basis by my kindergarteners. They ask “Why?” about things I know the answers to, most of the time. But the times I don’t know what the correct response it, is challenges me to think deeply and figure out what to say. To me, that deep internal dive is what change leadership is all about—not being afraid to explore the unknown in order to guide your group through inspiriting transition.

*Shifts in Beliefs & Thoughts*

I used to think that followers followed mindlessly, but now I think that followers have an incredible amount of agency. It quickly became apparent to me that I had been giving followers way too little credit. This course showed me that leadership is a two-way street; it is a process that includes both parties involved, leaders and followers alike. In one of the TED talks, it was stated, “We follow those who lead, not for them, but for ourselves.” I had never thought of following that way before! It stuck me as genius—followers really do have agency, and we as leaders need to channel followers’ ability to choose us, choose our vision, and choose our organizational future.

I used to think that teaching small children was fun (and I still do!), but now I know that my role is so much larger than I imagined. Kouzes & Posner state, “If you’re in a role that brings you into contact with young people on a regular basis—say a parent, teacher, coach or counselor—keep this observation in mind. Someone is looking to you right now for leadership.” This quote really called it out, in a way that was shocking, illuminating, and nerve-wracking all at once. The weight of this quote took a while to sink in. I now know, and try to be much more aware of, the presence I have around children I teach and runners I coach. In kindergarten, it is easy for me to be positive and articulate, lending a helping hand and a caring heart to all students. When coaching the high school cross country team, I sometimes forget that the girls are younger than me and are looking to me for advice and counsel. This quote made has made me more aware of my unique leadership positions, working with two discrete, impressionable groups. Having knowledge of how immense a power leading young minds is has equipped me better for any and all leadership positions that involve working with youth.

I used to think that a leader was untouchable, and now I think that a leader leads best when an element of vulnerability is present. This course has shown me just how large an impact authenticity and connection can have on one’s experience in an educational institution. A lot of what we learned seems to have a grassroots element to it, that is, the idea that it all starts from a small, local place. The answers we need are inside us, as K&P say, and if they aren’t, then it’s likely the answer will come once we ask for help. Without being vulnerable, or at least open to assistance, a leader would be highly disconnected. With no vulnerability, there is no authenticity. And as I’ve learned, authenticity is at the core of being an outstanding leader.

*Key Questions*

1. The necessary (and welcome!) nature of authenticity has been a huge learning lesson for me in this course. So, I wonder—how does one communicate their authenticity when they are high up in the leadership ranks? That is, how can authentic leadership be transmitted to a sizable group of people? Can authenticity just be felt, and that’s that?
2. Is finding your central “Why?” a never-ending process? In regards to Sinek’s golden circle, the “Why?” is at the core of everything. As leaders, do we find an organization’s “Why?” and stick with it, or can we allow the purpose to ebb and flow as the organization changes? It seems natural for the core to move as its other parts do, but I still wonder.
3. How is emotional contagion involved in change leadership? Daniel Goleman speaks to emotional contagion’s role in facilitating mood transference, but I wonder if it would affect the light in which an organizational change is viewed.

Debbie, this has been such a spectacular course. I have learned so much during this time, and am thankful for my newfound leadership knowledge. Thank you!