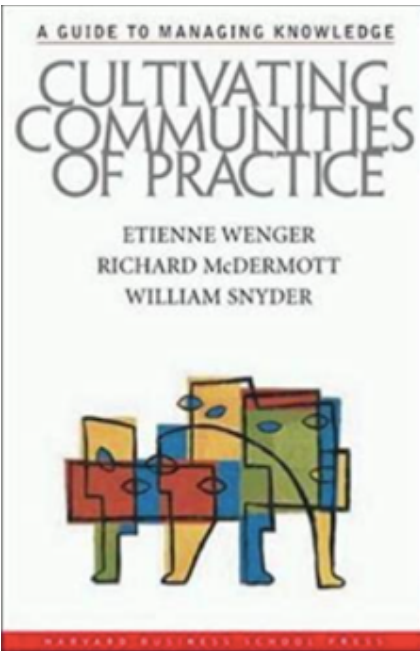


BECOMING A GOOD GARDENER – Joseph A. Hoover

As I consider the time and work I have put in to complete my graduate degree, there are a few areas where I wish to continue my learning. The analogy that holds value in my heart as I consider my future as an educator is that of a gardener. As I have pushed through the research assigned for the courses of this degree program, I kept coming back to the image of a gardener lovingly, planting vegetables, watering, pulling weeds, and creating an environment for growth. This picture is different than I have traditionally envisioned the role of an educator. I used to think educators were primarily about new ideas, movement in a new direction, and lecturing from up front. However, a gardener is more of a supportive, cultivator role. Like a good gardener, an educator must utilize reflective practices to discover the cause of the challenges faced by their organization and their craft. Analyzing cases and personal experiences has helped me think through the complexity in discovering the best way to engage students and their families. Each instance presents layers of nuance that make certainty elusive. This has provided me with an important virtue in my mindset toward our school's leadership as well as our students: grace. I am slower to harshly judge decisions that I don't understand and rather believe that there must be more information, rendering the decision logical. Just as a gardener trusts and adjusts to the weather, this mindset allows me to focus on altruistic activities I am able to control, and trust that colleagues and administrators are doing the same. With this in mind, my future learning goals have to do with developing my inner gardener through Communities of Practice, grit, and equity and inclusion.

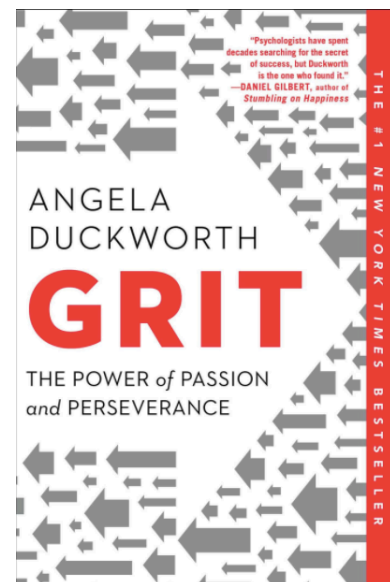


In order to improve as an educator, I need to be committed to life-long learning and embracing accountability to refine my practice. A specific structure that our organization currently lacks that would provide the time and space necessary for this continuing development is the use of Communities of Practice (CoPs). Etienne Wenger,

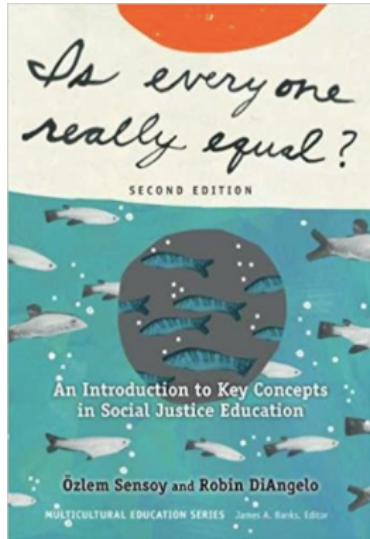


Richard McDermott, and William Snyder's book *Cultivating Communities of Practice* provides a systematic way to align knowledge sharing with benefiting an organization. Although this strategy is primarily embraced in the private, for-profit sector, this would significantly benefit our work in a private residential school as they have proven to help share best practices, build trust, acquire/improve skills, and improve retention. This type of professional development structure helps to establish the environment for educators to flourish. I am working to continue my learning around CoPs and plant the seeds for this framework on behalf of my colleagues. After the fruit of the CoPs is realized we can better establish the structure organization-wide.

One paradox of working in education, especially as a Houseparent, is the days can feel so long, but the years fly by! Staying motivated and determined to be fully present each day for the benefit of your family and students requires a strong "grit muscle." Angela Duckworth's book *GRIT: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, demonstrates the research behind a person's ability to grow this type of muscle. Prior to Duckworth's work the attribute of resilience was largely understood as static rather than dynamic in nature. I am committed to learning about growing in grit, personally growing in this area, and, finally, teaching my students these important principles.



Studying equity and inclusion in education was a meaningful topic I explored through my coursework. As a white, cis-gender, heterosexual, able-bodied, male, I have lived my life largely unaware of my social privilege. My positionality within the varying



levels of systemic oppression of US culture has allowed me to live unhindered to opportunities that other intersections of identity are not privy to. Studying this topic has grown my empathy for students and colleagues that belong to marginalized groups. A resource that I will continue to use in my future discourse around this topic is Ozlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo's book: *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*. This book will help us consider all programmatic assumptions that can inadvertently oppress students and colleagues of non-dominant identities.

With the structure of CoPs, a gritty mindset, and a focus on equity and inclusion, my future is bright as an educator. Pursuing these goals will keep me continuously improving in my professional and personal life—helping me continue to contribute positively to my organization, and overcome challenges to create an educative experience that accounts for the context of *all* our students.