

August 19, 2004: Exercise A – Kolb, pg. 39-40 Coghlan

Last year, Pennsylvania enacted a new law that states that all teachers must be certified in the area they teach. This means that elementary teachers teaching 7th or 8th grade must be certified for whatever subject they are teaching rather than just certified as an elementary teacher. At a monthly faculty meeting the Director of Secondary Education told our middle school faculty that current 7th and 8th grade teachers who are not certified in their subject area by 2006 would have to move to sixth grade. He asked those of us who were certified elementary but teaching in 7th and 8th grade to think about what it is we wanted to do and let the district know so that staffing could be planned for.

At a weekly team meeting, my principal asked whether or not the teachers on my team were going to take the middle school subject matter test for the subject we taught. None of the other teachers volunteered an answer. After several strained moments, I responded and stated that I had thought about it and that I would be willing to take the social studies middle level test so that I could continue to teach 7th & 8th grade social studies. In response, my principal said that's great, but I've decided that I want all my 7th & 8th grade elementary teachers to take at least two tests, preferably either English and social studies or science and math. I looked at him in surprise as this is not what the upper level administrator had presented to us at our monthly faculty meeting. I hesitated and then responded that I was more than willing to take the social studies test, but that I really had not anticipated taking more than one test and would not be willing to do this. I also stated that it would be difficult to teach two subjects at the level and depth required of the curriculum. The other teachers nodded their agreement. The principal responded by stating to all of us that he would not have room in the middle school for those teachers who didn't take both tests. I responded that teaching in the elementary schools would not be distasteful because we are all elementary certified and have been trained in that area.

I left the meeting, returned to my classroom, and sent an email to the Director of Secondary Education requesting a transfer to the elementary level. There was an opening for a computer instructor and I had been contemplating taking it so that I could complete my instructional technology certification process. I received a response back later that day that said the transfer was possible, and the rest as they say is history.

Reflection

The decision to take the social studies middle level test was a difficult one for me. I had always like teaching middle school because of the ability to move to different subject areas. This helped to keep me energized. One of the reasons that I wasn't very keen on taking the test is that I knew that it would mean that I would teach social studies for the rest of my middle school career. I just wasn't sure that I wanted to do that. I knew for sure that I didn't want to take two tests. I had taught two subjects at the middle school level before and it was extremely time consuming. Essentially you are carrying a 250 student load with only one preparation period a day and full day teaching schedule. I knew when no one would speak up to the principal's question that I this wasn't going to go well. No one wanted to commit to taking the tests. The tension was awful. I waited. No one spoke. Finally I committed to taking the test. I was shocked when the principal said that he expected us to take two

tests! This wasn't what was presented to us at the monthly faculty meeting. At that meeting, the director presented this as a personal decision without any pressure on us to decide one way or the other. We all thought that whatever we decided would be okay, so long as we were upfront so that they had adequate time to plan for staffing. . I was shocked at his response. This wasn't what was presented to us. None of the teachers said a word after this new announcement by the principal. The tension became unbearable. When the principal said that we either take two tests or there'd be no place for us at the middle school, I became angry. I felt that he was trying to bully us into something that he didn't have the authority to do.

In hindsight I realize that I reacted in anger over his attempt at trying to bully his teachers into doing something that he wanted. I didn't like being manipulated in this manner. I knew that this was not the intention of the school directors and from past history I knew that the principal was trying to manipulate and bully his teachers to do what he wanted. Since I needed to complete a technology practicum for my instructional technology certification I had already thought about making a move of some type. I also knew that there was a computer position open at the elementary level that would work for what I had to do. Did I act rashly? Yes! But, I realized at that moment that I had other options than to be dictated to and manipulated for someone else's convenience. I think that the whole episode was a turning point for me. I had become comfortable working at the middle level—I knew the content, the culture, and the students quite well. I had been struggling between my desire to do more with technology and the comfort of staying where I was. This episode launched me into action. It also launched another team member into action who also then transferred to the elementary level. A year and a half later, I am glad for the turn of events that motivated me to make a change. Perhaps I had been feeling trapped before this "bully incident." Perhaps I was afraid of moving forward from the classroom into new horizons. I know that without that incident I might not be here at OMET because I would still be in my old comfort zone.

While this incident turned out for the best, I hope that in the future I would not act as rashly. My goal is that when I am angry or feeling that I am being manipulated, I'll ask for time to think about whatever the new development is. This will allow me time to think through my actions and to look at options that are available. Although, I must say that the principal learn from this event also. During current year staffing changes, he asked people how they would feel about certain moves and whether a move would cause them to want to leave the building. So he has learned that his employees do have options and that they can exercise those options when desired.