

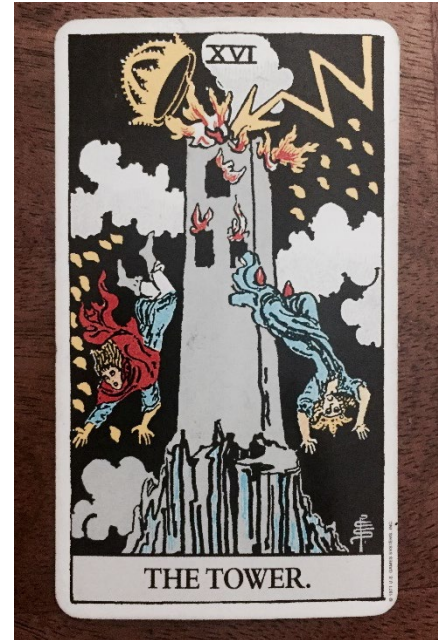
Facing a Tower Moment

I have spoken or written on a number of occasions about creating a culture of belonging and dignity, as part of a community of care, concern, and commitment. Now let me share a bit more about why I think this is so important. Dr. Ebony Green recently authored an amazing little book titled “Acts of Liberation: Opening the Box to Self-Transformation.” The key concept is noticing what she calls “tower moments” for the critical opportunity that is being presented. I suggest to you that education as a whole is currently experiencing a tower moment, calling us to action, to engage in the work.

Life happens. Sometimes it is joyous and sometimes it leaves us to ponder what happened. Tower moments, can be small or large, but are always recognizable for making you feel unsteady, uncomfortable, and a bit out of control. While this may sound like something to avoid, a tower moment lets you know that there is something valuable to accomplish and nudges you to take advantage of the opportunity to nurture, explore, and create the finest version of ourselves.

Now let’s apply a personal concept to the broader work we do as educators. Our schools are a microcosm of the larger community, state, country, and world. Our people and systems are being impacted by the same challenges we are seeing in our society at large. We are challenged to support our students and our staff as they navigate the world around us that is increasingly intolerant, unkind, and downright dangerous. It is reflected in the behavioral challenges we are seeing in our classrooms, the rates of attrition we are seeing in our staff, and in the ongoing violence in our schools and communities.

Fellow educators, this is likely the tower moment of our careers. We need to take advantage of this opportunity to reflect on the culture of our schools. Is the culture we are experiencing how we want it to be for our students? For ourselves? For me, the answer is no and I like to think many of you are with me in feeling this way. Good news: In spotting the tower moment, we have accomplished the first task – recognizing that change is needed, and within our collective experience is the power to facilitate the change we wish to see. The change we need is to create communities of belonging and let me explain why I know in my soul this is true. Research has clearly and consistently demonstrated that belonging in school is an important predictor of a range of outcomes for students. Belonging is linked positively to markers of psychological well-being (academic motivation/success, self-esteem and self-regulation, high expectations for the future). In its absence, however, research demonstrates poorer outcomes. Students are more likely to suffer increased mental health concerns (depression, anxiety), peer relationship problems (anti-social behavior), delinquency and health risk behavior (drugs, alcohol, increased suicidal thoughts/behaviors, dating/sexual violence). Consistent with these findings youth that have perpetrated acts of violence – including the most recent in Uvalde, Texas – perceive themselves to be un-liked, and report loneliness and alienation. Similar research exists for ourselves and our peers. A sense of belonging in your place of work increases happiness, job satisfaction, and lowers depression and anxiety.



What's next? Let go of blame and how we got here. Studies have shown that it is far more powerful to be "for" something, than "against" it. So rather than being "against" the factors that contributed to the current challenge, choose this tower moment to evolve and focus on being ALL IN! on effectuating change, the promise of ensuring our schools reflect a culture of belonging and dignity, and a community of care, concern, and commitment.

Now for the work. Like running a marathon, you likely won't be successful without building your skill and endurance. For our tower moment we are being called to build our toolkit around the skills of creating a culture of belonging and dignity. Starting in June and running through the fall, every CAIU team member will be engaging in a day long training that will give you the science and the why behind belonging, a variety of activities to reflect upon, and our expectations for creating our culture of belonging and dignity. Your work is to take it in, resonate with what you learn, and go forth to practice it, knowing better and doing better.