

# Over the Rainbow

Categories: Professional Learning

"Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." With these words, Dorothy, the heroine of the iconic film *The Wizard of Oz*, expressed her profound realization that she and her little dog had landed in a world that was vastly different from her comfortable and safe home in Kansas. There was no farm and no Auntie Em. She was left to face the horrors of The Wicked Witch and her flying monkeys, and the wonders of the Munchkins, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, all in amazing Technicolor.

As a school leader I have often shared Dorothy's sense of awe and wonder. As a school leader I have often faced issues that were as strange and daunting as those that confronted Dorothy. The changing family structures of our children, the weakened communities, the endless kaleidoscope of reforms and mandates, the constant criticism, and the expanded expectations have all made Dorothy's walk through a forest of humanoid trees seem like a stroll through the park.

Since we all have that sense that we have "gone over the rainbow," perhaps we can take some lessons from Dorothy and her friends that might help us navigate our chaotic environment.

## Lesson one

The first character Dorothy met was the friendly, but straw-headed Scarecrow. He was a playful chap and was played by Ray Bolger in the movie. Before this role, Bolger was known as a singer and dancer. In today's world it's a good idea to have a few dance moves up your sleeve (or pants leg). In the movie *The Wiz*, a retelling of *The Wizard of Oz*, the scarecrow was played by none other than singing and "moonwalking" superstar Michael Jackson. I have often thought every school leader should know how to do the moonwalk-it is a move where you move backwards while appearing to move forward. Of course there should be another version that would allow us to glide forward while appearing to retreat.

The most timeless aspect of the Scarecrow was his search for a brain. More than anything else, he wanted to be smart-to replace his straw with grey matter. He wanted to be respected for his intelligence and he wanted to think great thoughts.

The first requirement of a good school leader is to have a brain. Today's problems might seem intractable yet they are problems we must confront. In fact, many of them probably have no real solution so we must be successful working through the ambiguity and the paradox. That requires more than the usual amount of thoughtfulness on our part. Further, we have to think in new ways. We have to get out of the box by thinking laterally and creatively. As the saying goes, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten." School leaders must show they are capable of using new approaches to face new challenges. Just as the Scarecrow proved adept at outwitting the Wicked Witch, we must be good at outwitting our problems and adversaries. Otherwise we will just be a pile of straw, blowing away in the wind.

## Lesson two

Lesson two comes from the Tin Man. The Tin Man was the epitome of the modern man-he was all mechanical efficiency. With his ax,

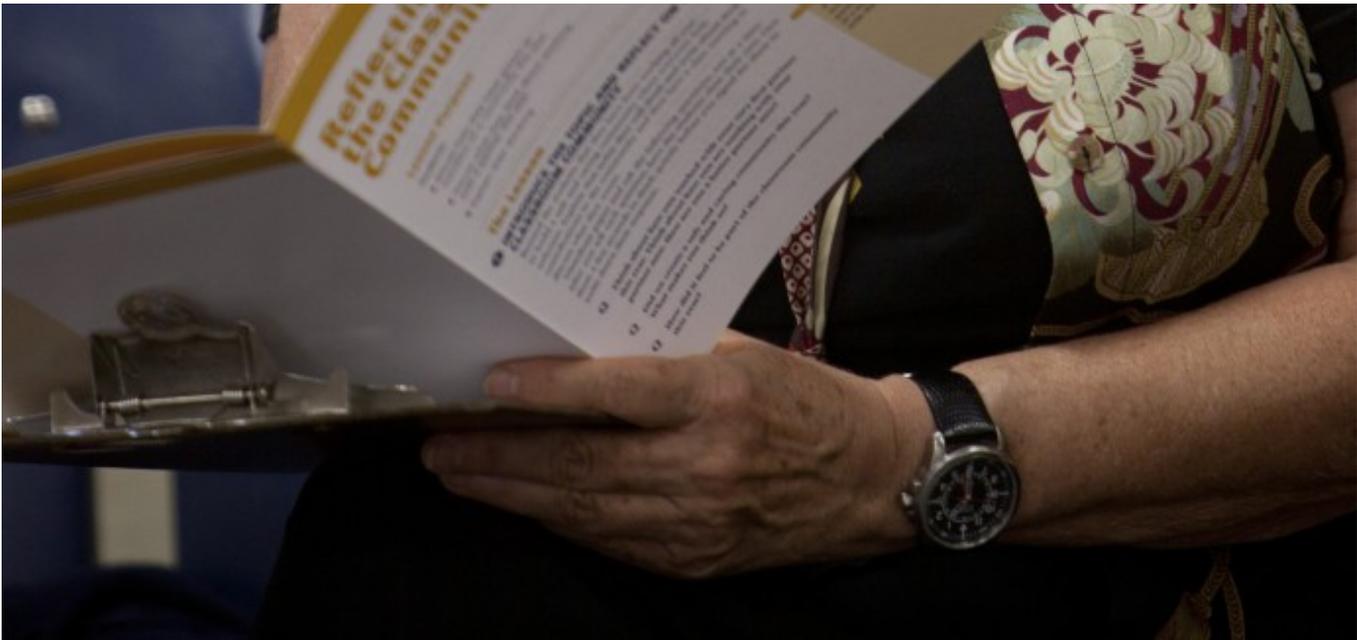
he was capable of cutting trees and foes down to size. Yet for all his abilities, what he wanted more than anything else was a heart. He longed to feel.

In the difficult world that confronts us and the children we serve, often what is needed much more than our efficiency is the feeling that comes from being connected to your heart. The real lubrication that the Tin Man needed was not from his oil can but from the tears of empathy he was able to shed. It was only when he discovered his heart that he could become the effective worker he was built to be.

### Lesson three

This lesson comes from the Cowardly Lion. Although he was King of the Forest, he was a mouse in his own mind. Yet, when things got really tough for Dorothy and her dauntless trio, the Lion showed real courage under pressure. He was already brave, but he just didn't know it.





Courage is one of the most needed traits in today's school leaders. It is impossible to face the challenges we have without having courage. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that "our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter!" Leaders today know what the things that matter are, and we must be courageous enough to speak out in support of the things that need our support and against the things that harm our children and our society. My father was a minister and he used to say his job was to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. That is a leader's task as well.

It has always been interesting to me that the Tin Man and the Lion were looking for the same thing. The word "courage" comes from the French word "coeur," which means heart. You must have heart to have courage and courage to know your heart.

## Lesson four

This lesson comes from Dorothy who, on her journey to Oz, learned many things. One of those things was the Buddhist teaching that "wherever you go, there you are." She learned that even though she was in a faraway place, home is where the heart is. And while we can't really click our heels and get back to Kansas, we can live fully in the place we are. The task of a leader is to be present. You have to be aware of who you are, where you are, and what is happening around you. You have to be in the moment so that you know what is needed and so you can draw on your internal resources to provide the balloon that takes you home.

The other lesson that Dorothy gives us is that she was full of wonder. She saw the world around her, not just as a place full of danger, but as a beautiful and exciting place. She embraced each moment with all its possibilities. So, too, should we.