

Leadership Impact Paper

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Leadership is a lifelong journey, which can promote self-awareness in and outside of the classroom. While I am in the process of obtaining a Masters of Education in Literacy, I have grown to not only better understand literacy in the twenty-first century, but also better understand myself through personal strengths, weaknesses, motivations, emotions and values. This process has taught me so much more than how to implement strategies in the classroom, but how I can be a leader and advocate for my colleagues and students. As I reflect on my leadership journey in the last fifteen months, I believe I have upheld my original goals and personal philosophy to the highest extent. I believe I continued to reflect on my recent practice and use a collaborative, differentiated and student-centered approach when teaching in the classroom and while learning new material in this masters program.

Reflection

Prior to enrolling at American College of Education, I had observed a constant struggle in students' ability to read and write in first grade. As a first grade teacher, it is terrible to witness young children struggle to be successful in the classroom. While originally collaborating with colleagues helped me address various students' needs, it did not seem to be enough. It is from this conclusion that I decided to continue my education and pursue a Masters of Education in Literacy.

The tasks in today's schools have become increasingly multifaceted and complex that one person cannot accomplish such tasks alone (DeMarco & Gutmore, 2021). Schools share multiple leaders at various levels and in different departments who uphold many responsibilities in improving the quality of teaching and learning for every student. One of many important tasks that leaders uphold includes enhancing classroom strategies and practices in a collaborative and

differentiated approach. The most effective leaders are those who continue learning, encourage and support their colleagues in addition to their students.

As I reflect on my leadership journey, I would have never initially thought of myself as a leader. I feel as though I have never taken those necessary steps to become a leader in my profession, however, I have now realized one of the first steps to becoming a leader is through professional growth and continued learning. This course has taught me that becoming a leader does not necessarily mean holding a higher position, but being someone who can model leadership skills and advocate for colleagues and students in the classroom. This last year I have used what I have learned to help colleagues identify areas of struggle for students with exceptionalities along with hosting professional development meetings to inform colleagues of evidence-based strategies they can implement in the classroom. It is crucial to share the knowledge I have learned and be open-minded to other views and ways of learning. I have also built stronger relationships with colleagues and have created a productive work environment that has helped me reach the needs of my students even further.

Connections to Experience

Throughout this journey I have made plenty of connections that involve myself and how I perform my leadership duties. Prior to getting my Masters of Education in Literacy I felt as though I needed to obtain more knowledge and up to date information in order for me to be an effective leader in literacy for my students and school. Knowledge is power and is a necessary tool to be successful in all aspects of life. After gaining an abundance of knowledge from this program I have been able to share what I have learned with my school principal and colleagues of all grades. I especially work closely with my grade partner, but have had opportunities to

share insights on the effects of teaching multiple literacies, how to implement them in instruction and more.

With the knowledge I have researched and learned I am able to implement that into my daily classroom instruction as well as with my school building and hopefully one day with the entire district on professional development opportunities. It is extremely important that I continue to increase my knowledge and share what I learn along the way with administrators and colleagues. Collaboration, open-mindedness, communication, willingness, and flexibility are essential to be an effective leader. Luckily, I have been fortunate enough to be a part of a school district where trust is built within each school and one's thoughts and feelings are easily accepted when it comes to professional opinion and growth.

Connections to Discipline

In order for students to learn and effectively understand what they are learning they need to make connections to improve the overall meaning making process. Making connections is crucial for the transfer of knowledge across all content areas. This is especially true for educators. As educators are able to make connections through professional practices and perspectives across all disciplines they are able to aid students in the making meaning process, which supports their overall learning. Many courses that I have taken in this program have stressed the importance of teaching literacy across all disciplines.

Linking literacy across all disciplines is so important because it builds up students' writing and skills and overall communicative abilities. Providing students with the opportunity to learn multiple literacy skills across content disciplines allows students the necessary skills to critically think, question and process important information. It is not only about *what is* taught,

but also *how content* is being taught (D'Angelo & Maid, 2004). As part of being a leader in my professional life, I need to ensure that colleagues are fully aware of the importance of literacy and how to implement it into daily instruction.

As I reflect on making connections to disciplines I think of the courses I have taken that stress the importance of creating thematic units. Thematic units strengthen teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. Educators should create meaningful, real-world contexts for standard-based teaching and learning. This will allow students to engage in complex thinking while being encouraged to learn through topics relevant to them. Lastly, thematic units are a great instructional method to integrate multiple concepts across all disciplines.

Risk Taking

Risk taking is something I never really like to do or ever thought it was something I was good at. Typically, I am the person who follows the rules, never speaks up and does as I am told. The longer I am in my profession, the more experienced I am and more confident I feel in speaking up, using my voice and stating my opinions. This is my fourth year teaching and with the help of this program and newfound knowledge I finally have found my voice. Too often I found that the curriculum offered at my school is rigid, not very straightforward and did not involve student choice. The first few years I followed the curriculum guidelines perfectly. However, as time went on I noticed the severe struggles some of my students were encountering and I rarely knew how to handle it because I thought I had to stick to a strict guideline.

Soon enough I realized that I had to change the way I was teaching. I had to be flexible in the way I was teaching my students and develop a better understanding of how they learned. I stopped strictly following the curriculum guideless and took a step back from my practice to

really see what was going wrong. As I began giving students the choice in their learning I noticed students became more involved. Students were taking ownership of their learning as well as creating work that was authentic to them (Arman, 2019). This was a risk I was happy to take and will continue to take more if it means I am helping my students.

A second risk I took was when I enrolled in the Masters of Education in Literacy program. When I graduated with my bachelors degree from The College of New Jersey I never thought I would attend graduate school. School has never come easy for me. I have always been one of those people that seem to have to work a bit harder than others to succeed. It was not until I finally came to the conclusion that I wanted to pursue my masters that I took the biggest risk of my life and enrolled. This risk has improved my personal and professional learning and experiences and is a risk I will never forget and am forever grateful for taking.

Ethical Perspectives

Ethical leadership in education is driven by respect for the values and rights of others. Ethical leaders help to build school cultures governed by fair and clearly articulated expectations rather than by politics and opinions (Arar et al., 2016). The best ethical leaders lead by example and create a framework for educators, students and administrators, which can be used to guide their decision-making. As a literacy leader it is my responsibility to be transparent, trustworthy and have open communication with my students, colleagues and principal. Part of being a literacy leader is to provide equal treatment to all students as much as possible and advocate for those who are not being treated equally or benefiting from certain policies. It is my duty as students' leader to make informed decisions on how to best meet the needs of students and encourage academic and developmental growth in the classroom.

Initiative

Taking initiative is not an easy task for some. I have often witnessed teachers' stuck in their ways of thinking and not willing to progress towards bettering themselves or their educational practices. It is imperative that I take initiative in asking for what I can do better in my practice to best support my students. It is also important to take initiative in asking how my school or district as a whole can increase student achievement. It is more important now than ever with the current pandemic to take initiative in asking these types of questions. This program has better prepared me for tough situations like these that will allow me to better assist my student in the classroom and at home through virtual learning. Education is ever changing and growing. As an educator, I need to continue to grow and learn so I can be a better leader for myself and for my students in years to come.

Conclusion

Leadership involves collaboration, respect, open-mindedness, and flexibility to try new approaches to teaching and learning. Leaders have an ethical responsibility to respect the values and rights of others and help build school cultures governed by fair and clearly articulated expectations rather than by politics and opinions. Furthermore, leaders must be reflective in their teaching and lead by example. It is because of this program that I am better equipped to take on the leadership role in my professional and personal life. I have been afforded the opportunity to see literacy in a new light so I can finally meet the needs of diverse learners. This newfound knowledge of literacy will allow me to implement new techniques and strategies into my classroom to better support my students, but also to help provide professional development for

teachers who are in the same position that I was in prior to enrolling in the Masters of Education in Literacy program.

References

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