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ED 498

Final Reflection

 In our final meeting for this class I mentioned how there were times in the program where I thought, “Is this really worth it?” There were other times when I would ask myself, “Can I really do this?” I am at the end of the program, this is my final reflection, and I can honestly say, that I can definitely answer one of the questions, but not the other, not yet at least.

 This experience was definitely worth it! I grew so much as a person, and that alone makes this experience well worth it. I grew as a teacher, I grew as a leader, I grew as a researcher, I grew in so many ways. Everything I had to go through to finish was worth it.

 The first readings we got in Professor Cooper’s class set the tone for my learning throughout the rest of the program. Dr. Cooper spoke about creating a culture of care at your school as a way to address marginalization. Early on we read, and had as a guest speaker, George Theoharis and he shared three strategies principals can use to disrupt injustice.

 This culture of care is already one I try to establish in my classroom by showing my students I care, not just telling them I do. I now feel confident enough to be able to attempt to establish this culture of care school wide, by establishing high expectations for both my students and teachers, and working tirelessly to ensure that all the needs of my students are met so that they have access to a high quality education to be able to meet those high expectations.

I would help establish a culture of care by re-professionalizing teachers, treating them with the respect they deserve, and as the adult learners they are. I would want teachers to work together using a peer-coaching model, where they are the experts, and where they learn from each other. This would help empower my teachers, and intrinsically motivate them to strive harder to help their students.

My colleague, just today, spoke about the idea mentioned above. We are trying to put on a Talent Show for the kids. The teacher organizing it has done an amazing job; the principal has given very little support, except of course to give her approval. This teacher went to the principal and asked to see if the school could purchase medals to give to all the participants. This would be a total of about one hundred dollars. The principal said no, and added that they could all get certificates. As a social justice minded principal I know that this talent show, done properly, as this teacher was doing, entails a lot of powerful learning. Plus, it would mean that this teacher would be open to putting on more of these sorts of events that make school and warm and inviting place for students as well as community members. I would do everything possible to support this teacher with this event.

I would also reconnect with the community. I would invite parents, community businesses and organizations into our school to be a part of serving the needs of our students. In Prof. Rogers course we are working on a plan to hold a meeting in the form of a Spring Festival, where we invite in community businesses and organization to set up all types of booths. Students would set-up game booths, where prizes with the school’s logo would be given out. This would be an informational type fair, where budget priorities would be shared with stakeholders, in the form of announcements in between student performances, and the communities input would be welcomed by having them participate in posting on our “Make a Wish” for the school wall an idea for a budget item our school might consider that would benefit students and impact their learning in a positive way.

Finally, I would make all of our classrooms as heterogeneous, and inclusive as possible. This would break down barriers set-up by the marginalization that happens in the name of benefitting the students. This marginalization is the result of being separated and labeled, and made to feel somehow inferior. By ending this type of marginalization, a feeling of inclusion would start to permeate my school, benefitting all students, not just some.

I would also make teachers accountable to some form of data. They can decide what data they will use to show student improvement, but I would hold my teachers accountable to those measures. I would encourage grade-levels, or multi-grade level teams to develop authentic assessments to gather and measure student growth as accurately as possible.

In these and in many more ways I have benefitted from this experience. I got an opportunity to lead professional developments. Through my leadership project, I got an opportunity to work with a team of teachers to help positively impact student scores on district assessments. I did this through a series of improvement cycles. I feel comfortable working with improvement cycles, and as mentioned above, using data to guide instruction. I now see myself as capable of directing and facilitating the curriculum and instruction at an entire school site.

Yet, I still feel there are many areas where I still need to grow to be able to say, “I can really do this!” My principal pointed out a couple of areas that made her hesitant to sign me off on my end-of-the-year evaluation. I, in fact, walked out of the meeting feeling completely demoralized, but upon reflecting I realized she was right.

My principal pointed out that I do not have enough experience in the management part of being a principal. I have no clue what it takes to run a school on a day-to-day basis. I’ve been in a classroom for the past 15 years. I know the classroom well, inside and out, one might say, but I have no idea what it takes, on the management side, to run a school.

My principal also pointed out that I lack experience on the logistics aspect of running a school. What do I do when things start to go wrong? I have some law background from Professor Biegel’s class. I know that LAUSD has policies regarding a great number of issues, but again on a day-to-day basis, once problems start happening one right after another, requiring on the spot decision making, I’m not sure I feel all that competent to be able to make the right decisions consistently, not yet at least.

Was this experience worth it? The answer to that would be a resounding, yes! Am I ready to lead a school right now? The answer is not yet. In the summer we have an operations and management course that will help address some of my needs. And other needs I have will only be addressed once I’m out of the classroom and getting, at the very minimum, coordinatorship type experience. This will put me in situations that will require this on the spot decision making, helping me to acquire and refine that ability.

While I don’t feel I’m ready now, I know that with some experience I will be. This is why my next steps include applying to work in an out of classroom position. I have already begun sending out applications, my resume, and letters of interest. I’m scheduled to go on one interview, so I will continue to pursue that avenue.

Once I have gained this out of classroom experience, then will I feel competent to take over a school site. I am a patient man. I know opportunities will come, and I must continue to grow and improve my craft to be ready when those opportunities do present themselves to be able to seize upon them, and learn from them. I am grateful for all the knowledge and skills that I was able to acquire through the PLI program. I am a richer individual because of it, and a very grateful individual for having been allowed to go through it.