Internship 1 Reflection

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During this internship, I have been in the fortunate position to be the teacher representative on school-based team for Grade Eight, the team leader for Grade Eight, and also the teacher in charge for over fifteen days. While in these roles, I have had the opportunity to observe Learning Support Services at Yorkson Creek Middle School (YCMS) through the lens of three of the Principals and Vice-Principals Standards. I have chosen to focus on a few specific scenarios that I have observed / participated in during this internship, that helped deepen my understanding of how Learning Support Services at YCMS works towards helping a variety of learners.

**Standard 2: Leadership for Learning**

**Principals and vice-principals foster quality teaching and learning opportunities to support student learning and achievement.**

Through my role as team leader, I was given the opportunity to work with the RE Mountain Senior Secondary (REMSS) Resource Department Head as well as YCMS’s Resource Department Head to streamline how we successfully transition students with Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) and Student Support Plans (SSP’s) to high school. Vice-Principals from both schools were also part of the process, and as a group we met in person once and emailed back and forth several times. It was a great opportunity to be involved in an initiative where the Vice-Principals were ensuring that ‘students’ educational needs were central to decision making’ as well as ‘modeling and using change processes to maximize student learning.’

There were three key pieces the group was looking at during these initial meetings. First, which students needed to go into core courses at REMSS next year. Second, which students would need a learning support block at REMSS. Finally, which students would need an Educational Assistant support in mainstream Grade Nine classes.

The most integral part of the process was determining which students were the best fit for a cohort of fifteen students who are placed in Core Math Nine, Core English Nine, Core Science Nine and Core Social Studies Nine. Core courses are designed for students with IEP’s who need a slower pace through the Grade Nine program, with the exception of Math, a course which is not aligned with Grade Nine curriculum. One extra class of Core Math Nine is also scheduled for students who either only need Core Math or for students who have SSP’s in Math. Many students with IEP’s at YCMS do not require Core classes, instead, they are provided with a learning support block.

After these initial discussions, it was determined that it would be in the best interest of students if the Department Head from REMSS came to YCMS and directly spoke with the entire Grade Eight team. This was the first time this had happened at YCMS and it was determined as an important first step to make transitions better for all our students between the two schools smoother. The meeting allowed for all information to be clearly articulated to Grade Eight staff from the source, rather than second hand. This allowed teachers to ask questions that they know parents would inevitably ask them. I have transitioned students to REMSS for many years, and this was the first year where I felt that the initial conversation around where to place students with IEP’s was clear going into course planning. My Grade Eight team expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak directly with REMSS Resource Teachers. After the meeting, they felt they were better prepared to answer parent questions and address their concerns. By setting up the initial conversations between the Resource Departments and myself, the Vice-Principals at both schools helped teachers to ‘encourage and support positive parental involvement in their child’s learning.

**Standard 3: Supervision for Learning**

**Principals and vice-principals create a system and structures for effective supervision focussed on instructional and assessment practices that maximize student learning and achievement.**

All classroom teachers at YCMS are required to participate in fall IEP meetings for designated students. These meeting included the classroom teacher, the Resource teacher and parents, and together, with the student, we discuss and set goals for the school year. The Vice-Principal or Principal typically attends these meetings, particularly if there is a social-emotional component or a safety plan. This year, I have a student, Seattle[[1]](#footnote-1), who has an Intensive Behaviour designation, due to extreme anxiety. Seattle receives outside counselling services, as well as has a variety of goals that we co-created with them. The Vice-Principals sat in on this meeting, to ensure that all the correct paperwork for her outside agencies as well as what services the school was provided were aligned with her designation. The Vice-Principal noted that she typically sits in on these types of meetings to ensure that we stay audit proof. Students with this type of designation have different paperwork that needs to be in place to ensure that if the district is audited again, the process will not be as daunting as it was in the 2016/2017 school year when the entire school district was audited for A-H category students.

Due to the size of our middle school, there are three school-based teams, one for each grade level. Currently, I am the teacher representative on the Grade Eight school-based team. Grade Eight school-based team meets once a month, and it is composed of two Grade Eight Resource Teachers, the Vice-Principal, the School Psychologist, one Counsellors, and the teacher representative. In addition, referring classroom teachers come to speak about their students. At the end of each school-based team meeting, we discuss the ever-growing Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist. Typically, by Grade Eight there are at least five students who have been waiting on the list since Grade Six or Seven. One of the most interesting pieces for me during this internship was the struggle over the Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist. The Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist at YCMS consists of students from grade Six to Eight. Some of the grade Six’s are carryovers from the feeder elementary schools, creating an even larger backlog in our school. As a result, at any given time, there can be over twenty students waiting. The school typically rotates between the three grades; however, certain students may be prioritized for a variety of reasons.

This year, a situation concerning the Psycho-Educational assessment list impacted my classroom. As September unfolded, I quickly became concerned over a student, Langley. At the first school-based team meeting of the year, I brought forward Langley, who I noticed was struggling in Math, attention, and organizational skills. When I referred Langley, their file was reviewed by myself and the Resource Teacher assigned to my class. What we discovered during this review, before the meeting, was that Langley had been brought to school-based team in Grade Six and at that time, school-based screening had been done, including the KTEA (Kaufman Test of Educational Assessment). The results had indicated that she was significantly below average in Math computation and Math concepts and applications. A significant gap was noted between ability and performance. The notes in Langley’s file indicated to provide intervention and learning assistance in Grade Seven, and then reassess the likely possibility of her being added the Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist. Due to the complexities of the that sometimes result in a lack of communication between departments, Langley’s file was not followed up on in Grade Seven. Therefore, when Langley was brought to school-based team in Grade Eight, the realization of the proverbial ball being dropped over this student’s learning interventions resulted in their immediate placement on the Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist. That was when the Vice-Principal stepped in and controlled the situation. I was impressed by how she ensured that the conversation remained ethical and in the best interest of Langley. At that meeting, it was noted that the pre-screening from Grade Six was still valid, and that Langley had received some support from an Educational Assistant in Grade Seven. Therefore, Langley was added to the ever-growing Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist.

The scenario got even more complicated because I had another student, Maui, who had been on the Psycho-Educational Assessment waitlist since the end of Grade Six. By the end of November, it was apparent that both Langley and Maui were struggling, even with SSP’s in place and adaptations being provided. It was becoming apparent that both should have Psycho-Educational Assessments completed before high school to help get a better picture of how to continue to best support them now and in high school. It was at this point I learned that the Principal and Vice-principals at YCMS have the final say on who gets a Psycho-Educational Assessment not the Resource Teachers. I watched the tricky decision making unfold first hand, because one of the Resource Teachers really wanted Langley to get their assessment done first; however, the Vice-Principal, felt that it should be Maui, who had been waiting longer. Insert, a very awkward meeting, during which I was asked which one I would choose, compounding the awkwardness. It was truly a weird position to be in, as I really did not want to choose because I wanted both students to have the opportunity, and I could see both of them equally struggling. Fortunately, I was not forced to make a decision at the end of the initial discussion. Furthermore, the Vice-Principal said she would wait until we could discuss it further as a team. Fortunately, in the end, I did not have to choose, because both girls got their Psycho-Educational Assessment’s done simultaneously, as our current District Psychologist has an intern, allowing for more students to be assessed before entering Grade Nine.

Through this scenario, I learned that the Learning Support Service Department at a school our size is always juggling student referrals and follow-up plans. As such, the emphasis on the communication piece is germane to student success in this realm. Communication can help reduce situations where students ‘fall through the cracks.’ However, if it does happen, it is the role of the administrative teams to not allow the blame game to play out, instead ensuring that what is best for kids is done. Watching the Vice-Principal calmly and kindly gain control of the situation was great modelling for what it looks like to ‘monitor the learning environment and the impact on student learning.’ The complexities of who gets serviced and when is an essential piece of administrations roll at YCMS.

**Standard 5: Learning Culture and Climate**

**Principals and vice-principals develop and sustain a culture and climate to support student and adult learning.**

One of my goals of this internship was to work with the counselling department to look at ways that they can support Grade Eight teachers with meaningful curriculum to support the health component of the PHE curriculum. The Counselling Department is eager roll out common language around mental health and wellness , utilizing curriculum in all three grades. A Vice-Principal, a Counsellors, and I have met a few times to discuss what this could look like in Grade Eight. The curriculum the Counselling Department would like to implement is based off the research of Dr. Stan Kutcher. The materials and lessons are in *Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide: Understanding Mental Health and Mental Illness* (2012). In addition to the guide, there is supporting work and literature at *teenmentalhealth.org*. In talking with the Counsellor at YCMS, the curriculum’s intention is to help unify how we talk about mental health and wellness with pre-teens and teens.

The conversations I had with the Counsellor and the Vice-Principal were fascinating and I enjoyed learning about the reasons behind the want and need to create a common language. As a result, out our meetings, we have created a schedule for five classes to start implementing some of the lessons with help from the Counsellor after spring break. I have found, in my role as team leader during the past two years, that there are layers of complexity around teacher ‘buy-in’ for new initiatives and ideas. The most difficult part is figuring out how to delicately add ‘one more thing’ to what feels like an already ‘full-plate.’ I often find myself carefully encouraging the Grade Eight team to take on new initiatives, while still listening to their concerns. I know that the role of the team leader is to help Administration to implement new curriculum and initiatives. That is why, through consultation with Administration, we are going to try rolling out some initial lessons on a smaller scale. In the fall, we will look at expanding to all the Grade Eight classes, utilizing built in collaboration blocks to support teacher learning with the Counsellor’s support.

1. For this assignment, student names have been changed [↑](#footnote-ref-1)