Internship 2 Reflection

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My second internship has had two main components, the implementation and leading of the Global Read Aloud (GRA) initiative at Yorkson Creek Middle School (YCMS) and presenting at both a provincial level and North American level conference.

**STANDARD 1: LEADING A COMMUNITY OF CARING AND LEARNING**

***Principals and Vice-Principals guide the development and implementation of shared values, vision, mission, and goals to support engagement, learning, and success for all learners.***

***First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.***

At YCMS, our vision, as outlined in the action plan, is to “improve student learning through meaningful relationships, connectedness, and an environment of care.” The key goal of the action plan is “to increase the number of students reading at grade level (or their IEP, Student Support Plan, or Annual Instructional Plan goals) to 80% by June 2020 through creating a culture of care that emphasizes the social emotional well-being of our students.” A huge focus of the action plan is to increase adolescent engagement by “promoting a school culture of care with a focus on building connections.” School-wide initiatives, such as the Global Read Aloud (GRA) have now been included in the action plan as one of initiatives to engage students, to boost literacy, and to develop common connections between grades. “Engagement can be difficult with middle school students; however when read-aloud is utilized, they can engage with the text, the teacher, and the discussion in a proactive manner”(Marchessault & Larwin, 2013, p. 244).

At a larger level, the goal of the GRA’s is to make connections with other schools. At YCMS, the goal is to make connections among and across grades; however, many teachers also take the opportunity to make national and global connections. Reading aloud to students, including middle school students, is part of a balanced literacy program. “Talking about text during a read-aloud can enrich and shape the meaning that is made by the students and young adolescents need opportunities to make sense of their school learning through their own experiences” (Albright & Ariail, 2005, p. 588). Many teachers stop reading aloud to students as they get older; however, “the bottom is that when teachers read to students, they enhance students’ understanding and their inclination to read independently”(Ivey, 2003, p. 812). Thus, the read-aloud process boosts literacy, aligning with the ultimate goal of the school action plan.

Since last spring, and into the fall, I have been working with the teacher librarian and administrative team at YCMS to set up school activities and curriculum connections around the novel “The Bridge Home” by Padma Venkatraman, the book chosen as 2019’s GRA middle grade novel. Please see the official GRA website for more specifics on how the novels are chosen each year and how the reading schedule of six weeks is determined. The GRA official kicked off at YCMS on October 3 with the principal and vice-principal at my school reading the first few chapters to the whole school over the PA. The week before, teachers had participated in a variety of pre-reading activities which included learning background about life in India and the caste system. Over the next six weeks, teachers followed the reading schedule in their classes and completed a variety of activities with their classes. The teacher librarian and I created a large bulletin board outside the learning commons where teachers added student work, predictions, and/or responses around the novel for the whole school to enjoy and read. Each week, I sent out links to resources to support that week’s readings as well as interesting ideas I had found from other teachers through sharing on social media; other teachers in the building were also encouraged to share ideas, building connections among staff, not just students. Teachers and classes were also participated in some of the global initiatives, as well as did shared reading times together in the learning commons together. As grade 8 team leader. I worked closely with my team, collaborating together to create engaging cross curricular opportunities for our students.

I found it both exciting and daunting to lead a school-wide initiative around literacy. School-wide initiatives are essential to building positive culture in the building. However, sometimes these can be hampered by those who don’t necessarily want to ‘veer’ from what they “always do” in October. The hardest part for me is to not take their reactions personally, and is tread listen with patience to what their concerns. At one staff meeting, someone brought up that they felt that the read aloud was taking away from the other reading activities they would typically do with their classes. I admired my principal, who was great at taking it away from individual persons involved and focusing it back to the reasons why the school decided to adopt the initiative and implement it. She was very good a redirecting teachers back to the ideas that our school vision and action plan and how a school-wide literacy initiative helps us meet our goals. At that same staff meeting, I shared a conversation the teacher librarian and I had recently overheard among several students in front of the GRA bulletin board. They had read the predictions of several classes and they were sharing their own predictions, debating over why each of them was right. Other students had joined the conversation and were adding their opinions. The conversation morphed on its own, where about 10 students, from a few different classes and at least two grades were talking about how sad a recent experience must have been for the characters. It was amazing to witness and heartwarming to overhear. It is those moments, that teachers needed to hear about. The power of story to bring students together and make valuable connections to each other and the world.

Throughout the planning process and the execution of ideas, I ultimately enjoyed the opportunity to move the learning of students in the building forward. Overall, the initiative has been successful in creating connections between students in our school, while fostering an environment where we celebrate the universal human experiences that connect us. Furthermore, it was great to see teachers reach out to other classes around North America, some of them stepping outside of their own comfort zones and stretching their understanding of what learning can look like. The feedback from teachers showed that students not only enjoyed the book, but also made deep connections in the reading. The variety of literacy activities as well as the connections to non-fiction text provided by the teacher librarian and I were appreciated. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to foster this initiative at YCMS.

**STANDARD 4: CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT**

***Principals and Vice-Principals have a deep pedagogical knowledge and a skill set to promote learning.***

***First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.***

*﻿“Developing teachers’ professional learning and leadership with, by, and for teachers is powerful and important” (Campbell, 2015, p. 37).*

*﻿“Teachers have positive feelings from professional development led by peers. This positive feeling is important, as a good climate improves the motivation for achievement, thus providing the means for effectiveness. Even the teachers who presented indicated an overall positive experience”* (Hickey & Harris, 2018, p. 15)*.*

This fall, I had the pleasure of presenting at two conferences, where I shared Math and writing strategies I use with students in my classroom.

On October 25, I presented two 90-minute workshops at the annual conference for the Provincial Intermediate Teacher’s Association (PITA). It was the first time I have presented for them in about three years. Since the beginning of my teaching career, I have appreciated the power of professional development opportunities to keep my practice current and relevant. Presenting pushes me to ensure that I understand where I stand pedagogically, forcing me to stay relevant and up to date, so that I am able to competently talk about the content I am presenting.

I enjoy sharing my learning and ideas, but the preparation time is extensive in order to deliver quality, relevant professional development for my colleagues. Professional development conferences are one way of teacher’s empowering themselves to improve their own practice. The backbone of these conferences in BC is teachers willing to share their ideas and experiences from their own classrooms. Having presented before, I know that most teachers that come to the PITA conference are looking for ready to use ideas that they can start implementing right away. Often, they are seeking innovative ways to engage and motivate their students. In addition, many are looking for how these tasks are assessed and how they are used to move student learning forward. In B.C. teachers are also looking for ways to effectively incorporate the core competencies into subject areas. When planning, I needed to take all of these factors into consideration, to ensure that teachers walk away believing that choosing to spend their professional development time with me was valuable to them.

In November, I had the privilege of being able to present at the Association for Middle Level Educators (AMLE) annual conference for the first time. I have gone to the conference in the past; therefore, I had an understanding of the size and scope of the conference. The process of getting accepted to present at AMLE for the first time is more intensive than any other conference I have presented at before. As the conference takes place in the United States, prepping to apply also required me to look carefully at the Common Core in the United States and find the threads of commonality between their curriculum and the activities I do with my students. It also involves researching and understanding the subtle differences in lingo and terminology, so that I could articulate myself correctly . Thankfully, in the end I was accepted to present two sessions in a format referred to as Speed Learning. Speed learning has a presenter and a group of 10 teachers around a round table. As a presenter you have 20 minutes to present to the group. At the end of the 20 minutes you then present to a new group. Participants cycle through speed sessions three times in total. The challenge with planning these two sessions was to pick relevant, engaging ideas that would fit the format, with the ultimate goal being that teachers walk away feeling like they have some new ideas they can walk away with and use immediately.

Presenting at conferences makes an educator vulnerable to how others will perceive them. Self-doubt creeps in about whether what I am presenting will actually have value to those who have chosen to attend my sessions. I worry for days leading up, running my workshops over again and again in my head refining my ideas, trying to make them pedagogically sound and usable. In addition, ensuring that the presentations are engaging, not just me lecturing about what they should do. I try to ensure that the teachers actually try as many of the activities as possible. For example, for the PITA writing workshop, I have the teachers participate in the writing activities, so they fully understand how they work, and so that they can ask clarifying questions as they work through it. All of this, though plays into whether teachers have felt that there was value in spending their time with me, after all they have spent money to attend these conferences, so they want to walk away with ideas that will genuinely help them.

The vulnerability of presenting to our peers and sharing our knowledge culminates with receiving feedback from participants. I am always anxious to receive immediate and formal feedback, for after all the hours of preparation, and the validity that it works with your students, there is still a chance that what you have to say will not be well received by your peers. The immediate feedback is that feeling in the room, the engagement that teacher have with what you have prepared. You can tell a lot by the type of questions teachers are asking, by those who seem to be nodding along with your message. Some teachers gush with excitement as they walk out the door. A few teachers will immediately email with follow-up / clarifying questions. These immediate responses are reassuring, and many of them lead to ongoing conversations with teachers. Two teachers from the PITA math workshop have already reached out and intend to come and watch Math stations in action in my classroom in January. After the last of rotation of both speed sessions at AMLE, participants lingered and asked more questions, leading to a couple of longer discussions about how I implement Math and literacy in my classroom. For the Americans, many were fascinated by the fact that at the Grade Eight level that I taught my own literacy and numeracy. The Math teachers, in particular, loved how incorporated literacy into Math and the idea that I presented on. Several teachers since AMLE have reached out to me via twitter. And I love seeing how they have been using the strategies that I presented and sharing with me the variations they have tried. This is part of the beauty of presenting, for the conversations can leave the conferences and continue to evolve. These conversations usually always lead to me learning as well.

When I finally received the formal evaluations for my presentations at PITA, I was relieved to receive some of the following feedback for the Math and Writing workshops: “Informative and fun . . . well done”; “Very engaging and exactly as advertised”; “I like how the centers use is applicable for many levels of students”; “Practical, motivating for students, dynamic, cool, and applicable”; “I would love a longer or follow up workshop. Such positive feedback fuels my desire to continue to share my passion for teaching with other educators. I have already submitted my application to present at PITA again in the Fall of 2020. In February, I intend to apply to present at AMLE again next year, for I already have the support of my administration and the District Leadership Team to send me once again if I get accepted.

**STANDARD 9: MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**

***Principals and Vice-Principals intentionally and strategically plan to strengthen the school’s capacity to support student learning and development.***

***First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.***

When I began my teaching career 20 years ago, I never imagined the places I would go and the people I would meet. Early in my career, I was fortunate enough to meet some mentors, both teachers and administrators, who saw that there was value in what I was doing in my classroom and they encouraged me to share with others. This September marked a continuation of many opportunities to present to leaders in the district activities I have led in my school. In addition to spearheading the Global Read Aloud Initiative in my school, I was also asked to present about it and other literacy goals connected to our school action plan at the Middle Networking Meeting in September. Both Assistant Superintendents, the Superintendent, several of the district Principals for various departments as well as all the middle-school Administrators in Langley attend these monthly meetings. They are hosted at different Middle schools in the District, and although not my first time presenting, this was the first time I was asked to stay for about an hour after my brief presentation about GRA to further discuss literacy initiatives in the district. During this hour, myself and a colleague were asked many questions around literacy in our own classrooms and at YCMS. The focus was on how the district and administrators can best support newer teachers in middle schools to effectively implement district and middle school literacy goals.

Upon returning from AMLE, I was asked to attend another Middle Networking Meeting in December. Four other colleagues and I had all presented at speed sessions at AMLE, so they set our portion of their meeting like a speed learning session. Langley middle schools have been sending a group of middle school teacher and administrators to AMLE every year for the past six years; however, this is the first year where Langley sent presenters, and it was a great accomplishment for our district to have us all accepted to present. It was a great opportunity to once again be included in Middle School visioning for the district.

I have appreciated the opportunities to share how I support student learning in my classroom. It was also great to be recognized in these situations for the work I am doing both individually and with some of my colleagues to make Langley schools optimal learning places.

Furthermore, I have appreciated the trust my current Principal has placed in me to run initiatives at our school that she has included in the action plan. I know that the action plan is a critical piece of her own personal growth, and to be part of that process is an honour.

While at AMLE this year, a colleague and I were talking with leaders within the AMLE organization about some of the work we are doing around design and social emotional learning with students. At the time, these individuals strongly suggested that we should attend AMLE’s Leadership Institute, an intense 3-day workshop around middle school leadership. We approached two of our assistant superintendent about attending, and they are fully in support of furthering our work and strengthening the middle school vision in Langley through teacher leaders. This would not have been possible if I had not taken the risk to present at a major conference to begin with. I am excited to see what other doors this newest opportunity may open.

References

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