Profession Growth Plan

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In the fall of 1998, I did my first classroom visits as a 22 year old, I thought I had it all figured out. I would teach for a few years, get some money and then go back to the law school spot I had deferred. The problem was, that on that first day, I actually enjoyed myself, and by the end of my practicum I realized, that teaching may actually be my true calling and not the law after all. 20 years later, I find myself embarking on a new educational adventure that both excites and scares me. I leapt into this new opportunity, excited to see where it could take me and how it can further enhance my role as lead learner in my classroom. Since my first days of teaching, I have always looked for opportunities that interest me and will enhance my practice. I’ve always enjoyed pushing myself in directions that both challenge me and make me a better person and a better educator.

**Baseline**

Early in my career, I was fortunate enough to be mentored by some amazing educators. These mentors took time to listen to my struggles and to help me focus on the parts of teaching that I found joy in. In every instance, these mentors took the time to build a meaningful relationship with me and showed me a willingness to model behaviours that I admired. These mentors were leaders, not in the traditional administrative sense, but rather leaders in their planning, practice, and pedagogy. All of them were amazing at cultivating relationships with students, meeting them where they were at, and tailoring their lessons to excite and motivate them. In addition, these mentors were learners themselves, constantly reflecting on their practice and looking for ways to improve. As a result, I sought to surround myself with similar minded educators and have taken the role as mentor to new teachers myself, by taking teacher candidates as well as by helping beginning colleagues on staff when they have demonstrated that they are seeking support and guidance.

Through these early relationships, experiences, and opportunities, my current educational foundation has been built upon three pillars: the cultivation of relationships, creative, inclusive lesson planning, and consistency in reflective practice. I believe the heart of education is the relationships we build with students. Without a positive relationship, I believe it becomes difficult for a child to feel safe and want to learn. Not one student or class is the same; therefore, each year, I feel professionally responsible to take the time to understand what each student needs to develop and grow with the groups of learners in the room. I believe in creating innovative lessons, which can be adapted for the diversity of learning needs in my classroom. I enjoy the process of ensuring that I plan opportunities that work for the composition of my students, trying to make learning personalized and impactful. Furthermore, my ability to constantly reflect on my practice and refine it is at the root of my educational belief system. Each day I believe it is important to look at what lessons went well and what didn’t, taking stock of how I can use these successes and failures to move forward with my students. At the core of this reflective practice is my insatiable desire to constantly learn and improve upon my practice. When I stop learning and challenging myself to achieve new levels of personal and professional growth, then I stop being the true educational leader in the classroom. I find it invigorating to work through the positive and challenging aspects of the job, that include supporting students through academic and social challenges, while celebrating academic and personal successes.

As a result of my reflective practice, I have been fortunate to take on a variety of leadership roles. Frequently, I have found myself sitting on committees as the school and district level and at workshops designed to better a school district’s vision with the hopes to improve student learning opportunities. Leadership roles in a variety of educational aspects have come naturally and seem to be presented to me organically, and I am drawn to their ability to reach diverse audience of teachers. My most role is a grade eight team leader for the second year at Yorkson Creek Middle School. In this role, I have enjoyed helping fellow grade eight teaching colleagues work on collaborative goals for the benefit of the students. I enjoy the challenge of bringing diverse teachers and their divers styles together and finding the common ground to work to improve the lives of our student population. It is a pleasure to work with my colleagues and hear their ideas. Taking on this most recent leadership role has helped me want to finally take the risk of taking on a Master’s program in leadership.

Those that do not know me well, struggle with the teaching identity I am developing through the industrial arts. This initially clouded my confidence and appealed to my vulnerability and identity of always knowing what to do. It is in those moments, that I find myself needing to focus on why this program initially appealed to me. It caught my attention because I believe this program will provide me with an additional skill set that can only further enhance my ability to produce opportunities for my students to participate in engaging activities outside of what they have come to expect of a traditional classroom. When I heard about this Master’s program, I envisioned the evolution of my educational practice to include providing students with a greater variety of opportunities and modalities to show their depth of understanding through cross-curricular activities that incorporate Industrial Arts and Applied Design components. I saw the potential for ADST (Applied Design Skills and Technology) language to be woven through my practice and for it to be a lens through which I motivated students and colleagues to pursue their passions and enhance their learning experiences. Therefore, my intentions for pursuing this program were always aligned with my core pillars as a teacher – relationships, planning of creative and innovative lessons, and reflecting on how to improve my practice.

Intellectually, I understood at that moment in time that my choice was the best choice for me. During the first day of the class, I found validity in my choice when reviewing Simon Sinek’s *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* with my cohort. When asked to synthesize chapter 5 and present it out to my cohort, I felt that this particular section of the of the book actually had parallels with the reasons as to why the program initially appealed to me. Sinek (2009) states that “differentiation happens in WHY and HOW you do it(p.73).” This statement echoed part of my initial desire to go into the program; the idea that I wanted to expand my skill set so that I could differentiate for my students and provide meaningful learning opportunities for them is at the core of why I teach. In addition, the Sinek (2009) stresses that “being authentic is not a requirement for success, but it is if you want that success to be a lasting success (p. 69).” This section connected directly to why I teach and why I made the choice to endure this program. The idea that at my core my teaching is about creating authentic connections with kids, and this program is another avenue through which I can connect with them and enhance their authentic connections to learning and curriculum.

I would not define myself as impulsive, but I would say that I am instinctual, and I am often a person ruled by my ‘gut decisions’. Sinek’s connection of how, when we are clear in why we make the decisions we make, ‘gut decisions’ make sense (Sinek, p. 79). At the end of the day, my choice to embark on this journey was partially a ‘gut feeling’, that ‘it’ felt right. I was drawn to it, because my ’*why*’ for teaching was aligned with ‘*what*’ the program hopes to be.

No matter what course we teach, teachers need to be lead learners, wanting to push to provide the best and newest opportunities for all of our students. Building relationships is the key, no matter what field you are teaching in and this is what grounds my firm belief that you need to build relationships with students and colleagues. I believe that ADST needs to be inclusive and accessible to all, so any teacher willing to challenge themselves can be successful in this field. In order to do this, educators need to be innovative, creative, and risk-takers, willing to push the boundaries of what traditional education looks by trying new ideas.

**Area of Growth**

My greatest area of growth will be in acquisition of skills in the area of technological arts that I will need to develop in order to implement my vision for ADST in my classroom. Furthermore, I need to embrace that I may make mistakes when first using some of the equipment. I need to get over my fear of cutting myself and just embrace the process and know that I am capable. In addition, I need to get more comfortable with accepting failure when it will inevitably happen and embrace the fact that I will not know it all; therefore, being okay with not always being successful when I first attempt new ideas. A large area of growth will be accepting vulnerability. Brene Brown (2012) states in *Daring Greatly*, “we have to be vulnerable if we want more courage; if we want to dare greatly (p.63).” I want to get better at accepting vulnerability so that I can take risks and acquire and implement skills associated with technological arts and ADST. I need to let go of some of my perfectionist tendencies, for as Brown (2012) points out “perfectionism is self-destructive simply because perfectionism does not exist. It’s an unattainable goal (p.130).” As I embark on this journey, I need to embrace vulnerability, and not be my own worst critic.

**Vision**

By the end of my Masters of Education work, I would like to have acquired a skill set that will allow me to effectively implement this vision for what ADST can look like in my classroom. My growth, has to come from the acquisition of these skill in multiple modalities, not just in the technological arts, but also in other ASDT facets introduced throughout the program. In addition, I would like to refine my leadership skills and find new ways to help inspire other educators to see the value in implementing ADST into their teaching practice. I would like to be able to help others incorporate it in a way where it doesn’t seem like more work, but instead a way to make their work load less daunting with the ultimate goal of reaching kids.

**Goal**

In the first two months of the program, I would like to improve my comfortability in the shop around the various tools. I would also like to try at least two ADST assignments in my class by Christmas, taking my students through the LAUNCH (Look, Listen, Learn; Asking question; Understanding the process, Navigating ideas, Creatine, Highlighting what is working and failing) cycle (Spencer and Juliani, 2016, p.55). Spencer and Juliani (2016) state that “design thinking isn’t a subject, topic or class. It’s more a way of solving problems that encourages positive risk-taking and creativity (p.52).” This idea aligns with what my original vision for ADST could look like in my classroom. They go on to give examples of how their LAUNCH cycle can be implemented in a variety of courses and contexts, stating that “although the materials and finished products may vary widely, the general process is common to every one (p.53).” I would like to first try taking my class through a writing activity, where I utilize the LAUNCH cycle outlined in their book, using the the language of ADST outlined in the provincial curriculum. In the *Look, Listen, Learn*, phase of Spencer and Juliani’s process, one way they suggest students start is with the product idea in mind (2016, p. 52). In this case, the product would be a picture book with a moral and theme. Students would then create the story as they move through the remaining steps in the cycle of “asking questions, understanding the process, navigating ideas, creating, highlighting what’s working and failing” and then launching their story to share it with others. (Spencer and Juliani, 2016) My hope is to find an authentic audience, perhaps an elementary school class where they can go and share their picture books with them. I would like them to utilize technology to help create the book, using an app like Book Creator, so that they are also incorporating tools outlined in the provincial ADST curriculum.

In the next few months, I also hope to have the students make something in the classroom using basic supplies and tools. My idea is that they make miniature crossbows, this project idea directly related to the Grade 8 Social Studies curriculum. I am still thinking about the logistics of this assignment, so in a sense I plan to take myself through the LAUNCH process with the creation of this particular assignment with learners in mind.

**First Steps and Possible Challenges**

The first step towards overcoming my fear of utilizing some of the power tools is to just start using them! This can be achieved as simply as me going into the shop and actually using the various tools. This will involve me going in during my preparation blocks at work and practicing with different tools along side the students. It will also involve me watching instructional videos and talking with people I know in the industrial arts field, looking for ideas of what I can do for my passion project and how this will tie to my classroom goals.

I have already started to use the language of ADST and my goal is to familiarize the students with this reframing of how they have traditionally approached tasks.

Challenges always arrive for me in the realm of time. I have limited time to go to the shop, while still trying to be prepared and ready to teach. In the classroom, finding time to properly implement a concept, when we are constantly bombarded with interruptions. In order to overcome these challenges, I need to prioritize my learning. I need to be okay with saying no to distractions, such as investing in others before myself and saying no to serving on school committees and coaching when I really don’t have the time. Overcoming my pursuit of perfectionism will also be a challenge, as I work towards getting better at being okay with making mistakes during my learning process.

**Timetable and Proof**

My proposed timeline is to reach some of my initial goals by Christmas break. By that point, I would like to have taken my kids through the ADST/LAUNCH cycle at least once in the context of a writing activity. However, I understand that the learning cycle of ADST is a Möbius strip, continuous and fluid, like my practice. Therefore, as I work though my fears, I do know that my acquisition of knowledge with not be complete. I will need to continue to work on those skills so that I feel competent enough to be the lead learner in a room with students. Also, as I try implementing some of my early ADST ideas, I know that their will be snags and that parts of my vision may not work out the way I want them to.

The minimum I will accept for myself is that I have made honest efforts to make my learning a focus and priority. I will need to be okay with having some vulnerability around the fact that my first attempts may not be perfect or pretty. However, I want to have tried, so that I can set new goals for myself and refine those goals and try again – just like I would expect from my own students.

Proof of growth will come from taking my first steps. As I spend more time around power tools, building my comfortability, I should be able to feel myself getting more relaxed in that environment. Through reflective practice, I will be able to see how far I have come from my current baseline. I will then be able to look at what worked and what is not working, reevaluate and try again. I believe the proof will ultimately come from taking the risks and being okay with being vulnerable to the inevitable change in self and practice.

**References**

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