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ECI 508 – Teachers as Leaders

Leadership Essay & Plan of Action

 My philosophy of education has been forming and evolving throughout my life; my mother, a high school English teacher, often discussed classroom and school issues at the table, and as I was in school myself and had an older sister who wanted to be a teacher, these were pertinent issues to my life. The main points that I remember from these talks and my experiences as a student were administrative incompetence or disconnection from the students led to serious problems with teachers, students, and school climate; poor classroom management leads to poor learning and negative student experiences, but good classroom management does not necessarily mean strict discipline or silent students; busy work and ‘teaching to the test’ does not lead to any quality learning or retention of information, skills, or strategies. As an undergraduate education student and classroom teacher, my philosophy developed further to focus on interdisciplinary integration in the language arts, my subject area, to give students authentic experiences with texts, practical skills and strategies for reading and writing a variety of texts, and motivating reluctant and struggling readers and writers with the real-world connections we established. As Barth stated, “only when we succeed in relating the curriculum to what is relevant in youngsters’ experiences will we begin to ‘teach’ them,” (p. 55, Barth) validating my own beliefs. I identified strongly with progressive schools of thought, believing that it is necessary to establish a strong base of knowledge and skills before moving forward rather than endlessly covering and dabbling without mastery, and differentiation of instruction seemed to almost require it. I wanted to help my students become independent readers, writers, and learners, from whatever point they started the year with me, and my favorite phrase to utter as a teacher became, “See? You know how to do this, you don’t need me,” because that meant that I had successfully prepared my students to move on to more complex texts, themes, and genres.

 The Teachers as Leaders course helped me solidify my philosophy of education, though I expect it will continue to evolve when I return to the classroom and teaching. Through the weekly responses to readings in my leadership log, classroom discussions with fellow professionals, and the Philosophy of Education Inventory (Zinn, 1999; in Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), I have found more specific language to describe my personal philosophy, and I have incorporated the knowledge, insight, and ideas from my graduate work as well. On the PEI, I also identified closest to Progressive Philosophy, and my former and future teaching will emphasize “cooperative learning…, multicultural education, authentic assessment, and the school improvement teams…” (p. 165, Katzenmeyer & Moller), and I will continue to try to be “a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage” in my practice. I also connected to Social Change Philosophy on the PEI, and my personal faith in Transactional Theory of Literacy (Rosenblatt, 1978) supports the “recognition of the influences of cultural, political, and economic factors on individuals and groups,” (p. 167, Katzenmeyer & Moller) as it pertains to my students’ reading and responses to texts, their strengths and weaknesses as readers and writers, and their performance in the classroom on any given day. This is also an important factor in interdisciplinary and multicultural education, other important issues for me as a teacher.

 The theme of school improvement teams in Progressive Philosophy connects to my experience and growth as a teacher leader. In Connecticut, I was the 7th grade representative on our School Leadership Team, as it was called, for four of the five years that it existed while I was a teacher there. On that committee, we worked on finding ways through creative scheduling, cooperative teaching, professional development, and anything else we could think of to improve the test scores of various identified subgroups and the school climate, our areas most in need of improvement. Through that committee, I also became the Chair of the Tiger Pride Committee, a subcommittee that organized and ran quarterly pep rallies to celebrate athletic, academic, and artistic achievements, honor positive character, and participate in fun and friendly competition between the students and faculty. I now know that these are examples of positional leadership, or “Leadership in Governing” (p. 122, Katzenmeyer & Moller). I also, through coaching soccer, cheerleading, and track and field, and planning and running the annual week-long field trip to Nature’s Classroom, showed “Leadership of Student Activities” (p. 122, Katzenmeyer & Moller). I exhibit “Leadership in Instruction” (p. 123, Katzenmeyer & Moller) by supporting and collaborating with other teachers, both within my discipline and my grade-level team, to improve classroom management, apply interventions, reflect on lessons and methods, and share ideas and resources that were effective. Teachers as Leaders taught me to reflect on these experiences to develop my “craft knowledge” (p. 56, Barth), which is an extension of my focus on helping my students to also become “lifelong learners” (p. 55, Barth). I learned that I am, and have consistently been, a teacher leader, through personal power, leadership by example, positional leadership, and transformational leadership.

I also learned that I am not as open-minded of colleagues with different philosophies from mine, and I have a limited tolerance for incompetence in colleagues, as they are supposed to be educated professionals. When I see teachers unwilling to reflect or refract on their practice, who ignore student needs and interests, and who refuse to move into the 21st century with their students, I am frustrated, but I now know that true teacher leadership is not demanding that others improve but modeling and encouraging improvement. I also know that true leadership can be quiet, but that does not mean it is not influential.

Moving forward as an educator after completing the NLGL program, my first action will be to secure a teaching position, either as a reading specialist or classroom teacher, hopefully again working with adolescents. I want to work with this age group for two reasons; too many people feel that it is “too late” when students are struggling as teenage readers, and because this will enable me to return to coaching. My personal goals as a future teacher-leader are to provide my students with 21st Century skills and strategies for communicating and learning and to combat childhood obesity. I hope to accomplish these goals by integrating not only the core subjects but other disciplines into the reading and writing curriculum, by designing projects and activities that are active and experiential as well as literacy-based, and by promoting and modeling healthy living, good nutrition, athleticism, and appreciation for the outdoors in my classroom and the community.

**References**

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