Practicum Final Reflection Essay
XYZ, M.Ed.
Supervisor Practitioner XYZ
Principal Supervisor XYZ
XYZ Elementary School
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INTRODUCTION

Will I ever be done? When you think about being educated, I will never be done. I love to learn. I also enjoy thinking about what is going on in someone’s mind when they are learning. I like to teach. The pleasure of seeing a person who “got it”, who says, “That’s cool!” or comes to school bringing their castle made out of cardboard because castles were talked about in writing is very gratifying.

The education environment intimidated me for many years because I respected the individuals who taught me and who kept me safe throughout my education. I did not think I would worthy to be a teacher. But after much contemplation, I began my path 14 years ago by returning for my Elementary Education degree and I joined the ranks of the many dedicated teachers who shared with me their skills, their talent and time to teach. It has been a privilege.

The requirements of success are outlined from the Pre-K to 21 plan in Massachusetts 603 CMR 28 and 35. Students may no longer enroll in the Pre-K to 12 education systems when they turn 21. After their graduation, what will the students be prepared to do? What are our students getting prepared to do? Our educational system is hopeful with programs like the Common Core State Standards elevating all states to reach specific objectives. Over the years of my teaching, I observed that if you use the correct language and work with the students on their level, they can and do learn. There are students who certainly have more difficulty accessing the curriculum and thus support is needed through multiple methods to improve their progress. The practicum and the American International College program have exposed me to the current trends and history of education and provided me the skills I need to move to the next stage of my career. This program has provided me the opportunity to discuss, learn and practice the systems and methods that help students access the best education.

I feel prepared to continue my role in education from another perspective. It took me 12 years to feel that I would be worthy and qualified to be a principal. How the principal does his/her job has changed in the 12 years that I have been employed as a teacher. To help teachers to manage a school and coordinate programs that influence not just the classroom, but also the entire school, is exciting! I know it is not easy. Will I ever be done? Yes, is the answer to the 300 plus hours that I have fulfilled while being employed fulltime as a fifth and then third grade teacher who also attended classes. I have to say, that doing these jobs, has been one of the most
demanding and stressful times in my life. I do not like to do anything half-heartedly. I give 100% to my students; I gave 100% to my practicum. The learning experience is 100% valuable and worthwhile.

I am a flexible person. I know the job of being a principal requires confidentiality. It requires skills to prioritize quickly; it requires a personality where you are talked about, disliked, even liked and second-guessed. Any teacher has wondered about a principal’s decision and talked about the principal. As a person, I have the stamina, the character, and the tolerance to handle the issues that come with being a leader in the school. Most definitely, after this AIC program, I am aware of the Professional Standards for Administrators and have gained experience in each area.

LEADERSHIP

People say to me inquisitively, “You really want to be a principal?” I do. I want to see the growth, the changes in a child from the start to finish. I recognized the demands of the position especially in light of the standards that a principal must meet. The principal is also reviewed by the superintendent and has less job security. But, if you want to be a leader, you need to take a risk. The risk can be thoughtfully discussed and reviewed by others in the school. I have been a teacher under three different principals and observed how the culture of a school is established and have participated in creating school traditions. It takes time. I have observed the leadership of my principal, the difficulties he has without the fulltime support of an assistant principal to address the needs of the parents, the students and teachers. Yet, under his leadership, we have started the All School Meeting tradition. Time was provided in the schedule. Under his leadership, the school is working to provide programs for the ever-increasing number of students with significant special needs as they progress through the grades.

I have worked with the District Coordinators of Math and English Language Arts. They have the leadership to budget for and select the education programs in our district. I have worked with the Assistant Superintendent regarding the Professional Development plans for the district and attended the planning meeting.

This year, I was selected as a teacher leader for the school and work to coordinate the programs within the school to benefit the students. With my leadership as the chair of the All School Meeting committee, the gatherings of the entire school have become more formalized and
thematic. We had the Fire Safety speaker the week of Fire Prevention week. We have coordinated Halloween Safety before Halloween. Veterans Day connected the students’ thoughts about veterans (student writing about the importance of veterans to us), talents with music (playing taps) and brought the community to attend the service.

Finally, our superintendent celebrated fifty years of working in our district with thirteen years as a superintendent and ten as an assistant superintendent. Her leadership, her tenacity and vision are role models for leadership. Due to her leadership, the district encourages strong communication. Her energy and organization, especially with the budget, has created a district with high performing students. Leadership is earned, and being a fair, timely and consistent communicator, the respect has developed with the staff to create a successful school system.

**ADMINISTRATION**

The administrative tasks can either take up your time or be part of the school routines. The budget can take up time as the principal coordinates the figures for the grade level and subject needs of their school. But there are deadlines for these tasks. A principal needs to undertake the significant paperwork that comes with the Teacher Evaluation System and the observations required. If you have a strong school secretary, some of the administrative tasks can be managed more easily like preparing reports about attendance for the superintendent. As one of the responsibilities, I participated in the hiring process of two fifth grade teachers, one school psychologist and a pre-school coordinator. I have served in the past on other committees to hire principals. There are numerous ways to approach the interview process. School Spring provides a more diverse applicant base. Questions can either be prepared ahead or allowed to flow, based on the responses of the candidate. The process also depends on what position is open. I learned that the culture of the school is significantly influenced by who is hired.

Our building has a top-notch building manager who understands the systems of the school as well as the systems within the district within which she needs to work to get repairs done. Our principal has a clear understanding with her about the security of the building and the areas in need of attention. The hiring of the right person makes the difference in the amount of attention the principal needs to spend on the issue. I work regularly with the school secretary and building manager to discuss scheduling events and coordinating the room set up. I am
aware of Response to Intervention (RTI) programs, the formative and summative assessment requirements. I encourage collegiality and sharing of ideas by teachers. The environment in which you learn needs to be maintained, managed and supported by the principal.

**EQUITY**

This standard of equity is one that permeates into all the tasks of any employee in a school. All students are to be educated. It is the principal’s role to make sure that programs offered are implemented in the school. The principal’s attitude gives the school a feeling. How he/she engages with the students sets the tone for the students in school. I have participated in the implementation of the Empowering Writers curriculum. I have supported the math department with the changes necessary to the Everyday Math program to meet the Common Core State Standards. I have met with parents regularly to engage them in my classroom practices and expectations of the students. My mantra placed on the walls in my classroom and mentioned on my website is spoken by the students to give them encouragement. “What I do is important.” “Effort makes a difference in my result.” “I can do it.” I have coordinated the Green Team committee and this year it is a strong, task oriented, yet collaborative group. Seeing the student committee members’ happiness at their contribution to composting shows the success of building in responsibility with the students for their environment. They are thrilled to have a responsibility. Seeing our principal kiss a chicken as the reward for the litter-less lunch improvement percentage gave the students more incentive to remember to use containers and not paper or plastic for their food. The time and effort to coordinate these events is considerable and cannot be done alone. Equity is a standard that permeates throughout the job of a principal. Creating an environment where the students want to succeed and work together improves the learning.

**COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

The standard of community relationships is one that some communities can have difficulties establishing. Education is a triangle between the student, teacher/administrator/school teacher/administration/school and families. Families come in a variety of shapes and sizes but no matter who the parents are, they have a significant influence
on the student. My district is fortunate as a community to have businesses that support the schools, to have parents who engage in school events and to have a dedicated administrator and staff who plan and attend activities. I have supported the Electrical Safety programs. I have coordinated with the community the fire safety presentation with the representative from the fire department. I also have worked with the local farm to arrange for their programs in gardening. These events provide connection to the science curriculum. These programs also help reinforce with the students what is right and wrong and create student awareness for a safe and healthy environment.

What I have not yet done at this time, is attend a School Council meeting. I am interested in the dynamics of the committee and what it accomplishes. I was aware of what the group did last year when another person I know was the chairperson. Surveys were performed and data gathered to solicit parent information and opinion. However, my exposure to this committee is limited and one I hope to see more in action at the November meeting.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

A person with morals, integrity and awareness of the legal responsibilities is essential in the role of the principal. Awareness of the trends and reading about the issues in the profession as well as working collaboratively with other staff in the district are ingrained in my routines as a professional in the education environment. I like to read about people who influence their community, who have created a new classroom management idea, or who lead their school community into the change needed to improve the learning of their students. Learning about the Collaborative Problem Solving program brings attention to the issues of time management as well as consistency in school behavior programs. This program is a concept that applies to 10% of the students who may require 80% of the administration’s time due to unacceptable, uncooperative behavior. The student may even be violent, aggressive or significantly obstinate. The committee is discussing how to help the teachers and get them the specific training to then address the behavior issues that will open the path for better learning to occur.

I liked reading about the legal cases that showed the issues school districts can have with unions, with religion, and with assembly speakers. Knowing the direction education is taking, beginning with the federal government to the state government down to the town and school committee level, is necessary to anticipate the direction of your school. As a principal, it is
necessary to be aware of the financial ability of the community and how funding is obtained so educational programs remain current and effective.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Am I ready? I believe the answer is yes. I am ready to complete the course and paperwork connected to the AIC program. I have worked very hard to balance the job of a full time teacher, 300 hours as a principal and home life. While I may no longer be accumulating the hours for the practicum and credit and licensure, I will continue to play a role in my school community chairing the All School Meeting committee, coordinating the Green Team, guiding the third grade teachers to best practices in their teaching and serving on the Leadership Team. I made a major decision to start another career 14 years ago when I decided to get my Masters in Elementary Education. I have never looked back. Working with people who believe in improving the future of children is a pleasure.

The American International College accelerated program was intense. The course work from the Introduction to Administration to the last course about the School Finances has given me the confidence that I am prepared. I have confidence in what I am talking about. I have shared with classmates the approaches of different school district and different grade level issues (elementary, middle and high school). Most importantly, the hands-on experience through the practicum has put me in the role of a principal and has exposed me to the issues that arise with the day-to-day responsibilities of the position. When asked, “What will I do next?” I say, “I will see.” Training is ongoing. Working as an Assistant Principal is a likely path to the next step. I have benefited from the rigor of the AIC program, learning with the students in my cohort and assuming additional responsibilities in my school. My passion for education is only stronger!