Redefining Leadership, Reinvigorating Technology

Kayla VanEgmond's Future as a Learner Essay

Teaching Teachers

When I began my master's program, I chose the concentration area of K-12 Leadership because I thought I might want to be a principal at some point in my career. However, due to both my additional experiences with different principals and what I have learned about leadership in my classes, I now know that I would rather be some type of teacher of teachers than a principal. Therefore, my goal moving forward in this Teaching Teachers area is to determine leadership roles I can take on that will allow me to do that. In my old school district, lead teachers were assigned the sole job of supporting and guiding the classroom teachers. That is the type of position I would love to take on in the future but in my new school the person who is called a "lead teacher" acts more like an assistant principal, spending most of her time on administrative tasks and disciplining students. Since my school lacks a clear model for leadership focused on helping teachers improve their practices, my goal in this area takes the wide perspective of trying to figure out where I could fit in that type of leadership. Despite the apparent mismatch between how I would like to lead in my school and the structures already in place, it is important for me to stick to my goal because it fits a trend in education that I have noticed throughout my classes: a shift from top-down leadership to more collaborative leadership. As the importance of diffused leadership becomes more prevalent in schools, I will put myself in a position to exhibit leadership by following this goal. On the other hand, however, I do wonder if this trend is really as significant as it seems. Another possible reason I perceived such a major shift is that as I gained more experience through my teaching and my master's degree, I felt more confident that my voice should be heard in the decisions and direction of my school. Have schools really always been places of diffused, collaborative leadership but teachers

don't notice that until they feel like they are in a position to contribute? Or is there really a major shift in school leadership as the academic concepts I learned in my classes get put into practice?

Taking in Teachings

By "Taking in Teachings," I mean my own continued professional learning as a teacher. When it comes to technology, I have often felt like I am ahead of the curve because I am one of the few teachers who grew up as a digital native. As a younger teacher with many ideas about how to use technology in education, I have felt an awkwardness between myself and older teachers who prefer to "keep it old school." The flip side of this is that I have already had a great opportunity to share my expertise with others by leading a Professional Learning Community focused on technology at my previous school. However, I will not always have this advantage so my goals in this area is to keep up with technology as it continues to change. I intend to do this by always taking part in any technology trainings offered by my school district, collaborating with my talented technology-centric teacher friend from undergrad, and following up on any Facebook or Pinterest posts about technology in education (which when you know a lot of young teachers is more than you might think). This way, even when I am no longer young and the other teachers in my school are also digital natives, I can continue to be a resource for other teachers. As the teaching workforce transitions throughout my future career to being all digital natives, the digital divide between generations will cease to exist and I will only be able to maintain my role as a technology resource if I ensure I stay abreast of new technology and how to use it in the classroom.

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Teaching Tots

As I went through my master's program, I noticed how I, as a learner, felt safer engaging in group conversations behind a computer screen than I would in a traditional classroom. After realizing this, I decided to do a one-to-one unit with my sixth grade students to see if I could draw the voices out of students who hide behind shells of quietness similar to my own. This plan was a wholehearted success. Reflecting back on this experience and wanting to create similar connections between my own learning and that of my students, I determined that my goal in this area is to improve my self-monitoring of how I learn using the Internet. As a digital native who gets a major part of what I learn about teaching and the world beyond the classroom from social media and the corresponding connections to the wider web, if I can determine what strategies and formats appeal to me as a learner, I will be able to use those same strategies to benefit my students. Since my students could be described as being an even greater degree of digital native than me because technology continues to increase its influence over our daily lives, this goal of self-reflection will continue to increase in its importance to reaching my current and future students.