

ED594 Leadership and the Teacher

Capstone

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Introduction

The concept of leadership is different for everyone. Exerting influence, creating a sense of community, fostering commitment, inspiring trust, and being a role model - All of these can be considered functions of leadership. (Functions of Leadership). In this capstone, I will examine my definition or role of leadership as it pertains to my job responsibilities as Technology Coordinator for the district. As the “caretaker” of technology, my duties are very broad; from fixing printers and network connections to long-range technology planning and professional development. One of the nearest and dearest topics to me is technology literacy for staff and students. I will explore my role as a leader, or mentor in this case, and how I can best use my skills to teach and prepare teachers to integrate technology into their classrooms. To do this, I must inspire and empower the teachers to become technology leaders themselves within their own classrooms.

Leadership in the Classroom

“In your role as a teacher, you will develop your own definition of the mentoring process.” (Stevanson). The role of a leader is different for everyone. It is important to be flexible in order to function within different roles of being a leader as well as a student. “Leaders must be innovative, creative, flexible, adaptable, and yet, responsible.” (Baltoni). As a classroom instructor for the first time this year, I am developing my own individual teaching style, management techniques and rapport with my students. This provides a continuous challenge as I grow to be an experienced classroom teacher. At the beginning of the school year, I was terrified at how I would handle varied student behaviors and styles. I attempted to quantify every potential scenario and how to deal with it before it actually happened. While a good exercise in planning, it provided little help in practice. Leadership in the classroom can not be nurtured unless you are actually there, experiencing the subtleties that make for very different classroom settings. As I progressed through the year, I reflected on experiences, assessed my actions, and planned strategies to reinforce or change my teaching techniques. To be an effective leader in the classroom “different patterns of leadership are required.” (Functions of Leadership). From mediator to counselor to mentor, I strive to meet the diverse needs of my students.

Technology Leadership

Two years ago, the superintendent of the Oakridge School District asked me to apply for the position of Technology Coordinator. My charge was to begin implementation of the district’s Five-Year Technology Plan. While the plan was well thought out, for the previous two years, no

action took place to properly employ the technology resources on hand. The plan needed leadership to take it from the planning stages to reality. I realized that when I was hired, I was going to be that leader. My first year, I concentrated on the physical infrastructure of our technology backbone, the network. This involved setting up hardware and software, ordering and installing components and maintenance of the equipment.

However, “technology is not a silver bullet.” (McKenzie). As quickly as we put computers into classrooms, actual usage has left much to be desired. Anxiety, fear of technology and time constraints has impeded teachers and staff from accepting the everyday usage of computers in their classrooms. This presented the first challenge in my quest to be an effective leader. “The ability to look at the world as it is and envision something new and improved is a valued trait of leadership.” (Baldoni). I did have the vision of improved learning environments through technology. I visualized students collaborating with each other and using the multimedia capabilities of computers to deliver presentations and reports. When this did not magically happen, I needed to find creative ways to deliver technology literacy training. By empowering teachers to use technology, they would then become leaders and mentors within their own classrooms.

Action Research Project

For my action research project, I developed a series of technology training classes for teachers and staff based on surveys sent out requesting course offerings. Through a grant that allowed stipends to teachers for participation in classes, I was optimistic that teachers would become more knowledgeable and comfortable using technology in their curriculum. My goals of technology literacy would be realized by “creating a vision and sense of community.” (Functions of Leadership) I look forward to teachers recognizing the benefits of technology and spreading the excitement into their own communities, their classrooms.

The Importance of Technology Literacy

There are several reasons that technology literacy is important today.

- ◆ Preparation of students for the 21st Century workplace.
- ◆ Promoting critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- ◆ Helping students meet content standards and benchmarks.

As we proceed through the 21st Century, technology will play an increasingly important role in the everyday working lives of today’s students. The more exposure they have to a computer in the classroom, the more prepared and competitive they will be in the workplace. Additionally, the ability to think critically and independently needs to be encouraged and reinforced. The fluid nature of computers provides an appropriate vehicle to allow the creative thinking process to take place. Technology, used as a tool, can also assist students in meeting CIM/CAM requirements.

Conveniently, my goals of technology literacy for teachers, staff and students are reasonably attainable given my position within the school district. As a mentor, teacher and perceived “computer guru”, my hope is to effectively apply appropriate leadership styles to make sure these goals are met.

Acceptance of the notion of technology literacy can depend on internal and external forces. Externally, society can dictate the current format of how we educate our children. For example, CIM and CAM are directly impacting WHAT we need to teach. School reform doesn’t really address the HOW of changes. The HOW can be addressed internally, where more direct control is present. Leadership, in this case, is applied internally to present teachers techniques and training to provide a means to an end. The mean being technology and the end being higher test scores for students, better critical thinking skills and preparedness for the workplace.

Conclusion

This capstone seems to be a culmination of previous modules. The topics of the modules are all definitions or functions of leadership. Or rather, leadership is the common thread that binds the topics of the modules together. I am now realizing the importance of being an effective leader and how it impacts my students and colleagues. In a small district such as in Oakridge, it is easy to become a big fish in a small pond. The burden, or opportunity, of bringing high technology will rely on leadership that has the qualities of mentorship, patience, creating a sense of community, sharing responsibilities, and realizing a shared vision. Leadership is being able to exercise any of those qualities in the appropriate situation to make meaningful and effective progress.

References

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