Nicole Prevost, Bring on the Books!

**Leadership Profile and context:**

My experiences as a **leader** so far have been to:

* Support new teachers in my building helping them adjust to the school climate and the classroom
* Membership chair of the Quincy Education Association
* Member of the board for the Massachusetts Teachers Association
* Building Representative for the Quincy Education Association

**Context**: I am currently a 3rd grade teacher in Quincy, Massachusetts. Currently I am a self-contained teacher teaching all subjects to the children within my classroom.

**Description of pathway and competencies:**

**The pathway** I chose was Instructional Leadership.

The reason I chose this pathway was because I was working with other teachers within my school to enhance the teaching in the school. We were able to collaborate and learn from each other and learn new strategies to reach all children. This collaboration helped to make reading instruction more beneficial throughout all the grade levels.

**My Project** was to research ways to purchase new guiding reading books for levels that are not currently in our literacy closet.

Its intended goals were:

* To buy new guiding reading books that are at a level “M” or higher
* Listing resources so teachers are aware of what resources are available to them.

The 4 **competencies** I have selected for focus on my project are:

1. Reflective practitioner
2. Personal Effectiveness
3. Interpersonal Effectiveness
4. Communication

The reasons were:

1. As a **Reflective Practitioner** I noticed that many of the books in the literacy closet were at a lower guided reading level. This posed a problem for the teachers in the upper grades who had children reading at higher guided reading levels. This made it more difficult to read with children at their instructional reading levels. Many teachers would have the whole class reading the same book which may not be appropriate for all children. If we were to get more books at children’s instructional reading levels then we are able to help children gain the skills they need at their level. If children are learning skills at their level they will be more likely to apply and generalize the skills they are learning.

In the beginning when I first joined TLI, I saw myself as**,** developing**,** but now I think I see myself straddling performing and transformingin my overarching competencies.

Personally I have always reflected on this issue and never really figured how to fix this problem. Throughout this TLI project we were encouraged to keep looking outside of the box and try to fix a problem. With this encouragement and conversation with other TLI I participants I realized I could take this project on. I realized that we as teachers should not have to go out and buy these books.

1. Personal EffectivenessI think I use my heart to lead me as much as possible to reach all students. This helps me to encourage children as much as I can to reach their goals. I use whatever strategies I know to help the children learn to read and help them make progress. I learned that we need to continue to learn strategies so that we can reach all children. Last year I really had to reach out to my other colleagues to reach one of my children because all the strategies I knew to help him were not working.

As I reached out to my other colleagues originally I noticed many of them were as frustrated as I was with literacy closet. I asked what kind of books they would like to see in the literacy closet and what levels they are looking forward. I gathered this data and realized that many of the teachers are looking for many of the same levels. I then compiled the list and brought this data to my administration and had a conversation about how we need to find money in the budget to help support these teachers and in turn help support the children.

I think I see myself in the performing **category** of the overarching competencies. Two of the characteristics are adapting and balancing which are characteristics that I feel I have improved throughout my TLI experience.

1. The third competency I chose was interpersonal communication; I helped support my colleagues with their concerns about their students reading. We were able together to brainstorm how we are able to help the students. Together we came up with skills that our students needed work on and developed an action plan of how to work on those skills. The teachers were also able to come up with books that would help teach these skills.

I see myself as in the **performing** category for the way I was able to support my colleagues. I was able to gain the trust of my colleagues by sharing some of my concerns about my ability to teach this skill. I think this helped my colleagues feel more confident about sharing some of their concerns. I gathered together a group of people who all had a common goal. Throughout my conversations I was able to empower them to find different way to reach these goals. I think my project gave thoughts on teaching by my helping all my colleagues feel more comfortable with each other to share our concerns about how we are teaching our children. This helped all us feel that we trust each other and rely on each other much more.

1. **Communication**: I think this is something that I find challenging at times. I would like to continue working on this. At times, I feel like I get so busy I forget to communicate with others that I need support. I tend to do everything by myself and shut out all others. However, this project has encouraged me to work on this and it is something I am getting better at. It is still something I am working I would say I am in the developing category here.

Including your rationale for choosing to address this challenge and its connections to the Teacher Leadership Initiative Competencies and the pathways of leadership selected;

* + *What prompted you to select this particular leadership pathway for your project?* I chose the Instructional Leadership pathway because I believe it’s the pathway I have the most passion for. My goal every day is to help my children learn as much as I can. So this pathway lends itself so easily to the goal of helping more readers by increasing the level of books they can read.

I knew from past experience as a teacher in the upper elementary schools that we struggle finding guided reading books at higher levels. When we would ask the literacy teachers for books they would have one or two when we needed whole sets. I also knew many teachers were going out and buying their own books. So this prompted me to work on this particular project.

* + *How does focusing on the selected competencies enable you to address your identified challenge?* I think focusing on the competencies helped me to really reflect on the issues we have in our school. I was able to identify a concern that many teachers within the school have. The competencies also encouraged me to work on skills that I need to work on such as communication.
  + *How does your project address the Capstone expectations?* I think the Capstone expectations wanted us to see how important collaboration is. Throughout every step of this process we were continually collaborating with each other. Whether we were getting feedback from each other, participating in Google hangouts, or participating in the face to face meetings. I also think the capstone wanted us to develop our confidence. We were allowed time to develop this confidence by having our work out there and having us present this work. I think I will use these ideas to encourage me to feel more confident when I speaking to others. Before this when people would challenge me I would back down now I feel more confident in my opinion.
* Plan and implementation – steps taken to implement your project, including those that may not be completed by the conclusion of TLI:
* In this project so far I was able to gather upper elementary level teachers to agree that we all need higher level reading books. We were able to agree on what kind of books that we would like including a combination of a fiction and non-fiction stories. As a group, we have also come up with a list of books to bring to administration. The next step is that we are going to bring this list to administration and request funds to purchase these books.
* *Evidence of success/effectiveness* –
  + *What evidence indicates that your project was successful?* We are as a school still working on finishing up this project. So far we were successful in gathering a group together and putting together a list of books we were looking for. The next steps will be to get the funding and purchase the books and track how they are helping teachers change their reading instruction.
  + What evidence indicates your success in addressing your selected competencies? I was able to reflect on my teaching and come up with a problem that I could potentially fix. I was able to communicate with my colleagues and have other people join me with this concern. I was also able to successfully show my colleagues when I am passionate about something I will make any project work.

*What work do you still need to do to make it completely successful?* I think I would need to see the books within the literacy closet and teachers taking them out and using the books in their classroom. I would also like to see a list of strategies that can be taught with each book so that teachers can use the books in many ways. I would like to be able to get together with my original cohort members and share our projects and celebrate our successes so far and the ones yet to come.

**Reflections leadership growth**: When I first started this TLI process I would say I was in the developing phase. Though I was involved in different leadership positions I was not very confident in these positions. Through the help of many people in my cohort I feel much more confident. I was able to help Laurie Wasserman, I was able to develop my interpersonal skills by slowly encouraging her to get more involved in the MTA and local. I was helped by my state coach Gary Gilardi reminding me that I was a person who had a great amount of knowledge and I should be more confident.

* **Reflections on leadership growth** – description of the leadership skills needed to complete the project and your growth in the four competency themes you selected for focus;

As I look back on my application for TLI from a year ago, a lot has changed for me professionally and personally. At the beginning of this experience I wrote, “I believe lately teachers are being blamed by society for many things out of their control. I want to be able to change this. By developing my leadership skills, I can help society change their view of teachers. I believe by developing my leadership skills I will be given the information and skills I need to order to start changing this view.” I began my journey with TLI, I was still not sure what to expect. I knew that I wasn’t the most confident participant but I knew I had some knowledge. Throughout this process I was able to gain confidence in my skills to speak about the concerns that affect all teachers. I was able to gain more information in order to have many different facts that I can supply people when they start to attack teachers.

As I reflect on this year, I see myself as someone who has changed from developing**,** to**,** performing**.** When I started this process I would sit at board meetings and not say much because I was not confident in my ability to speak up. Now I feel much more confident speaking at board meetings and have been doing it much more often. I have also started to engage more people about the way teachers are being seen. I feel more confident in my ability to take on these people and have evidence that back up my position.

Further Reflections

1. How can we promote and enhance the role of teacher-leaders in schools, districts, and in the profession to support student learning? This is what I wrote a year ago: “We can promote and enhance the role of teacher-leaders by emphasizing how important these positions are. At the school level, we need to recognize these leaders expertise and use this expertise to help all students. At the district level, we should be using these leaders to decide on appropriate curriculum and assessment decisions.”I do not think my opinion on this question has changed all that much. I still believe we need to promote these leaders and state the importance of these positions. However, I do now think we need to have these teachers leaders voice their concerns about the amount and the kind of standardized tests children are expected to take. All teachers especially teacher leaders need to express their concerns about how these tests are not always developmentally appropriate.
2. Discuss your advocacy experience related to professional issues impacted by local, state, or federal policy.  In what ways would you like to develop these skills, and how do you consider that to be part of your professional responsibility? A year ago I wrote: “I have been an advocate for elementary school teachers within my district. As a district, elementary school teachers were not getting the same prep time as upper level teachers. Through the bargaining process we were able to start the process of getting all teachers equal time.” I think I have been involved in much more advocating since last year. If I were to rate myself I would say I have gone from emerging to performing. One reason I say this is I have been doing a lot more advocating for all elementary schools in my district when talking about the new educator evaluation system. I was appointed to the working group team where the local association meets with administration to discuss issues. I have been able to advocate for some changes that have helped teachers such as examples of evidence and changes in deadlines that teachers felt were not attainable.
3. What do you believe the role of the union or Association should be with regard to teaching and learning issues?  How do you believe the union or Association should determine its priorities for advocacy and action? A year ago I wrote: “ I believe that the role of the association is twofold one continue to fight and keep our collective bargaining rights and second be the voice of teachers for the public… I believe that constant communication with members is vital in determining our priorities. Again I do not think my opinion has changed instead I believe this is even more than I did last year. I would say I have gone from developing to transforming. In the past couple of months my state local association has had to fight some new licensure requirements. We had to communicate with all our members and let them know how damaging these new requirements could be. Once we were able to do this we had a tremendous response and many, many teachers wrote e-mails to let DESE know we are against the requirements. Due to this response DESE decided to eliminate these requirements and come with a new proposal. Not that this fight is over however, I was able to see more than ever how vital it is to communicate with all our members.
4. A year ago I wrote the following about my motivation to participate in the Teacher Leadership Initiative.  “… I *am motivated to participate in the Teacher Leadership Initiative because* I believe lately teachers are being blamed by society for many things out of their control. I want to be able to change this. I believe by developing my skills I can help start to change this view*”*. I still believe that teachers are being blamed for many things out of their control however; I do believe my skills have increased and that’s why I believe I have gone from emerging to proficient. I believe my communication skills have increased and I feel much more confident speaking to other people. I also believe the TLI experience has given me many more facts that I can use to help people understand that teachers are not the targets. When I did my summer work on teacher evaluation I learned so much about VMA’s and why they don’t always measure teacher effectiveness.

I have learned so much from this experience that I can’t wait to show others what I have learned. As a union member, I have helped to encourage people to get more involved in union activity. I was able to convince some of the teachers not normally involved in the union to e-mail DESE and fight the new licensure requirements. As a member of the working team, I was also instrumental in helping teachers feel much more confident with the educator evaluation.

Professionally, I have been able to bring together teachers and learn different ways that we can help our students. I have been given the good fortune to see teacher’s struggles and help them learn new strategies. I have been lucky enough to see children learn and read brand new literature. Children have been able to show me how much they love to read and how they learn new skills every day.

Personally, I have been lucky enough to meet some amazing people through this process. I was able to continue to develop and grow some relationships with people in all different types of jobs. I was given the pleasure of helping a member get more involved in the state association by mentoring and helping her understand our state’s annual meeting. This also helped me develop my communication skills and enhance the skills I already had.