**Cassidy Buescher**

**Final Internship Reflection**

**EDL 621 -- 7/27/2016**

I feel as though I've grown as a leader through my internship experiences in an unexpected way. I enjoyed working in an assistant principal capacity much more than I had anticipated. I enjoyed addressing issues as they arose, problem solving, working closely with students and teachers, and making sure the program was running smoothly at all times. I also felt as though I could be of service to both the principal and the teachers, and I enjoyed feeling helpful and supporting their hard work! The other unexpected surprise was learning of my enjoyment in the elementary school setting. Between summer school and the city mission childcare center, I've a newfound appreciation and fondness for working with younger children, to the extent that I am already considering getting my K-6 administrator's license right away. I also felt I learned a great deal about myself as a teacher and a mother by monitoring and participating in their early learning and development

By working closely with Mrs. Walter, I learned the importance of parent communication. Contacting parents each day when a child is absent, sick, injured, or even makes a comment such as, "I'm going to light my [tissue paper] Olympic torch on fire for real tonight!" is only part of the job. Mrs. Walter stressed that just as important as *what* you say is *how* you say it. When communicating with parents, it is important to be honest and forthright, always giving more information rather than less, but it's also important to choose your words carefully and know the parent with whom you are conversing as much as possible. I was able to work with Mrs. Walter on documents, schedules, and plans for the coming school year, giving me an idea of what it takes for a leader to prepare for teachers to begin in the fall. She answered many of my questions about data, about the early childcare program, and about meetings like 504 plans and board meetings. I also learned to remember that students can often be help with situations or the solution to a difficult challenge. Having students take responsibility and help each other can sometimes alleviate the need to overwhelm teachers with menial tasks.

After working more closely than ever before with both our curriculum and our data, I feel a much better and deeper understanding of our students and my teaching. I found holes in our English curriculum, standards that are not being taught with direct instruction, and our data reflects those weaknesses. I can now make informed adjustments to my curriculum, (and I can accurately and intentionally inform other staff members so they can make changes as well.)

Finally, I'm really beginning to understand the importance of taking full responsibility for the culture of my school. As I watched Mrs. Walter interact with the other teachers, the office staff, and the students, I understand that it is her leadership that has had a positive influence on that environment, and I know that I must accept the responsibility of making the culture of my school one of positivity and proactive change.

The biggest thing I learned from my diversity experience is that I still have so very much to learn! I know nothing about the population that I worked for, and that is not acceptable in a leadership setting. I cannot serve my students if I do not know what their lives are like, how their cultures differ, what they are struggling with, or what they are going through. I found myself trying to teach a three year old to share who owns nothing, no possessions whatsoever. Though he still must learn to share, I must remember that he is not being spoiled and selfish, but he might be holding on to something just for the sake of calling it his own. I found myself trying to enforce a rule of not climbing off of the slide to yet another student who responded with "Frank's gon' be mad at me, he gon' whup my butt." As an educational leader, I must always remember to keep what is best for the student in mind. While intellectual and academic learning should always be a focal point, perhaps sometimes what is best for the student is to stray from the rules and the reading and writing and address a personal and emotional problem with just some love and kindness.

I also feel as if it should be a focus of mine as both a teacher and a leader to stress to students that they probably don't know the whole story about many of their classmates. As I saw the children entering the childcare center, I never would have guessed that any of them were homeless. They were clean and dressed well, with hair combed and teeth brushed. While some of that is a benefit of them living in the shelter, it would be impossible to pick them out of a classroom of students. It's not as if I expected them to be dirty and ragged, but I was reminded that I could have had any one of these children in my class and never known their circumstances. As a leader, I must also keep in mind that there is more than meets the eye, and I must do my best to know as much as I can about what my students are dealing with outside of my care.

Through my reading, I was reminded of many of the "dispositional" characteristics that are crucial to being a successful leader. Much of our past learning was reinforced, and I found myself beginning to truly break down and list ideas that I *must* remember as I continue my journey. I *must* remain positive and stay true to my core beliefs including the importance of practicing empathy and kindness, always remembering what is best for students is most important, and that I am the one who creates the culture of my school. I *must* recognize the best teachers, give them autonomy and recognition, make their enthusiasm and creativity spread, and hire others like them. I *must* learn to delegate but in a smart way, protecting high achieving teachers from burnout. I *must* focus on relationships every single day, working to repair those relationships even when they are not broken, and teaching the students the skill of repairing their own relationships. And I *must* clarify what is important to me and what is not significant. I know what kind of leader I want to be, these are just a few things I can remind myself of as I continue my development so that I do not develop bad habits and don't stray from my core beliefs.

I think I've continued to make discoveries about myself as a leader, and I am gaining confidence that successful leadership is within my reach. Though I still feel as though there is an overwhelming amount to remember that I've already learned, and there is an infinite amount of learning yet to be done, I am beginning to believe in myself as a leader and see myself becoming the leader I truly want to be. I feel this internship time was invaluable for that, and I wouldn't change anything.

As I continue my journey, I plan to work harder to take an *active* leadership role in my school. Because I'm gaining confidence along with my knowledge and skill, I hope to turn that into real and tangible change for the better.

I will be:

* working closely this year with the principal on our SIP goal and AQuESST,
* completing my own SIP project,
* leading our roll out plan from Data Retreat focused on the 6th to 7th grade transition, and
* taking on a new role as a community liaison, writing articles each month communicating the best of what is happening in our school.

At the same time, I will be teaching, coaching, moving classrooms (perhaps more than once), and working with the drama team without a stage or storage, all with my sweet new baby boy at home. This year will be challenging to say the least. However, I plan to keep all of my learning and experience in mind as I move forward, acting with my core beliefs at the forefront, and remembering to be positive and taking on new responsibilities and challenges with optimism and confidence.