**Teacher Leadership Initiative Capstone Project:**

**Collaborating with Teacher Generated Data on the New Educator Evaluation System in Massachusetts**

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**Leadership profile and context**

I am a high school social studies teacher in Andover, MA. A ten-year veteran, I am a National Board Certified teacher, and am currently a doctoral candidate engaged in my dissertation work for a degree in Educational Leadership. Thus far in my career, I have served in a few capacities that have helped me move towards more of a leadership role within my school. I have served as a mentor to new teachers, taught professional development courses, and been involved in my school’s *Senior Exhibition* program. Two years ago, I served as a committee chairperson on my school’s NEASC accreditation group. These experiences pushed me to become more open and collaborative with my colleagues. My private work on National Board Certification and the pursuit of my doctoral degree have helped me to learn a great deal about education and instruction. I feel like my involvement in the Teacher Leadership Initiative has been a way for me to become a leader not just by virtue of any official position, but because of my ability to lead by example.

**Description of pathway and competencies**

I chose the pathway of policy leadership. I chose this pathway because I felt as though this is an area that my school context has weaknesses. With a new educator evaluation system being implemented at my school along with proposals for extending the school beyond our current physical space, radical changes to our schedule, and the crunch of documentation required of us under the new educator evaluation system, communication is critical to our sustained success as a school. As new technologies are implemented in concert with this process, school-wide changes require time and space to be thoughtfully considered, discussed, and adjusted to. Unfortunately, in the mad rush in between classes, much of this discussion hasn’t happened. In fact, many teachers worry about the new EES, mostly because we know so little about how it actually functions.

Focusing on the pathway of policy leadership, I view the new system as one filled with opportunities for teachers, but also one full of with difficulties related to the lack of clarity in communication and uncertainty about expectations. The potential impact that the new system could have on teacher collaboration, lesson development, improvements in instruction, and more of a collective ownership over students and their outcomes could positively impact the daily lives of teachers and what they are trying to accomplish in their classrooms on a day to day basis. It seems the origin of many revisions to the way teaches are evaluated is close to the idea that classroom practice has a larger impact on students than any other factor, including socioeconomics.

I felt like this pathway was a way for me to do a project that intersected with my research interests. I am currently working on my dissertation on teacher learning in data teams. Much of my research has therefore dealt with the mechanisms of mandated teacher collaboration, and how individual teachers can learn from those types of experiences and apply that knowledge to their practice. Ultimately, the reason for this developing norm in education is for teachers’ collaborative learning to positively impact classroom instruction.

My research on teacher learning in collaborative environments emphasizes the social constructivist perspective. This perspective approaches learning from the angle that individuals learn from others through the act of participating in or observing a group’s activity. Because teacher collaboration is a contemporary zeitgeist, manifesting itself in the educational policies and practices all over the country and the globe, it is increasingly important for teachers to not just collaborate more, but for them to collaborate purposefully so that what teachers learn from each other accomplishes some end for those involved.

**Pathway, Competencies & Project Summary**

**My project** as a member of the first cohort of the Teacher Leadership Initiative consisted of two parts. The first was gathering more information about the new educator evaluation system. This was made more fruitful through my choice of educator evaluation as my summer learning module. Interacting with the materials and listening in on the thoughts of other educators on the topic helped me to understand the origins and purpose of changes to the way teacher practice is evaluated in our modern context. The second was to lead discussion among my colleagues about the data I collected on our new evaluation system.

The focus of this work was centered on the aspect of our evaluations that requires teachers to submit artifacts or evidence of progress towards their SMART goals (self-directed goals for development of professional practice and for student learning). Because my district just began the new system last year, there has been few opportunities for us as teachers to gather together and discuss how to document out progress through the new evaluation system. Leading official conversations on this topic through the gathering of data and presenting that data to lead conversations has helped me grow as a teacher leader through the TLI experience. For my specific competencies of **policy implementation** and **policy engagement and relationships** I feel as though I have moved from *emerging*, where I was aware of new educational policies through my engagement in my doctoral work and the NEASC accreditation process and prepared to lead discussions on these changes. Now I feel that I am *developing* in both categories, as my project has helped me to filter and communicate mandated policies with other teachers in an effort to strengthen our school environment by clarifying policy and norms around those policies.

**Plan and Implementation**

The planning and implementation of my project began years ago when I became interested in the use of data in education in collaborative environments. As I began to build my research knowledge in this area, I became more and more interested in how teachers learn in the collaborative groups that they are asked to participate in so often. When I entered TLI, I thought I would be most interested in teacher collaboration, and through many of the learning modules and collaborative experience, I maintained this interest. What changed my approach was my involvement in the summer module on teacher evaluation. Though I found myself at odds with my colleagues leading this module and involved in the discussion boards, I realized that these conversations were emotional and required more collaborative efforts like what TLI had presented.

I decided to try to develop more collaboration in my department and school around our new teacher evaluation system. This too generated lots of emotional discussion. People fell on all sides of this issue, distributed research, gave presentations, yet ultimately failed to really engage the faculty in the implementation of the new evaluation policy.

I began by generating data on teachers’ use of the new system and what they contributed to the evaluation tool. Through this process I learned a great deal about what teachers valued and did not value in the new system, and it clarified for me that the majority of the new system revolved around student work according to teachers, a result that I thought confirmed the positive rationale behind the new system.

The confusion around other parts of the system lead me to present my findings to my department and lead conversations about the new policy and how teachers can more effectively implement it into their practice, and use it to better their practice, as the process of the new system mirrors the National Board Certification process, which is a great professional development experience.

**Evidence**

The evidence that my project was successful was the fact that teachers participated in the data collection process, and engaged thoughtfully in conversation around this data. (The data and the infographics used at the meetings are attached).These also show how I have been able to filter and explain policy to my colleagues, and send powerful messages about the positive aspects of the new evaluation system, and engaged my colleagues in collaborative discussion and activity around the new system that had previously left them in the dark. To take my project to the next level is to scale it up at my school. My department level survey and department meeting were very successful at meeting the goals I had for establishing conversations around data to drive understanding of the new evaluation system. The school as a whole needs this type of activity to help establish norms and understandings around this new system, and I plan to take the survey, and collaborative discussion around the survey data to the school-wide level to continue my work in this area.

**Reflections on Leadership and Growth**

At the beginning of the TLI process, I believed that I was a more involved leader than I truly was. I think part of this was the fact that I was immersed in educational research as I was building the concept for my dissertation study. However, being engaged in that work was not necessarily correlated with my taking on a leadership role. Now, I feel that I am beginning to translate my knowledge and expertise into actual leadership with my colleagues. Preparing to lead department meetings, and eventually school-wide faculty meetings required me to collaborate and work with colleagues, something that I’ve grown more skilled at through the TLI experience, and something I now value as a crucial aspect of teacher leadership. Part of what I wanted to get out of my dissertation work was to be able to learn something, and then take what I learned to change the field of education for the better, improving my colleagues’ work. TLI has helped me realize the importance of collaboration between teachers as a component of teacher leadership, and that by working together with colleagues, we can be clearer about how to deal with changes in policy to affect greater outcomes from our practice.

**Artifacts**

**See Attached Documents**

**Teacher Survey / Results**

**Data Maps of Survey Results: Word Frequencies**

**Department Meeting Agenda**