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Striving Towards Efficient Curriculum Implementation

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Abstract

As an Early Learning Mentor Coach for a non profit organization my job is to ensure proper implementation of our curriculum within the classroom in order to be in compliance with our grant agreements. Through this process I had to think of a way to support teaching staff and helping them be successful without adding extra stress or hours to their work days. Whether this was to be done through a binder, a reflection checklist, or a website, I needed to come up with something that was efficient, effective, and convenient for the teachers.

Keywords: Curriculum, Efficient, Effective

Introduction to your Capstone Project

Throughout my capstone project I focused on how I might provide professional development and curriculum implementation resources to teachers that I work with. I will be completing this through the use of the action approach and have thought of either creating a handbook or a website. A website would not only provide a convenient place for teachers to find resources, but would also be accessible to parents. Because teachers are busy, I am hoping this site encourages them to seek out additional information when challenges arise in the classroom by taking away the stress of having to do the research themselves. Through conversations that I have had with teachers I realized that a common frustration shared among them was that they did not feel that they received training for some of the things that are expected of them. I am hoping this approach relieves some of that frustration and stress while providing them with the tools necessary for success.

Section 1: Innovative Approach

Bringing Together Perspectives

Prior to being an Early Learning Mentor Coach, I worked as a Lead Teacher for the Head Start program and was able to bring the teacher and coach perspective when curating my website. Teachers in the Head Start program get observed twice a year by different program specialists and my role is to prepare them for these observations. These observations include meal service, mental health, preschool quality assessments, active supervision, and teacher - child interaction observations. Each specialist is looking for classroom interactions, teacher practices, environmental set up, policy, and curriculum implementation. After observations are completed and feedback/notes are provided I plan to use the website to provide resources

specific to each area and share these with the teachers in order to improve practices and gain an understanding in the importance of these observations and how they interconnect with each other.

Creating Innovative Approaches: Beyond Either/Or

After doing some initial research, I saw that there were a few reports of teacher frustrations about not having one spot to find teaching resources/ideas/materials. I also noticed that websites that did offer professional development materials for teachers either charged a fee or only provided tools that they specifically owned or created, meaning teachers would either have to pay to improve their practice or navigate through several different websites to find information relevant to the problem they are facing at that particular moment. Additionally, within my program there isn't a single system used to get training, articles, or other professional development sources to teachers. While, there are websites that provide instructional information there aren't any that are curated to meet the individual needs of the teachers that I am working with and set up to easily provide relevant information to help teachers improve teaching practices and observation scores.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

Awareness of Self and Others

Working towards my capstone project has given me the opportunity to reflect on the challenges I faced as a teacher and the frustrations I feel as a coach towards the teachers that I work with. As a teacher I felt frustrated when I did not have enough time to review all of the curriculum materials that were left on my desk after a long day. Going into this project I focused a lot on gathering informational material that I needed. Throughout the process I have made a shift to focus more on getting material out to teachers of topics that they are struggling with. This

shift came after I found myself feeling frustrated with a teacher who was behind on her assessments. I thought to myself, “she doesn’t care enough” but in reality she’s facing her own struggles. As a new teacher she is working towards developing a relationship with families and students that had already established a connection with a previous teacher. So, for this particular teacher I might share resources that focus on confidence and relationship building. In my work as a coach and towards my capstone, I have had to work on becoming a better listener and allow the teachers to come up with their own solutions. My goal wasn’t to tell them what they needed to improve, it was to provide them with the tools to strengthen areas once they’ve identified where they were needed extra support. I am working on building this and strengthening my listening skills by getting clarification from others of their frustrations and curiosity by repeating what I hear and asking open ended questions. This practice, I feel, is going to allow me to better curate my website to the needs and interests of the teacher vs. the needs and interests I had as a teacher.

Consideration of the Audience: Emotional Intelligence

My website focuses on reflection, goals, and ideas set by teachers. It has been developed and updated to include different resource materials such as pictures, articles, podcasts, and videos in order to meet the needs of individual learning styles. Teachers will get to share how they feel things are going in the classroom and identify areas that need growth. I then take that reflection and find resource material that offers information and ideas in strengthening that specific area within the classroom. The way I that I introduce my website to individual teachers will be influenced by their ability and openness to receive suggestions, feedback, and guidance.

Value to Others: Emotional Intelligence

During my reflection with the other instructional coaches working with teachers within our program I learned that teachers aren’t burned out, they just don’t have the support/resources

that they need to succeed. Anytime teachers are observed, they focus on the score and whether it's good or bad. This can be discouraging, especially when scores are provided without guidance on how to strengthen areas of concern. Our curriculum has extensive research showing its long term influence on children which is why we try to be as efficient as possible, but in order to be efficient we need to provide our staff with the tools to be successful. Not only will my website share with the teacher the why as to how important and valuable they are to these children, it will also share with the teacher the how when it comes to strengthening their implementation. A high score feels rewarding and I want to help teachers meet that goal. My project is going to offer teachers support, reassurance, and will scaffold their learning.

Section 3: Creative Thinking

The Creative Framework

In the first seven weeks of the semester it took a while for me to decide how I would approach my capstone project. I thought of wanting to do something different and meaningful but also realistic and attainable with the amount of time that I had available outside of other coursework and work responsibilities. At first I thought, maybe this isn't too out of the box. But then I realized that this would be a challenge for me because I am not technologically savvy. Another factor that played into my decision was when I was having trouble with my computer and getting something to load correctly, I became very impatient and frustrated. My husband then said to me, "teachers really need to be required to take a tech course and just learn the basics" and I think this inspired me to teach myself and take on the challenge of building my skills and knowledge with computers while also supporting teachers in my program.

Unique Approach/es to Project

While there are many websites out there with different articles and trainings for early childhood educators, many of the websites only have their own publishings listed on them. For example, teachstone only has teachstone videos, highscope only has highscope videos, webinars, and articles. The information on these websites is not categorized by teaching strategies, challenging behaviors, or really any specifics. Most of the information on the websites is found through a search engine and then having to scroll through many articles in order to find fitting information. The idea with my website is that it will bring together those different articles, videos, strategies, or webinars, separate them based on topic/interest/need, and provide them all on one site. Making the search for information easier and more convenient for teachers. It is also a way for me to get information to teachers about a specific topic they are wondering about without bombarding them with 4 resource articles when I visit their classrooms while also meeting their unique learning styles; whether it's through reading print, watching videos, or through hands on implementation.

Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

Accomplishment of Capstone

My project provided teachers in my program with the tools and support they were seeking in order to be successful in curriculum implementation within the classroom. Right now, the website has information on it about general implementation practices, professional development opportunities, and supporting behaviors within the classroom. Once more teachers begin requesting more information in regards to their area of interest or needs will be on the website with different delivery methods (article/podcast/video). If utilized and successful this website has the potential to contribute to employee retention by providing teachers with the tools for success. As more teachers are receiving additional support and trainings on how to redirect

behaviors in the classroom, provide active supervision, plan open-ended and highscope appropriate lessons, we can expect to see an increase in observation scores. Teachers are currently requesting more help but due to there only being 3 coaches in the entire region, it can be hard to get out to classrooms in a timely manner. Therefore, this website can provide teachers with the tools/information they are needing vs. having to wait for a coach or having to research it on their own and risk finding ideas/information that doesn't align with our curriculum. This is a different approach to supporting classroom staff in a way that meets their needs and respects their time, it is also a different approach to staff retention (in a poll gathered in the previous year teachers reported feeling like they didn't have enough support).

Innovative Approach to the Problem/Project

Originally, I had thought of creating an onboarding handbook. Where I would create a due date list for new teachers to help them keep track of all the screeners, parent teacher conferences, lesson dates, home visits, rescreens, etc. I thought this would help teachers feel less overwhelmed with their work load. But, then I thought of current things happening in the classrooms, observations, behaviors, new staff, and strict curriculum expectations. I reflected on how nerve racking it is to be observed and having to read through all the areas that need strengthening, especially as a new teacher. As a coach, I have time to research the curriculum and how to properly implement it in the classroom. But, as a teacher I didn't have this time. I strongly believe that if I go back into the classroom I would be a much better teacher because of the time I have had to grow my understanding. Instead, I can use this to help other teachers grow and be successful. Even though I try to only focus on one thing when I am in the classroom in order to avoid overwhelming the teacher, sometimes the teachers may have a lot of areas that they are wanting more information on. That's where my website comes into place, to provide

them with the additional resources they are seeking without them having to wait on my next visit. While there are already websites that provide professional development and learning opportunities about our curriculum, different information is found on different sites and teachers are redirected to sister sites or teachers are expected to subscribe/register for memberships. With my site I will gather information from the other sites and make them available on one single site vs teachers having to jump around different sites and have 5 window browsers open. This approach is taking things that are available to teachers but putting them in one spot so that they are also easily accessible.

Section 5: Results

Benefits to Stakeholders

According to the feedback that I received, my website provided teachers with easy and convenient access to different articles, sites, and lesson plan ideas/activities. One teacher reported, “ the site provided clarification on curriculum implementation, some of the why’s and how’s of what’s expected in the classroom”. After teachers were observed and received their feedback, they were able to access additional information on the site and think of how to adapt/modify the approach to meet the needs of their classroom and program expectations which provides them with the opportunity to build their understanding, observation scores, and focus on areas that need strengthening. While only 4 teachers looked at the website, 2 of them suggested that I continue adding information and getting it out to more classroom staff in the oncoming school year. Teachers appreciated not having to wait 2-4 weeks to receive information on a topic they were wondering about or wanting more information on, they no longer had to step out of the classroom to search through 3 different sites to find something they were looking for, and they

have direct links to the three different higher education programs that our employees can get reduced tuition or an education scholarship for.

Impact on Stakeholders

A lot of the new teachers in the program, especially teachers that begin mid-year, do not receive the training and support those who begin in the beginning of the school year do, therefore they are left having to figure things out as they go. This creates a lot of frustration, overwhelming feelings, and stress because new teachers are expected to implement the curriculum, manage behaviors, and create individualized, developmentally appropriate lesson plans that align with developmental domains. By providing different articles and implementation ideas on an easy to access website vs. the twice a month visits, teachers are able to build their understanding in those different areas that help them build classroom management and provide quality preschool experiences. Teachers are building their understanding and motivation in the classroom by having clear expectations and the tools to meet those expectations. This clear understanding will lead to a positive climate within the classroom by giving teachers the tools to provide supportive and caring interactions in their classrooms, build relationships between children and teachers through proper implementation of feedback loops, responsive interactions, and social and emotional lessons, and increase observation scores by providing specific trainings on areas teachers scored low in.

Section 6: Conclusion

In summary, I chose to complete my capstone project using an action approach because it allowed me to focus on creating a functional website to support the teachers that I work with by providing a tool where they can conveniently access informational resources about properly implementing our curriculum. The website that I created fit's under the action approach because

it wasn't something that was solely researched or something that I collaborated with a foundation on. It was something that I actively worked on, on my own, and modified after receiving feedback. Working towards the completion of my capstone I gained many new skills such as, how to create a functioning website, add buttons that navigated to different pages on the site, added pages with buttons to external links, organization on a website for the page to flow, and convert PDF files to JPEG files. Aside from technological skills, I also gained a better understanding of the different curriculums my program implements and program expectations. The teacher's I work with have reported that the website has benefited them by helping them gain a better understanding of what it meant to redirect children, share control within the classroom, professional development opportunities, and how to improve observation scores by improving interactions within the classroom. Since sharing my website with teacher I have seen less incident reports, a decrease in aggressive behaviors within the classroom, strengthened teacher-child relationships, and more open-ended and child-led activities happening. The different skills that I acquired were image conversation skills, introductory website development, gained research skills, knowledge of the highscope curriculum, communication skills, and organizational skills. This is a step towards supporting the teachers in my program by providing them with the tools for success.

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