

Mentor Interview Report – Amber Clark

This is the result of my interview with my Mentor on April 13th.

1. From your perspective, what accomplishments might be attributed to this leadership initiative?

Jason felt that my initiative showed the cracks, or demonstrated what was lacking in the school. That said, we are both still baffled at how little I actually accomplished “on paper.” Structurally, my initiative was responsible for the implementation of staff/parent email guidelines, but even these were not supported. Jason felt that I worked very hard and presented many great ideas, but there was a definitely lack of support when it came to the follow-through. He also mentioned that he wished that he had had the authorization to actually support me and implement some of my ideas. Lastly he felt that I had achieved and grown a lot as a person, and as a professional. I have added more skills to my “leadership toolbox” and I had the opportunity to participate in something that combined action research with best practice theory. I learned something in the classroom and was able to practice it. It might not have turned out the way I liked, but it was an opportunity nonetheless.

Jason also felt that the effort I had put in personally with building positive relationships with the parents of my students benefited me as a teacher. My interactions with parents were smooth; I established positive relationships with parents, and I emphasized communication and transparency. This paid off as parents had to take personal responsibility and were not able to blame the teachers for the students’ choices. Unfortunately, this school has had some negative history in this regard. Because I had so much documented communication – almost 2 emails for a month since September, as well as my marks being online, and the letters of concern sent home – almost all of my parents appreciated that I had really gone above my duty to communicate with them. Students also knew there was a higher level of accountability, because oftentimes, their parents would ask them about assignments, and they would mention the emails that I had sent home. The triangle of communication between parent, teacher, and student was finally complete.

2. If I could rewind and do this again, what might have improved the results?

I have sat down and reflected over the past 3 months, trying to sort out what I could have done differently. I do feel that I could have been more forceful and proactive in following up with certain people, as well as reminding them of commitments they had made. Unfortunately, for various reasons – most of which I still do not understand – I was given no support, and my mentor felt that I was “fight[ing] a lost cause.” He saw how personally hurt I was because I believed so passionately in what I was doing, and he, too, was hurt because he believed in what I was doing but was unable to support me.

We are both still so confused about a few matters. The school is going through two accreditation processes: both require a Parent-Teacher Association; a Parent-Teacher Association is even mentioned in the Faculty/Staff handbook, yet, we still do

NOT have a Parent-Teacher Association. It wasn't as if my vision or goals didn't align with the needs of the school. Lisa (former mentor and Middle School Vice-Principal) and I even had parent volunteers, but yet we were unable to start a Parent-Teacher Association.

It is very disheartening to look back, feel like such a failure, and not feel like I have adequate answers. I have asked someone with a balcony view, and they have basically echoed what my mentor has said – the support just wasn't there.

Perhaps I have been taking personally something that wasn't really about me. The structures of this place were not in place to support me, and with so many "things needing improvement," the school had to prioritize. Increasing parent involvement was not a priority for them at this time. It doesn't mean it isn't important, but merely that the time is not right. This has been kind of an epiphany for me because it really isn't about me personally, but about structures and systems out of my control. Maybe another big lesson is not to take things so personally.

3. What changes have you seen in me as a teacher and teacher leader as a result of this course work and leadership initiative?

Sadly, my mentor really felt that I had suffered personally through this situation, but was proud of the resilience I showed. That said, he also mentioned that he has seen other staff suffer as a result of the decisions that have been made. He felt that this experience has reaffirmed my "anchor values" – those things that I feel are important and that has allowed me to "weather this storm." I have looked at my priorities as a person, and that has helped me in my quest for finding a new job. He also said that it was obvious that I had never faced this kind of opposition, or resistance to constructive criticism offered "up the ladder of leadership," which is a learning experience in itself. By weathering the storm, I have shown my resilience and by reflecting, I have shown personal and professional growth. We also talked about the importance of balance, and knowing when and where to contribute my energy – being able to read the context of the situation.

4. What would you recommend as next steps in developing as a teacher leader?

My mentor advised me to think about different areas where I could develop my skills. We talked about middle management, peer-mentoring or coaching, being an instructional leader, or an educational specialist. I told him that I would prefer to remain in the classroom, so we talked about possible year level leader or department head. The most important point that we both agreed on was that a leader doesn't need a title. Based on the discussions I have had with my new director, we have talked about some of the areas where I might be able to use my leadership skills and ways that I could positively impact the school. I feel this is a positive first step.

5. What are the next steps for this initiative?

To be perfectly honest, I feel the initiative is dead and I have no desire to contribute any more time, energy, or thought into it at my present location. It was hugely successful (again) for me as a teacher – I have been reaching out to parents for the

past 10 years and have always had such a positive response from parents. That said, I am relocating, and I intend to take my skills, knowledge, and passion and use them at my new place of employment. As mentioned above, I have already spoken with my new director and I am excited about what I can contribute. I feel that I have gained many skills that I can easily transfer to a new school. I also hope that I have picked a school that is in a better place to support me. I have heard some members of another cohort of Masters Students talk about my initiative and the importance of parental involvement. I also know that there are certain requirements – like a Parent-Teacher Association that are needed for the upcoming accreditation. This is all out of my control or even my interest, as I won't be here in the next academic year, and neither will my mentor.