Final Reflection

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EDUC 800 Ways of Knowing

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Introduction

What do I know? How do I know what I know? What do you know? How do you know what you know? I have explored these and other questions over the course of the semester. I am beginning to make meaning and understand the rationale behind the course through this inquiry. I now see my own ways of knowing as a spring board that will launch me to the next stage of the doctoral process. More specifically, the examination of my ways of knowing has therapeutically allowed me to find my lens. I am now cognizant of my ways of knowing and in turn how I understand the world. Through the course readings, in class exercises, and collaborative projects, I have learned that beauty arises from everyone’s unique way of knowing. My journey through this course covered reflective epistemology, method, paradigms, ways of knowing, and creative collaboration. Each of these topics has guided me from my previous and current way of knowing.

Before EDUC 800, I had not spent any time thinking about epistemology, paradigms, or even creative collaboration. The only reference I had for a WOK was a large deep skillet used to cook Chinese food. It was in this course that I began to examine the unknown and acknowledge the many valuable pieces I already knew. For this reflective paper I will attempt to walk through the course and elaborate on my new way of knowing.

Ways of Knowing

In September I struggled with what I knew about many things. I did know that I was a knowledgeable person, but I was perplexed when the construct, I know ______ because. _____ was presented in class. I began to focus on ways of knowing my discipline. I recall that some of my initial statements were:
• I know that examining perspectives is important in International Education because I have read about marginalized voices.

• I know that power is a key element when studying International Education because it is contained within social, economic, political, and educational systems.

• I know that language is an aspect of International Education because of its role in dialogue, discourse, translation, and understanding.

• I know that inequities exist within Education and International Education because of my personal experiences.

As I reflect on each of these statements I begin to realize that they each form a piece of how I know and view my discipline. They also begin to paint a picture about my interests. I know that this information will be very important in finding my passion and final research topic.

As I begin to discover my interests and ways of knowing it is fundamental that I first explore the person that I am. I am a teacher, daughter, sister, friend, and partner. In each of these roles my gender and perspectives shape my ways of knowing. My gender defines my ways of knowing because as a teacher relationships matter to me. I always go out of my way to establish relationships with my colleagues and students. In the classroom I realize that gender issues do arise. I have found in my personal experience that female students do not participate as much and therefore I try to help female students find their voices. My culture defines my way of knowing because I continuously strive to make connections with minority, female, or English Language Learner students. My family life, academic and professional experiences have allowed me to see the value in promoting all learners. One way that I culture shapes my way of knowing is through the active role I play in promoting scholarship opportunities, recognizing,
and nominating students for their achievements that would be easily ignored. My culture tells me to validate all experiences of others and accept their differences.

Each of these exercises informed my current thinking about my discipline and future research because they have allowed me a format to constructively format who I am and what I know. With this foundation I can begin to discover what I can bring to my discipline and how I can shape my future research.

Core Concepts

Epistemology

I came to know about epistemology through the readings in the course. Hofer and Pintrich (1997) stated that “Epistemology is an area of philosophy concerned with the nature and justification of human knowledge” (p. 88). This was the first time I began to examine how I had come to know what I knew in relationship to the models of epistemological development.

As a teacher, I use my reason, experience, proven practice, and perceptions regularly. More specifically, I use rationalism through my daily interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. I have unconsciously chosen to use reason when dealing with many situations that occur inside and outside of my classroom simply because it works. Descartes (1637) stated that common sense was “…the ability to judge well and distinguish what is true from false” (p.5). The ability to judge what is true from what is not will be beneficial to my future research because I will be able to use this knowledge to examine and analyze data. Another tool and fundamental realm of epistemology is empiricism. I have been a language learner and this experience has helped me become the language teacher that I am now.
Method

After thoroughly examining the course readings by Descartes I came to view the word method in a different way. I was familiar with the methods used in classroom instruction and had heard about quantitative, qualitative, and scientific methods, but what did this all really mean? Cartesian thought suggested that method was derived from logical reason and sequence. Descartes rationale and dissection of truth in my mind is similar to the work a doctoral student must do when working on his/her dissertation. It is an examination of individual pieces, a sequence, and one’s reason and perception. This paves the foundation for shifting predetermined ideas in a field of practice or paradigm.

Paradigms

Through the readings and discussions conducted during the course paradigms were defined along with the revolutions that have shifted these paradigms. It is my mission through my doctoral work here at Mason to become a part of a community of practice and actively work towards making a change in the current paradigm. I think that this research is extremely important in the field of International Education. Teachers around the world may be conscious about their diverse classrooms, but they may not necessarily understand how to teach international mindedness and preparation to all students. In fact, I doubt that much study has been done on preparing teachers for the eminent change in classrooms around the world. That is where I would like to begin making the shift. We will see.

Creative Collaboration
Collaboration is an important part of research, but more importantly I have learned that this is not an individual process. If you are going to shift a paradigm you must first form part of a community of practice and abide by the rules of this community (Kuhn, 1962). Only then will there be “…an opportunity to transcend … individuality and to overcome limitations of habit” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 57). My work with the film collaborative and with other colleagues has been informative and I hope will bring new opportunities for future collaboration and scholarship.

**WOK Project**

The readings and participation in the Ways of Knowing Project informed my overall understanding of Narrative Ways of Knowing, International Education, and future research. I began with what was familiar, and what I knew and that was about stories. I always remember hearing them from family members or teachers. These oral narratives shaped the way I interacted with the world around me. While researching this way of knowing I began to make connections with my discipline of study. I was able to make connections and formulate initial research ideas around teacher training and professional development using a mixed model narrative self study, explicit instruction, and observation. Narrative as a WOK and Narratives for teacher training and professional development were both very interesting to pursue. I am sure that the latter would not have been possible without validating Narrative as a ways of knowing. This course has been instrumental in grounding my thought about my future research.

**Collaboration**

My collaborative experiences coupled with my individual experiences aided contributed to what I know. Each of the collaborative experiences I was involved in was special and
meaningful. I remember when Anthony and I went for a walk and discussed how gender affected our way of knowing. As we shared our personal experiences about our perceptions on gender roles and exchanged stories, I began to learn not only about my partner but also my own past and present view of the world. Cognitive development occurs when individuals partake in shared activities and internalize the outcome of the collaboration (John-Steiner, 2000). I grew from my walk with Anthony, similarly to my work with my colleagues in the film collaborative project.

The film collaborative project was fabulous. I enjoyed every part and learned a lot about myself and others from the collaboration. The Breakfast Club, an eighties classic granted me the opportunity to reflect on how my way of knowing has changed overtime. I remember having watched this movie religiously as an adolescent and considering myself to be one of the club’s members. When I revisited the film for this project, I watched it with new eyes. I am a teacher, not an adolescent. I considered myself to be an advocate for the rights of the students, which is most likely why I chose to speak from the perspective of Carl the janitor. My colleagues also agreed that their way of knowing had changed from their first viewing of the film until now. Our shared experiences contributed to the ease in which we worked together. I also grew a lot from members of my collaborative team, because I had to adapt my working style and could not procrastinate. That was very difficult for me, but I proved to be extremely effective and relieved a lot of unnecessary stress at the time of the presentation. John-Steiner (2000) mentioned that “…in collaborative work we learn from each other by teaching what we know,” which my group members and I did every step of the way (p. 3).

Experiences
I learned something new from each and every experience during this course. Each experience helped me discover and understand better the person I am, how I make knowledge and how I can use this knowledge in my future investigation. The course experiences that had the greatest impact on me were the film collaborative, Art as a Way of Knowing, and reading Descartes and Kuhn. Each of these experiences has shaped my vision of research and scholarship and left an indelible mark on the person that I am. I do not think that there were any parts of the course experiences that had a lessened impact on my way of knowing.

**Self evaluation**

- I know narrative ways of knowing now because of the work I did on my WOK project.
- I know Descartes now because of the course readings.
- I know the importance of collaboration because of the course readings and my personal lived experiences in this course.
- I know more about epistemology because of the work done in EDUC 800.
- I know now that there is not always a right answer, and that’s ok because of EDUC 800.
- I know more about critical constructivism now after my dinner party with Descartes and Kinchloe.
- I know more about the way that I know now because of EDUC 800.

**Final Thoughts**

This has been a very powerful experience and I do not think I am able to fully reflect on the profound depth of knowledge that I have discovered in this course. I will never forget all of the great exercises we did and how much I loved being able to explore writers like Descartes and Kuhn. Working individually and in collaboration with others not only
facilitated my overall learning, but granted me membership in our small Ways of Knowing community of practice. I look forward to continued growth and application of ways of knowing in my future research and practice.
References


