

RUNNING HEAD: Internship Reflection

EDUT 514/414-Reflection Paper

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Prior to teaching EDUT 514/414, I had only been a guest speaker for Susan, Sylvia and Stacia's classes. I had never been responsible for the entire class from start to finish. In January, the night before classes started, I felt like it was the first day of school my first year teaching Head Start. Over the next sixteen weeks, there were some great moments of learning by both myself and the students, also some experiences that lead me to reflect on what or why a particular activity or discussion did not go as planned. Finally, there are elements I would refine in the future, in this particular class and in other courses I teach.

Even though managing the work load of teaching this class, taking other courses, fulfilling other PhD program requirements and working full-time has taken a toll on me, the experience was excellent and an opportunity I am very grateful to have had. It has lead me to reflect and think about how I encouraged the group to become so close and trusting of each other in such a short period of time. I was very purposeful in each of the initial activities, even though at first I was not comfortable working with the group. I wanted them to get to know me and each other. This was all done in an effort to build relationships and ultimately recreate a community of learners. I now see how McCaleb's (1997) thoughts on 'community of learners' applies even to adult learners, for developmentally, in order to learn they too must feel secure, safe and respected.

As a teacher educator, I believe it is extremely important for me to model what I want students to do or embody as teachers. Therefore, I had to come to a point where I trusted them, so that they would trust me (Brookfield, 1995). I believe that if I do not share part of my story and passions how can I expect the students to do the same? Part of my criticism of myself is that I was not explicit in my purpose for doing many of the activities we did. I realize now it is necessary to be very clear as to the specific thought behind an activity, otherwise it gets lost on

the students. I know that I said to them that as educators everything we do must have a purpose and to remember how that purpose is related to practice, the base for critical pedagogy. But, when it came down to it I forgot to follow my own advice. Students commented on this issue, not tying everything together and that they did not understand why we did certain activities, such as centers. They wanted to know what they should have done to support the English Language student in the play situation. As I read their comments on the mid-term evaluations and final evaluations, they confirmed my concern that I was not pulling it all together. I was not sure how to address this. I instituted the Ticket Outs as a way to help with this issue when it first came up in the midterm evaluations. I think they helped a little bit, but this was introducing something I was not totally sold on personally. Consequently, I did not introduce it properly nor did I build in enough time at the end of class to fill them out. I realize now that some tools used by other people will not necessarily work for me or my class situation. For Leah the technique might have worked, but for me it was different. They were completing the Ticket Out very late at night, I was able to hold their attention for the entire class period but the Ticket Out was too much. Many (almost all) of the students commented on how they did not like them or see the purpose. This was a technique I added without clearly introducing it--since I was not totally invested in it, how could I expect them to be?

Even though I struggled with tying everything together (the discussions, activities, readings etc), I did manage to create a community of learners. I think that I was so concerned about connecting to them in an authentic, supportive, caring way that I believed that would be enough. I am not saying I would stop striving to connect human to human (Noddings, 2003), but that I need to find a way to balance content with connection to me and each other. I do not believe that learning can occur, even for adults, if there is no connection.

There are elements that I believe I would add, initially at least, such as a short sheet establishing what they each already know. I see this as a sort of personal KWL. This is necessary because I was initially operating on the assumption that they knew a much more about young children than they did. Once I began to think about my level of knowledge in graduate school I began to remember what level they are at. I think that this sort of activity would help me see where I need to supplement the class's knowledge base, instead of assuming everyone is at a particular level. The issue of addressing all of the students' needs was a dilemma for me, since all 13 of them had very different needs, stances, and were in very different phases of their identity development, as people and as teachers. I was reminded of Brookfield's (1995) discussion on how critically reflective teachers see the students and assignments as a way to move students forward in their thinking. I see confusion and a small level of stress or discomfort as a part of learning and shifting thinking. I saw and talked students through this discomfort in the numerous discussions we had about assignments. I realize now that I should not look at that time as wasted but as part of the learning process. In the student comments and attitude toward the video reflections, I see how they may not have wanted to do the project but that was all the more reason they needed to do it. Many of them found various excuses in the beginning as to why they could not do the assignment, but I did not waver. Having experienced video-taping I recognize how important it is to one's own development. I also saw this issue in their resistance to doing center based learning for young children. I believed that by modeling centers and having several discussions on the usefulness and developmental appropriateness of centers that they would see the value in them. In reading their Curriculum Unit papers, I was shocked at how many of them continued to use worksheets. I decided that this was a huge point, one that I thought I had discussed and modeled, but they were still holding on to those worksheets. So I

decided I needed to directly discuss and address this issue. I toyed with the idea of giving them a pop-quiz, to drive my point home but decided to directly talk about it instead. I shared with them that I had thought about giving them a pop-quiz; they all groaned and wanted to protest. I stopped them and pointed out that is what they do every time they give a young child a worksheet! I told them that I was going to put some calculus questions in the quiz, since they should know about that topic too. Again, they looked at me shocked but I reminded them that is what they do to young children every time they give them a worksheet. I asked them if the pop-quiz would really show me anything about their level of knowledge and abilities. No, but I pointed out-- then how can a worksheet tell the teacher anything about the child? I talked about the fact that many times worksheets give teachers a false sense of learning. The teacher thinks the child has the skill, but the child has memorized it for that context and not in a real authentic way. I went on to demonstrate why letter or letter sound of the day is completely inappropriate. I used scaffolding as my example. I told them that I should have just written scaffolding up on the board and walked out. I asked them if that would have encouraged their learning. Would it have been meaningful? I was surprised when Lindsay said "I would have gone out and gotten a ladder." This was an "ahh" moment for her. The comments by her and others helped me to see how important it can be for students to receive examples, which relate to their experience, in order to move them forward. This example led to a rich conversation about how and why these techniques do not work and are not age appropriate. Many students stated that they needed to think about what they believed in and what their center believed in and then decide how to make the two work together. I encouraged them to remember that they, as teachers of young children, must remember what they know in their heart and from their training what is good and appropriate. I reminded them that just because their center does it, does not mean they should

use a practice or activity that is not developmentally appropriate or good for young children. Even though this conversation happened on the last night of class, I saw their reactions and the light bulbs going off above their heads. This was very exciting to see, it made me really think about how the class might have been if I had been more clear and explicit on other issues. I do not see clarity as disrupting the learner's process. I do think that sometimes when students are in schools that are not doing child-centered practice or developmentally appropriate activities it is necessary to let them know why such practices are inappropriate and not good for young children. I can not assume that they will just get it from the readings, or see how to transfer it. I think that in some cases they needed my support to give them the courage to try it and know that it is okay.

The comment from Lindsay and the amazing growth of her and others is what has stood out to me and will hopefully always motivate me. As I read and grade their Reflective Video Analysis reflections, I see how much each one of them has grown over the last 16 weeks. I am reminded of my UTEEM experience "to always have faith in the learner." Now that I have experience with adult learners, I see how amazing their growth can be. With this experience I can now see why I have to have faith in the adult learner. Even though everyone might not have reached the same level, each of them grew and started to shift their thinking and understanding of how to teach young children. It is exciting for me to think about how I influenced each of them. I look to my future as a teacher educator with excitement and possibility. Of course, I still have a much to learn about how to weave appropriate practice, critical reflection, culturally responsive, and inclusive practices into my classes. Now I see why each of these core elements are integral to who I am and what I feel is important to communicate to future teachers of young

children. My challenge now is to work to refine how I communicate each of these theoretical stances into this class and any other class I might teach.

Reference

Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McCaleb, S. P. (1997). *Building communities of learners*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.