

Running Head: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

**Reflective Journal 2**

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### Introduction

For this journal, we have been asked to consider two pieces of professional literature, one coming from a larger stack of books and one coming from a smaller swell of articles and curricula. Our class was permitted to choose the pieces that we were most interested in and encouraged to connect those readings to our own classroom practice. In addition, it was stressed that this reflection was not to exceed five pages of text. As hard as I find it to limit reflective practice and in particular reflective writing, I am going to do my best to stay within those guidelines and hope the offering in the following paragraphs provides some insight as to how I viewed the pieces that I chose.

#### “Practicing Democracy Through Student-Centered Inquiry”

This article interested me after I read the first few paragraphs. It speaks about many of the ideas I want my students to discover, consider, and embrace through some of my Part 2 but mainly my Part 3 IB English works. Since the works in Part 3 have to be connected through themes, I connected my works through themes that force the students to consider the broader world around them and consider whether or not human beings are really acting in the best interest of other human beings or only acting in the interest of themselves. In the article, the student Kelly’s speech indicated that students, want to be educated in important issues, and that some of them will carry their learning out into the world (Slesinger & Busching, 1995, p. 50). This is the same sentiment I want my students to take from my class, especially as they go off to their next level of education.

Although the project described in Slesinger and Bashing’s article dealt with a middle school study of World War II, the lessons the students took away from the unit could be applied in any classroom. Throughout their study of the war, the students engaged in both structured learning and independent inquiry activities – activities where they decided what specific learning

objectives they wanted to focus on. As in Wells, a knowledge wall was again utilized to allow students to post questions and get information at a glance. I think the knowledge wall or at least the idea of having my students post questions about something they are reading or working with might be an interesting idea for me to try next year and am thinking that I might try this with *Richard III*, should I find myself teaching seniors again next year. *Richard III* is a difficult text for the seniors; the language presents issues because it is not familiar territory (Shakespearean dialogue) plus there are many connections to history that the students need to learn. This text may be well-suited for such an inquiry activity and allow me to give control over to the students in combination with mini-lessons on text annotation, iambic pentameter, and differences between Shakespeare's version and King Richard's actual history.

Getting back to the idea of students considering the broader world around them or as Slesinger and Busching said, beginning to *be* citizens who seek to understand and value others (50), I designed my current IB English curriculum with those goals in mind. Knowing the IB commitment to the Learner Profile (LP), I selected texts which both fit the English A1 Prescribed Book List (PBL) and Prescribed World Literature List (PWL) but had themes that would fit in with the ideals of the LP. When I chose my texts, I built my curriculum around two basic questions: 1) What happens when people forget what it means to be human? and 2) What are the forms and effects of dehumanization? In addition to these questions, I planned that the texts I chose, specifically: poetry by Owen and Heaney, *The Pickup* by Gordimer, *Climate of Fear* by Soyinka, *Death and the Maiden* by Dorfman, *Incident at Vichy* by Miller, *A Man for All Seasons* by Bolt and *Oleanna* by Mamet would continually touch upon the LP goals of Principled, Open-Minded, Caring, Communicators, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Inquirers, Risk-Takers, and Reflective through class activities. *Richard III* is the one text that on the surface does not meet my thematic objectives

but Shakespeare is a required part of Part 2 and I do try to have my students consider Richard in light of his impact on others.

Through class discussions and their reading, I see the fruition of my efforts when students are practicing questions for Paper 2 of the IB English examination. In these questions, students have to write about two of the spring semester works – in my class those works would be the dramas I mentioned above with the exception of *Richard III*. As I listen to my students discuss these four texts and relate them to exam questions concerning the abuse of power, prejudice and bias, gender issues, marginalization, and other issues, I see that they are making connections not only between the texts and the questions that they have to answer but the stories contained within the dramas has made them consider the bigger picture – the world around them and the people outside of their own circle, their own neighborhood and their own culture. In addition, written journals from the students also tell me that the students are making seeing connections between the works and the outside world. I have read comments regarding our presence in Iraq while studying *Climate of Fear* and the dramas this spring, discussions of Gaza during *The Pickup* and *A Man for All Seasons* and most recently, listened to several students debating what they might be willing to die for and considering the case of suicide bombers while studying *A Man for All Seasons*. If anything, I am confident that I definitely sending some of my students to university seeing their world with more critical eyes.

#### Assessing and Reporting on Habits of Mind

I chose this book because I was interested in one section concerning reflection and wanted to see if there was anything in this book about assessing reflection. When I was reading it, however, sadly, I was disappointed that the information was more focused on how to get students to reflect. In my own classroom, I do not have that problem as senior level IB students come to my class

already practiced in this skill from the IB English 1 teachers. What I did find interesting in the book however, was how some of the habits of mind seemed to correspond to various areas of the LP and started thinking about how I see this in my own classroom.

The idea of listening with understanding and empathy seems to correspond to the Learner Profile goals of Open-Minded and Caring. Through the texts I described above, my students understand and appreciate their own cultures and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience. (IB, 2006, p. 11) Further, questioning and posing problems matches well with the Learner Profile goals for students to become Inquirers. My students develop questions to complement their study of texts and to prepare for the various discussions we have. As time passes, students see the value in questioning and hopefully develop a love of learning that will continue throughout their next educational endeavor.

Another habit of mind that seems to correspond to the Learner Profile is the idea of taking responsible risks. This matches to Risk-Takers. Although this aspect of the LP often seems the hardest for my students (especially when a grade is involved), they are often the most satisfied with themselves when they acknowledge to me in their journals or in class verbally that they thought they took a risk with something. It makes them so proud to say they have accomplished something that they thought they would never do back in September.

The final two habits that corresponded to the LP were thinking and communicating with clarity and precision (Communicators) and remaining open to continuous learning (Reflective). The use of language in any form is extremely important and students need to have this skill in order to become functional adults. Students in my class practice writing in forms including academia, business, and personal reflective. They also practice oral communication. The other habit of mind,

however, remaining open to continuous learning, is a little more difficult. Students need to always assume that there is more out there to be learned and that there is more to something than just the completed project – the process and the reflections are important as well. In my class, I have assignments where substantial parts of the grade are given to the reflection and the process and less is given to the completed, final product. Students sometimes have a hard time with this idea and have fought me about this. They have not won me over yet.

### Conclusion

The two items that I selected to read did give me additional ideas to consider and think about for my own teaching practice. From this course, I am coming away with some additional ideas on how to turn education over to my students. I will definitely find a way to make use of the knowledge wall idea and I think I am on the right track with my ideas on getting my students to see the bigger picture especially concerning dehumanization and human suffering in the world. Although I still think inquiry is approached in a different manner in the Diploma Programme, I can see how I can incorporate it a little more in the earlier parts of the year with my students. In addition, I think I will look into thinking more about the concept of international-mindedness this summer. I stumbled on a recent discussion board on the Online Curriculum Centre that addressed this in English A1 that I think I might like to start chewing on but did not have time to consider for this paper.

## References

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