Summative Reflection

EDG 593

Cabrini College

As I reflect on my growth during this program, I find that I am looking at myself completely different as a teacher. I have learned so many useful strategies that have been incorporated into my classroom and I have a list of many more strategies that I hope to implement throughout time. Each course has provided me with a wealth of knowledge that is molding me into the best teacher that I can be.

As I started my learning opportunity with Cabrini, I needed to begin by reflecting on who I was as a teacher. I had to take a close look at how I was teaching and where I needed to improve. The best way to reflect upon myself was to think about my journey as a reader. In our first course, we began by reflecting about how we learned to read, who helped us read, and what we liked about reading. Through self-reflection I learned that my parents were the reason I learned to love reading, not my teachers. I realized at that moment that I needed to make sure I was not being the teacher that discouraged children from reading. I needed to find ways to get all of my students engaged and excited about reading.

I decided that I needed to get input from others so that I could have a variety of teaching methods. I spent time observing another colleague’s classroom, as well as her teaching practices. This gave me a starting point for determining some improvements that could be made in my own classroom. In creating a community of readers, I needed to make my literacy environment a comfortable place for learning to occur. I used the knowledge gained from the course texts and my colleague’s classroom to help determine how I should change my classroom to suit the needs of my students. I learned that my students should have a say in what makes them comfortable in their learning environment. It was hard to give up being in charge, but I found that my students appreciated being able to help reorganize books and literacy materials in the classroom. I ended up leveling all of my books based on guided reading levels. I wanted to make sure my students always had level-appropriate materials at their disposal. Now, each of my students knows their reading level and they can choose books accordingly. Regie Routman was the source of many changes that I chose to make in my classroom. She is an educational guru that has brilliant suggestions for implementing new and engaging reading strategies in the classroom. With the use of “Reading Essentials” (2002) and “Teaching Essentials” (2007), I learned about the importance of before, during, and after reading strategies. I now currently use these strategies in my classroom on a regular basis. It helps me to understand what prior knowledge my students are bringing, as well as areas that I can spend more time focusing on.

I was introduced and reminded of the theories that several theorists hold. I discovered that Lev Vygotsky was the founder of the “zone of proximal development.” It was interesting to learn what learners can do with and without help. Jean Piaget introduced me to the idea of schema, which is thinking about thinking. My students are able to use their schema to organize their thoughts and understand concepts. Lastly, I was reminded of the works of Howard Gardner and multiple intelligences. I think it is quite fascinating to learn about how students learn. It is incredible how each person learns so differently. These theorists provide teachers with the necessary knowledge to truly understand students.

“Words Their Way” (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston (2012) was an excellent resource to understanding phonics and word study. I had not realized there were programs that could truly zone in on specific phonetic issues that my students were facing. I love how this book taught me so much, and in turn I used it to learn a lot about my students. With a large class, it is hard to focus on the minor difficulties that are affecting student learning. Using this program, I have learned how to motivate my students and increase their phonetic abilities. The students enjoy the use of this program because it is hands-on and engaging. I was able to assess my students, analyze their performance, and determine plan instruction accordingly. It is an excellent resource for providing differentiation in my classroom.

The use of instructional strategies for teaching reading is very beneficial. Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell have given me a huge introduction to thinking within, beyond, and about the text through their books “Teaching for Comprehension and Fluency” and “The Continuum of Literacy Learning.” I had no idea how much depth could be put into the questioning I was using with my students. This was something I knew I would instantly need to learn more about and begin using in my classroom. This questioning helps promote higher order thinking and allows my students to learn better comprehension strategies. We continued to learn comprehension strategies, specifically focusing on activating background knowledge, questioning, making inferences, summarizing and synthesizing, and visualizing. Through several course texts, we were given many strategies to use with our students. I keep the book, “Strategies that Work” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2007), in my classroom so that I can look back at ideas when I plan to teach a given strategy.

I really enjoyed learning how to complete interactive read alouds with my students. This strategy allows me to plan ahead and focus on only a couple important ideas. Normally, I would complete a read aloud with my students and discuss any text feature that stood out to me while reading. I was trying to get too much in during a short time. I have now learned that my students can benefit from focusing on smaller pieces at a time. We can always go back and reread a story to talk about a different feature. This is very different from how I used to complete my interactive read alouds. I also enjoyed learning about book clubs. I did not give my first grade students enough credit in the past. I felt that I had to be fully in charge of everything going on at every moment. Now, I can see that my students bring so much knowledge to our group time and they are more than capable to completing conversations about various texts with one another. I merely need to facilitate their discussion, but they are given the power to discuss what stands out to them. It is amazing how much I have been able to learn from and about my students during book talks.

I have learned about several assessment strategies for my learners at risk. The IRI (Roe & Burns, 2010) is an excellent resource for assessment strategies to use with these students. To fully understand the IRI, I worked with a student who was considered at risk academically. Using the IRI, I was able to focus on specific issues, as well as monitor the student’s progress. I thought the IRI would be an overwhelming tool for an entire class setting, but individually it is a great tool for monitoring progress and pushing my students along.

I have learned so much more about teaching writing to my students. I have discovered how closely related reading and writing are. In the past I have taught these subjects separately. Reading time was for reading and writing was for writing. I quickly realized I was wrong and these two subjects needed to be integrated. I began by looking at areas of the school day where these could be intertwined. I found that it was not as hard as it seemed. I could easily have my students use their writing time to write about the text they were reading. We could spiral this off in a million directions always finding something different to write about. The students love the opportunity to write about what they are reading. I love the opportunity to see what my students comprehend from what they are reading. It is really helping me to eliminate some of the stress I had about getting it all done. I am a more confident writing teacher now. We also completed projects on different genres. This helped me to take a closer look at several genres. Each person completed their own inquiry into a genre and shared it with one another. Completing a genre project gave me a lot of insight to teaching about this. I received several useful tools from my colleagues, such as graphic organizers and worksheets. I will be able to use these tools to teach my students about different genres.

Through our internship in literacy development I was given a lot of time to reflect and look back at each of the courses I have taken with Cabrini. We completed a professional reading log where we looked back at fifteen professional books and five literacy-related periodicals. We had to provide two-paragraph annotations and appropriate citations for each professional material used. It helped me to understand why each of these texts was important to me as a reading specialist. There are so many theoretical ideas and theory-based strategies that I can learn from and use in my classroom. The use of ongoing reading will help me to stay fresh and current with best practices. I had the opportunity to complete a collaborative review of practice where I wrote about and displayed a project showing how I used to teach something and how I teach it now. This was proof that I have already begun changing my teaching strategies based on my learning from Cabrini.

I have learned so much useful information about English language learners. During my teaching I have not been faced with this struggle to this point. I feel confident that I am prepared to teach these students because of the materials I have received. I plan to keep the materials I have gained close at hand so I can look back and refresh myself on which strategies might work best. I enjoyed the opportunity to complete a cultural profile where we each looked at a certain culture closely. My eyes were opened to why certain cultures act the way they do. I did not used to think about cultural backgrounds affecting the way students think in the classroom. I will have a lot more empathy for my students when I understand how their cultural background can affect their behaviors in school. We also completed a thematic unit for a content area partnership. During this project, we worked on creating a unit for a secondary content class. We were asked to revisit the use of before, during, and after activities as we focused in on completing an entire unit. This project forced me to leave my comfort zone and really think out of the box as I had to work with a secondary class. This is something I was completely unfamiliar with, but I realized that although the activities needed to be geared toward secondary students, the ideas around the activities were not very different from what I am doing with my first grade students on a daily basis.

To conclude where my journey has brought me thus far, I have looked at my classroom not only as a learning environment for students, but also a comfortable place to meet with my colleagues and share the knowledge I have gained. My colleagues are aware of the wealth of resources I have. They are comfortable coming to my classroom and looking through resources that may benefit them. I have a filing cabinet drawer full of materials I have gained during my time with Cabrini. My professional materials are also easily accessible to all of my colleagues. I see myself becoming a professional leader.

New ideas are constantly being presented and I will work to implement as many strategies in my classroom. I have found a new teacher inside of myself that is motivated and willing to provide my students with the most support I possibly can. I am eager to continue seeking out new professional materials and workshops that will help me to teach my students.

References

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