

Daniel Bell

Foundation Reflection Journals

9/19/07 – 10/31/07

EDCC 541: Foundations of Education

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Journal #1: Sociological and Historical Foundations of Education

Reflection of 8/29's Readings and Discussions

I entered education because of and with many preconceptions including, but not limited to, the idea that I'd be a hot commodity owing to the fact that I'm a young, white male, that teachers are subjected to a constant battle with their administrations, that private school systems pay less than public school systems, and that special education is a highly understaffed specialization. As I said, these were preconceived ideas that I'd garnered from many different sources: some educated on the subject, others speculative. Our first class, and the accompanying readings shed a lot of light onto these preconceived ideas for me.

First of all, especially through the readings, I found that I was partially correct about my demographic being a high sought after one. I had thought that that idea was true across the board, but no – it appears to be only mostly true in terms of elementary school. Secondly, in terms of administrations, whether they are local, state, or federal, I have to say that I found the amount of bureaucratic organizations, like those included in SPA, to be initially quite daunting and frustrating. I say that knowing that these groups and administrations are there partially to assist teachers, but in my experience the more groups that oversee, regulate, and otherwise push papers around for any given profession essentially make it more difficult for that profession to get it's job done in the most successful manner. Third, it seems that the stigma of pay in terms of public versus private really depends on the area, the district, and the amount of funding available. Lastly, it seems that yes, special education is a field that is hurting for qualified, passionate professionals. I am only too happy to be a part of it.

Reflection of 9/5's Readings and Discussions

I found certain portions of this week's discussions and readings to be inspiring and reinforcing of my passion to be teacher, while other portions caused me to be a bit more introspective and self-critical than I had expected.

First, I was happy to read and hear that, according the chart on page 6 of *The Foundations of American Education*, "Teachers Get America's Vote of Confidence." I never realized that we were valued above the military and doctors, though I thought including lawyers in that study was just asking for a loss.

Next, in regards to the race of American educators, I was surprised to learn about the overwhelming majority of white teachers. I hope that minorities can and do find a stronger presence in schools sooner than later because the number of minority students is undeniably rising and they need representation in the classroom.

Continuing, in response to a comment made in class about an English teacher who thought that IQ levels are black and white – smart and dumb – I'm glad to already be very conscious that this is simply not true. That's one of the most important things I had to realize right off the bat from working at my school because even though my students have LDs, they are by no means stupid. They are just as intelligent as their peers in public school, they just learn differently.

Lastly, one thing the *Effective Teaching Methods* readings brought up that caused me to reflect on my own teaching methods was that speaking style is one aspect of being an effective teacher. I realized that I can be a "complicated" speaker and that that is something I need to work on to be more effective.

Reflection of 9/12's Readings and Discussions

After our lively discussion this week, a few key things struck me: bonuses, diversity, and bilingualism.

First, I am torn between the two sides of the “should bonuses be used as a recruitment incentive for educators?” It is true; I am not in this for the money. However, I’ll use a recent example that happened at my school to convey my slight hypocrisy on that previous statement. A co-worker of mine was recently “forced” to miss a weekend cycling event that he paid for because of an unforeseen and altogether not-completely-necessary school obligation, which he was not compensated for. I would have demanded compensation or I would not have stayed that weekend and missed the event.

Second, diversity was discussed in the readings and in the class. I always equated diversity simply to race, but now I see that that is not the whole story with diversity. I do believe, though, that in terms of race, I am not personally burdened with that issue because my school is 90% African American. I see that my real diversity issue is actually gender, though not in the typical male favoring male way. I actually find that I have less sympathy for the ‘problems’ of the teenage males that I teach as opposed to the females, whom I feel the need to be nicer and politer too. I’ll just try and not let that get in the way of my classes.

Next, I am most definitely in favor of teaching all children to be bilingual. No matter how Americans want to slice it, English just isn’t the only common language in our country. And until we have universal translators on hand, I think teaching all children Spanish as well at an early age is by no means a bad thing.

Journal #2: Governance and Support of American Education

Reflection of 9/19's Readings and Discussions

Several things jumped out at me during this week's readings and discussions. There were interesting terms thrown around in regards to the social and ethical implications of education.

First, I found the idea of reconstructionism fascinating. Johnson, et al. (p. 98, 2005) describes this not only as a reproduction of society, but a means to positively change society. I'd very much like to be this kind of teacher and I believe that my content areas, Video Production and Music, are a great platform for this. Hopefully I can guide my students to produce videos and music that both connects with and conveys ways to help our surrounding community.

Next, our discussion of meritocracy really made me reflect on how I scrutinize and assess my students. Johnson, et al. (p. 115, 2005), basically describes meritocracy as the old adage of one being able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. I've found, however, that this just does not hold true in our society. For instance, I know and am well aware that I was born into quite a privileged middle-class life where I had no real worries or struggles compared to many Americans. And I mostly went to college because it was simply expected of someone in my situation. But the more I get to know my students, the more I understand that many don't have it as easy as I did. However, I still expect the most of each of my students, no matter their background. I try to find ways for them to see that meritocracy can possibly apply to them in some way or another.

Lastly, I was comforted to hear that good classroom management, according to Marzano (2003) is surely made, not born. I don't think I have poor management, but I know I need a lot of work.

Reflection of 9/26's Readings and Discussions

This week, classroom management took the spotlight of readings and discussions and it definitely made me look at myself as a teacher and as a classroom manager.

First, we discussed the differences between rules and procedures, neither of which have I had a problem creating or implementing so far. However, I have already realized that I do have a problem disciplining, or, in other words, really following through with the consequences I've set forth for some of my rules. I believe this has to do with the fact that I find I'm more comfortable teaching when I feel that the students are on my side. What I mean is that I often feel that administering the standard consequences for rule breaking often makes the students bitter, resentful, and spiteful (because, really, who likes admitting that they were wrong?). So, instead, I try and have them listening to me because they want to, not because they must or because I tell them to.

Next, Borich (2007), discussed the stages of group development, something I have been having more issues with than I thought I would. A lot of this, for me, seems to come down to group dynamic. I have a couple classes that are just great; everyone seems to respect one another and work well together. But in one class in particular, I have several fairly apathetic students and one that is notoriously disliked for his inability to prevent any and every thought from being spoken aloud. Borich's and our discussion about these stages, however, gave me some insight into how this development progresses and that I may still be in the 'norming' or even 'storming' stage.

Finally, Marzano (2003) mentioned how important parent contact can be to classroom management. This is something that is not only encouraged, it is required for our advisory (homeroom) students. And what a difference it makes!

Journal #3: Philosophical and Curricular Foundations of Education

Reflection of 10/3's Readings and Discussions

This particular week was rife with terms and philosophies that are certainly relevant and useful to my classroom. These include the ideas of direct and indirect instruction, a 'thinking curriculum,' and learner attitudes.

I recently gave a lesson on the standard shot types used in film and television production. And then I moved straight on to a creative project that was meant to utilize those shot types. I later a bit disappointed that the student's work did not reflect my expectations set from the initial lesson. I see now that I was merging two different types of instruction too quickly and haphazardly. The initial lesson was direct instruction in that, as Borich (2007) puts it, I was teaching facts and rules. However, I did not take the time for the review and practice and more review that Borich shows. I jumped right into indirect instruction in that the project was creative, abstract, and concept based, yet I didn't give the students the initial grounding in the rules and facts, as I should have.

Next, I try hard to be a 'thinking curriculum' instructor because I try to always have my students asking "why?" Even when I am showing a film or television example, I devise a series of critical questions that must be answered after the viewing so that my students don't simply feel that it is just time to relax and turn their brains off.

Lastly, during our Johnson, et al. (2005) discussion, the idea of 'learner attitudes' was brought up and I found this relevant to me in that I use my student's attitudes as a management style: if they have a "bad" attitude towards anyone or anything in class I let them know they are being disrespectful, not "bad," which hopefully lets them know I respect them and that I view them as an adult, not as a "bad" child.

Reflection of 10/10's Readings and Discussions

This week I presented my field experiences with Rachel Grossman, which was a very helpful project. There were also many ideas I found interesting in our discussions.

First, in terms of my field experiences and presentation, it was definitely helpful to take some time away from my classroom and observe other teachers – especially in my school. Since Chelsea School caters specifically to students with learning disabilities and I have either had, or will have, the students of the classes I observed, it was great to see how other teachers handle our students. I need to do (and do plan to do) some more observations on my own time because I walked away with new and improved ideas about classroom management, grading, teaching styles, and ways to approach teaching.

As for the woman that presented next on the bilingual school in Georgetown, I was initially amazed by the whole idea, especially the class in which the kids created what they wanted to learn. I frankly thought that that was an awesome idea; how could the kids complain about a lesson they helped create?! However, I can see how this can become problematic in that it is difficult for a child to know what they really need to learn in school and that if they were presented with a lesson they did not create, they may be resistant to completing it.

As for our discussions on our readings, Johnson, et al. (2005) discussed how Monitorial schools, with class sizes of hundreds, mostly closed down by 1840. That made me wonder if our current public school class large sizes of, I believe, between 20-40 students still have some effect on the stigma that our public schools are sub-standard. For instance, I just observed (for another class) a 4th grade class and even with two teachers the class was very difficult to manage.

Reflection of 10/17's Readings and Discussions

Due to missing most of class because of the event at my school, I will be discussing the readings regarding the legalities of education.

I actually wasn't as intimidated as I thought I might be regarding the legalities. I have a habit of not learning a lesson until I've made a mistake and I was a bit afraid that one mistake I made in the classroom would mean my job, especially since I am a novice teacher with almost no classroom experience. However, the chapter regarding legal matters in Johnson, et al. (2005) did actually help put my mind at ease.

First of all, with all of the legislation regarding special education, including IDEA, Section 504, and EAHCA, I was beginning to wonder if all of that legislation just made it harder for me to do my job as a special educator. But comparing each one made me realize that these pieces of legislation are why I am even able to have this job. Because of EAHCA and IDEA, students with LDs and IEPs can get funding from the state to attend a non-public school that caters specifically to them.

I never actually knew specifically that, as Johnson, et al. (2005) discusses, the Federal Government doesn't directly oversee public and non-public education. I am currently feeling the heat from the state; MSDE is coming to site-visit Chelsea School next month and I really need to make sure I am up to date on my individual IEP goals and objectives and I have to be sure I know exactly where I am in my curricula for each class.

Another idea that Johnson, et al. (2005) discussed was that of academic freedom. I do understand how it is a controversial subject, especially since parents want their children to learn what they are supposed to learn. However, I sometimes feel very limited

by my curriculum and would like to believe that I have the academic freedom to break from it where necessary.

Reflections on 10/24's Activities and Readings

Our guest speaker this week was a wonderful asset to the class and gave me a lot of ideas. Not only did I simply enjoy her lesson, I was inspired to utilize some of her strategies for myself. I very much liked how she structured the lesson; how we began with individual work, moved onto cooperative learning, and then group presentations. I actually have a lesson coming up involving entertainment industry production roles, which initially involved mostly direct instruction using a Power Point presentation. I did a kind of pre-test of the lesson with one of my classes and found that the presentation alone is pretty dry. Now, however, I have a plethora of ideas to spice the lesson up, make it more interactive, and utilize more than one learning style.

As for the readings, Borich (2007) paralleled our guest well. I've been using 'cooperative learning' for many of my lessons thus far, but in a sometimes arbitrary, haphazard way. I haven't always been clear about why I'm using it and how to get the most out of it. This chapter very much helped clarify how both myself and my students can get more out of the collaborative process. For instance, even though I've been assigning certain production roles while my students produce their video projects, it never occurred to me to give them cooperative roles for assessing each other after the project is completed. I attempted to do a full-class critique, and while several students always had a lot to say, others said nothing, and now I see that, if given a specific job to do, I can get more complete assessments from all of my students, not just some.

Lastly, in terms of Johnson, et al. (2005), the readings on educational philosophies was very enlightening. I have to say that I can relate more to the Pragmatism philosophies

than the others because, basically, I also believe that what works, works – inside the classroom and out.

References

Borich, G. D. (2007). *Effective teaching methods: Research-based practice*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Ltd.

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Marzano, R. J., Marzano, J. S., Pickering, D. J. (2003). *Classroom management that works: Research-based strategies for every teacher*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.