

Reflective Teaching Practice

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Teaching was one of the things I told myself I would never do. Growing up, I had a negative experience with school. I didn't like it one bit. It felt restrictive, and rigid and I didn't feel like I had the freedom to be who I was. I was a very independent kid who didn't like being told what to do, so naturally school wasn't my favorite place. However, jumping to 2014, I started working in an afterschool program through the Y. I loved the kids I worked with, and strived to be a mentor for them. I desired to make their experience in the program a great one. This sparked something in me that I didn't realize was there. A passion for leadership. I still dismissed the thought of teaching, though, As it still left a bad taste in my mouth.

The summer after I started working at the Y, I was provided the opportunity to lead the 5-7 year old arts camp for the summer. I had to come up with the curriculum (something I had no idea how to do) and was ultimately in charge of these kids all summer. Having a background in art and theatre, I embraced it, even though it scared me half to death. What I took away from that summer was the confidence that I had made a difference in these kids lives. The smiles on their faces as we performed at the end of each week, and how proud they were of the art they created inspired me to want to keep going; but I knew I couldn't be a camp counselor forever. That's when I started to seriously consider teaching. Because I knew that it was possible to give kids the opportunity to explore and have the freedom that I didn't feel like I had in school. An opportunity to grow into their full potential, and an opportunity to LOVE school. I never looked back after that.

When I started in the education department at Columbia, I hit the ground running. I had no idea about anything that had to do with teaching up to that point. I had coasted by in school, not really caring about grades, resenting that I had to be there. But in this department, I realized that if I really wanted to make a difference in kids lives, in the future, I needed to take it seriously. It took me a while to reconstruct my work ethic and learn how to study. But the part of the coursework that really made an impact on me, and solidified my understanding was being out in the field. Being in the classroom, reflecting on it, talking about it, being active in it, and making mistakes and learning from them, helped me to relate what I read in books to real life. I am an active learner, I need to be apart, to explore, to witness, and to see examples in order to fully understand and soak in the information. For example, we spent a whole semester and a half talking about Reggio Emilia, this wonderful, magical way of teaching that seemed too daunting to even think about bringing into the American education system. It was this far off thing, somewhere out in the distance, beyond my grasp. That was, until I actually saw it with my own eyes, and experienced it firsthand. Then, and only then, could I fully take in what it really, truly was, and how beautiful and impactful it is. I am so thankful for all of the field work that this program provided, all of the hands on experiences, meaningful discussions and reflection. Without it, I don't think I would be where I am today.

Reflecting has become a huge part of my philosophy as a teacher. It is a way to look back at what I have done, to think about what I can do differently and to be better. Reflecting is ultimately a way to look at my experiences and figure out, or meditate on ways that I can be better; be better for myself, for my students, for the community and for my coworkers. It has given me a deeper level of understanding of why/how I do things and how

to better suit my students. The amount of reflection that was encouraged throughout both practicums and course work has helped me become more intune with my teaching practices and disposition. It has shown me what I need to work on, and has made me more confident about trying new things. The ability to reflect has impacted me greatly. It has taught me to explain what, how and why I do certain things. It is still something I am working on and will continue to do throughout my life.

I will take all of this with me into my teaching career and beyond. It will lead me forward as a teacher by providing a strong base to continue to grow on. This program has helped me create a strong foundation that will help carry me through the rest of my days. My days of learning will never come to an end. As a teacher, I will continue to immerse myself in learning and reflecting. Having this base will help me to be flexible, to try in different ways, and to work *with* my students. Having the mindset to continually learn will help me to have the humility and grace to learn from, and with my students. It's easy to think that I have everything figured out. But the truth is, I don't have everything figured out, and I probably never will. By challenging myself as the teacher, I challenge my students as well. Reflecting on this process helps me become a more effective teacher and to key in on my own learning process as well as my students. The fieldwork that we were able to experience and be apart of has helped me to be confident and ready to try new and different ideas. I have gotten to see many different teaching styles, and ways of doing things. This has helped me start to shape my own teaching practices and what I value most. As a teacher I am open to new ideas, and incorporating multimodal ways for diverse learners.

I will continue to use what I have learned to become an effective teacher. Like I said before, I continue to reflect and be open to new ideas and ways of doing things. I will encourage my students to reflect as well, and to have meaningful discussions, promoting curiosity and exploring new topics together. I have learned how to put together an effective classroom that has a flow and a purpose in order to promote a relaxed, comfortable learning environment that is welcoming to all students and families. I will try to incorporate elements of the community and involve parents and families in any way that I can. I will encourage reflection, from myself and also from my students. I will be ready to involve my students in the process of learning together. I will welcome all ideas and encourage questions and curiosity.

Everything that I have learned will provide a strong foundation to becoming an effective teacher. Being an active learner has helped me to engage with students in different ways rather than just teacher directed activities. I want my students to be involved in all parts of the process. From gathering information, to giving directions about an activity, and decorating our classroom. They are as much a part of the process as I am, and I want them to feel that they have a voice, that they are heard and that they are appreciated.

By doing this I will create an environment that is responsive to cultural and linguistic needs, is mutually respectful, and supports positive social relationships. I want my students to feel welcomed and like they are an important asset to our classroom. My hope is to celebrate every child and their individual strengths. By celebrating their strengths, the children are being acknowledged and appreciated for who they are. This sets the stage for high expectations for everyone, including the teacher. Holding the students to high expectations helps to continually challenge them and to do their best. By celebrating their individual strengths, they know they are appreciated and

therefore will feel more confident entering challenging situations or work in the classroom. I will create an environment that is responsive to cultural and linguistic needs by involving parents and community within. BY creating an environment that is accepting to parents and community, it allows them to enter into a dialogue with the teacher and students and bring more of the culture and community into the classroom. This supports positive social relationships because it is an example for the students to see relationships form between their family and community with their teacher. Two things that can become very separated if not careful to involve families and the community. By valuing the students culture, as the teacher, I am showing them that they are seen, that they are important and that their families are important to their learning, socially, emotionally and academically.

I have learned so much in this teacher preparation program. It has challenged me to be better, to reflect more and to be flexible and accepting of all learners. It has provided me with a strong foundation to start my teaching career. I am confident going into my first year of teaching because I have a solid foundation to back me up. Do I think it will be easy? No way. But I have the tools to help me get through challenges that I will face, hurdles that I will jump over and walls that I will have to climb. Over the last two years I have gone through tremendous growth, and I know that I can encourage my students to do the same, to become lifelong learners that are excited and eager to learn and explore and be curious. To feel confident to try new and challenging things, and to feel supported through it all.

My goal as a teacher is to create comfortable, supportive environment that is challenging, engaging, and filled with conversation and curiosity. I believe my time in the education program at Columbia College Chicago has prepared me to do that in an effective way that suits all types of diverse learners. It has prepared me to welcome the challenges of teaching with open arms and has prepared me to fight for my students, their community and for myself. I am eager to begin and to learn even more.