My Learning Journey: Summary of Reflection Process

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EDUC 361: Exceptional Students, Special Needs, and Inclusive Schooling

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October 22, 2014
Reflection and the related metacognition are important parts of the educational process. They are important because so many unique and wonderful things happen within a classroom each and every day and as teachers we should use reflection as a tool to aid our professional practice. Over the course of the past few weeks during the inclusive education course I have had the opportunity to participate in regular reflections and metacognition. I have learned so many exciting things about inclusive education that I will carry with me through the remainder of my pre-service teacher education experiences as well into the professional practice within my classroom.

I believe that the process of reflecting has been critical in helping me to continue to build my professional practice as I think it has given me the opportunity to take a step back and really think “Ok, I have read about a great inclusive education teaching strategy, but why do I think it is important and what effect do I think it will have on my practicum classroom in the coming months and more importantly my teaching career?” I also like the fact that regularly reflecting on interesting things I was learning about made me realize there are so many diverse and unique approaches one can take to meeting the needs of their students that will help them to be successful and learn to their full potential. I feel reflecting has given me a continued appreciation for the timeless statement “A teacher can never say that’s it…I have learned everything I need to learn” since life in the classroom is not static and there are so many new things you can learn each day. Through reflection I realized that I actually did not know as much about inclusive
education as I thought I did coming into the class as many of the new ideas I was exposed to I had never heard of before.

Now what you are probably wondering is what are some of the new things I think I learned through the process of reflecting during my inclusive education class? One of the most important lessons I learned that really impacted my inclusive education beliefs is it is not an insurmountable task to have a truly inclusive classroom if you take a step back and realize inclusive education sometimes involves finding universal support strategies which effectively meet the needs of all students within your classroom. For instance, you can use differentiated instruction as an effective support strategy to meet the needs of many students. I have gained significant insight into how important it is to begin the differentiated instruction process by getting to know each of your students learning preferences and interests. I have come to understand that the first step I must take in order to effectively differentiate my instructional practice for my students is to involve them in the process of telling me how they learn best. The most effective way I think I can involve my students in this process is to have them complete learning preference inventories and individual interest forms. These forms and inventories will give me excellent insight into understanding how each of my students learns best.

Another inclusive education strategy which I learned about that I find particularly intriguing is the sandbox behavioral technique. The sandbox behavioral technique involves a young student being given a portable sandbox with small characters/toys inside the sandbox to play with. Usually the student using the sandbox has recently had several instances of less than desirable classroom behavior. The student is then allowed to play with the characters within the
sandbox in whatever way they see fit (without judgement or interference from an adult). Many times a student playing with the sandbox will actually use it as an opportunity to work out difficulties within their life. I find the sandbox behavior technique intriguing because it seems like it would foster independence amongst students to become problem solvers. Fostering independence amongst students is absolutely essential to the inclusive classroom so that students have coping mechanisms for when times get tough.

A third idea I feel has had a significant impact on my professional practice is that a teacher must create an exemplary learning environment where all students feel like they can be themselves. I think an excellent way in which I can make my classroom into an exemplary learning environment is through including students in the development of a set of classroom expectations which we will all follow. I think it is critical to involve students in the expectation setting process because everyone in the classroom has a right and a responsibility to know how we can be respectful to others and learn and grow together. Involving students in the expectation setting process will also make for easier conflict resolution when undesirable student behavior occurs because the students will know what expectation they were not following and what action must be taken as a result of their behavior.

One area of inclusive education I would like to continue to explore further throughout the remainder of my pre-service teacher education training is how to provide students with organizational tactics to set themselves up for successful learning. While I do feel cognitive credit cards and consistent daily classroom agendas will go a long way in helping students to develop these organization skills, I still would like to learn more about ways in which I can help
my students develop good organizational habits. I also still openly wonder how can I provide my students with the tools and knowledge to self-evaluate which learning support strategies make the most meaningful difference in positively impacting their learning? In some cases students may have several equally useful learning strategies to choose from and I look forward to working with the students to figure out what strategies help them learn best and reach their full potential.

Teaching and learning are both a journey. It is not about where either start (and we know for sure they never end) but it is about all of the marvellous ideas and experiences you have along the way. Through the processes of reflection and metacognition I truly learned what it means to develop a reflective professional practice as you will always continue to be exposed to new things that may help you better meet your students’ needs. I am so very thankful to my instructor Vicki Glass for her incredible insights regarding inclusive education and some of her suggestions for inclusive education strategies have forever changed the way in which I will carry out teaching in my educational career😊.