

Final Synthesis Paper

“On Teaching”

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After completing a semester in the School of Education at the College of William and Mary I have begun to develop my own philosophy on teaching. With experience in practicum settings, I have witnessed a variety of teaching methods that I will employ in my first grade classroom in northern Virginia. As I begin to teach in my classroom, I will always be reminded of the different theories and philosophies that were presented in the Educational Psychology Course.

One major idea to keep in mind for my classroom is that schooling is meant to prepare students for the future. Educational systems are present in the United States to prepare students with knowledge that they will need in order to succeed in the global economy. I agree with Carl Bereiter's that there are four types of learning, personal, direct application, basic skills, and background knowledge (Bass, 5/3/2007). Students develop intellectually and socially throughout their years in school. As an educator I will commit myself to educating my students in a safe and friendly classroom. Beyond needing to know specific content information, I will also need pedagogical content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge (11). It is important that I understand how to teach my students in effective ways.

Schooling in the United States is regulated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, by state standards such as the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), and locally by district curriculum guidelines. Beyond requiring teachers to teach to preplanned curriculums, I will also have to be licensed before I have a classroom, because research has indicated that teachers have a powerful effect on student achievement

(13). Teachers are now held accountable for their students' performance on standardized exams, and students are accountable to learn material in order to be able to graduate from High School.

As a teacher I will be presented with a variety of curriculum guidelines and standards to implement in the first grade classroom. One important thing that I will use to help my students reach the objectives will be effective planning of instruction. While specifying the objectives for my students I will incorporate Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy which dominates classroom lesson plans (Bass, 2/13/2007). The objectives will include behavioral and content information and will be listed in a behavior-content matrix. Beyond remembering and understanding content, I want my first grade students to be able to apply what they know, analyze information, create their own knowledge, and evaluate themselves. An example of an application objective I plan to address in science instruction is Standard 1.11 which states that students will conduct investigations in which predictions are based on patterns of observations rather than random guesses. I want my students to use information that they learn in the classroom and relate it to real world experiences.

Beyond focusing on the different cognitive levels, I will also incorporate Mager's Behavioral Objectives. I believe that informing students and parents about my expectations is important. I will select topics that students will need to know, specify the objectives, prepare activities for student to reach objectives, design assessments to measure the objectives, and reevaluate my lessons to ensure that they

align with the objectives (L. Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, 406). Not only does it keep me accountable to my class, it also allows the students to know whether they are fulfilling the requirements. Students will know what my terminal expectations are, what conditions they will be evaluated in, and how they will be asked to perform (408). For example, students will know that they will have to correctly write their ten spelling words from memory each week during an in-class quiz.

At the beginning of each school year I will have a new class of students. The children in my first grade class will be between five and seven years old. In general the students will be compliant and eager to please adults, have short attention spans, require close supervision, and break rules because they forgot them (374). One key thing to remember is that students in the same grade and class will exhibit different levels of development. Regardless of the educational levels of the student, varying levels of maturity, cognitive development, and social interactions will lead to a classroom full of unique individuals. Under Piaget's theory of intellectual development, students in first grade may fall into two different stages. Some of the students may be preoperational and have a thought process that is dominated by observations and perceptions. These students will face rapid growth in their language abilities, but will face problems when dealing with abstract concepts (34-45). They will likely not be able to solve conservation tasks nor will they understand reversibility. The preoperational students may exhibit egocentrism and will not be able to understand that other people may see the world differently than they do.

Others students at the concrete operational stage will be able to take on different perspectives, solve conservation tasks, classify objects, order objects, and infer relationships between objects. One particular SOL that targets spatial ability is 1.15 in which students describe the proximity of objects in space (near, far, close by, below, above, up, down, beside, and next to). The first grade SOL expands on K.12, in which students are asked to describe locations of one object relative to another and are not challenged to identify location in space.

Another relevant theory of development is Vygotsky's sociocultural view which emphasizes the influence of social interactions and language on the development of individuals (45). This theory focuses on the fact that students need to interact with others in order to acquire understanding and develop abilities. Children in first grade will have varying degrees of development. Some students may require more assistance than others on different classroom activities, but through scaffolding (modeling, questions, prompts, and cues) the students will begin to actively learn new concepts (50). One major thing that I will need to take into consideration regarding development of my students is that their cultural background will impact the interactions they have in the classroom. By getting to know my students I will be able to gauge whether they do not understand or whether they just need help transitioning into the school environment.

Erik Erikson, another theorist, focused on Psychosocial Development. Based on Erikson's stages of development, students in my elementary class would likely be

in the Industry vs. Inferiority stage (70-79). Students will begin to develop feelings of competence due to successes on tasks in class. An important goal as a teacher would be to ensure my students do not develop feelings of inferiority due to failures. I would try to work individually with students who were struggling in order to set reasonable and attainable personal goals. For example, if students enter my classroom reading books at DRA level 1, I would work with them to improve step by step rather than giving them failing marks for not reading at higher DRA levels.

One particular aspect of development that may be relatively similar across all the students would be moral development. External morality, Piaget's concept of moral development, provides a view that rules are fixed and permanent and enforced by authority figures (81). This idea directly mirrors Kohlberg's preconventional theory of moral development. Students in my class would exhibit egocentric moral reasoning. The students may not fully understand the rules but they know acts lead to consequences (Punishment-Obedience) and that exchanging favors can benefit the self (Market Exchange) (82). Some things that I will do when creating my classroom rules is allow students to help list the rules, state the rules positively, and make sure everyone understands why the rules exist (Bass, 4/19/2007). I will also implement a reward system for good behavior and a response cost system for bad behavior. For example, my students will earn tickets or stickers each day for their behavior, these can then be used to buy treats from a classroom closet. The students that do not behave in class will be warned verbally initially, next they will lose privileges such as

computer time during centers, and finally a note will be sent home if the problems continue.

One of the most influential theories for my lessons would be Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. Each student will have individual strengths and weaknesses within the eight different intelligences. Some students may be logical-mathematical oriented while others may be spatially gifted (98). The diversity of each learner will be due to intelligence, experiences, socioeconomic status, gender, and culture (chapter 4). Some students are visual learners, some kinesthetic, some verbal and others tactile, some independent and others social (101). Based on Gardner's theory I would have to use creativity to create lessons that target multiple dimensions and allow students to learn in a variety of ways. For example students learning about the relationship of seasonal change and weather to activities of people would take turns coming up with different recreational activities, work activities, and clothing/accessories that are involved with different times of year. Each student would then demonstrate an activity with props, act out the activity in charade fashion, or draw a picture on the whiteboard. The rest of the class would then identify the appropriate season or time of year that is involved.

My main goal as an instructor is to pick activities that allow students to comprehend material, no matter what type of learner they may be. First graders often learn by participating in hands on activities so I will arrange my classroom into groups of desks that can be used for center stations (375). I will also leave some

empty space at the front of the room for the class to come together and discuss activities on a thinking carpet. In my classroom I will implement behaviorist strategies by reinforcing good behaviors (168). The social cognitive theory will also be used in my classroom. I will pair modeling of activities with verbal rationalizations to help students learn different concepts. Beyond just modeling behavior, I will help students develop their abilities to self-regulate themselves (186). Although I strongly believe that teachers' behaviors are observed and learned by students, I also believe in the cognitive perspective of learning. Students are mentally active in their exploration of the world, learning through new experiences depends on previous understanding, new understanding is constructed, social environments enhance learning, and learning requires practice and feedback (Bass, 3/27/2007).

In my classroom, I plan to implement a variety of teaching strategies. I will use enthusiasm and care in my classroom. With my instructional objectives, I will set high expectations for myself and my students. I plan to be very organized and set up different routines for the students to follow when arriving and leaving school. For example, the students will develop self-regulation when unpacking their things and putting their bags and coats in their cubbies before the class starts (186). I will also have activities ready for students to start on each day while I take attendance, lunch orders, and go over any announcements. I plan to use questioning in my instruction and will make sure that every student is called on; I will provide prompting for students that need additional help with a question, and allow students sufficient time

to think before I call on them (419). Students will also regularly receive positive and effective feedback on their verbal comments and written work.

As a means to gauge learning, I will implement the OPIE model of teaching. Students will know objectives, be pre-assessed on their understanding, receive instruction and learning activities, and be evaluated based on the objectives (Bass, 1/30/2007). Since I will be working with younger elementary school students I will use direct instruction to teach basic math operations because it can be broken down into specific steps. I will also use guided discovery in the classroom. Students will carry out science investigations in which they make observations and then use their observations to find patterns and create conceptual definitions (430). My first graders will also be able to do cooperative learning activities in which the class will be given directions and the freedom to work through activities as groups (432). For example, my students will work in pairs to solve math word problems.

As a teacher I will work to create a positive learning environment. I believe that a teacher should work to show their students that they care about each and every person in the classroom and the school. Beyond caring and respecting students, teachers should set positive expectations for the students. With the variety of learning strategies in my classroom, my role will vary. At times I will be a facilitator and reinforcer for learning. Other times I will serve as a mentor and counselor. The fact is, teaching requires flexibility and creativity and although I will have a series of

curriculum objectives for students to learn, I want the students to be involved in the learning process.

By allowing students to become a part of the learning process, I will contribute to their motivation. Student motivation is affected by the characteristics of the students in the classroom, the teacher, the classroom environment, and instructional variables (353). I will involve my students in the learning by giving them the ability to set goals, monitor their goals, and implement different strategies to succeed. I will also promote an ordered and safe classroom that gives students freedom to share thoughts without facing criticism. Students will also be motivated to learn because introductions to lessons will be interesting and attract their attention (353). I will try to link my lessons to real world experiences and involve the students in activities. Motivation can be divided into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (299). Students in my class will be extrinsically motivated to gain approval of their work with verbal praise, good grades, bonus time doing an activity that they enjoy (perhaps reading, working on the computer, or free time), and perhaps even as far as a prize for the student or party for the entire class based on all their hard work. Students would be internally motivated to learn about specific contents that they are interested in. For example, when learning about the life needs, habitat, and physical characteristics of animals (SOL 1.5), the students would be allowed to choose an animal that they want to learn about. Then the students would find facts about the animal and share their findings with the class. By allowing the students autonomy in the activity and

evoking their curiosity, they will become motivated to learn about something they are interested in.

Beyond motivating my students, I will also have to assess whether they learned. Increasing learning is a primary function of assessment and I will use informal and formal assessment methods to evaluate my students (476). I will informally assess student understanding through observations of participation in group activities and class discussion. Formal assessment methods will include students' handwriting samples, quizzes, worksheets, reading ability, and writing samples. As I assess my students I will need to ensure that the assessment is valid and measures the learning objectives that students were supposed to learn. I would also want to make sure that my assessment is reliable, so that results are consistent across the class and the grade level (Bass, 4/26/2007).

With time I will create lessons and activities that can be used over and over again from year to year, but even with the ability to reuse lesson ideas I will need to reflect on my teaching abilities. Teachers need to evaluate their teaching methods and class activities on a regular basis. An activity that works well one year may not work the same in a classroom of different students. Although the curriculum and standards for the grade level will not change drastically each year, there will always be needs for self-evaluation. I will plan ahead for lessons, so that if one activity does not run the way I intended I have other options to use that day. I will also remain flexible with my class because the important thing is not that the students complete

every activity, but that they grow and learn. Through effective planning, organization, and understanding I will be able to help my first grade students learn new things. As I teach my students I will always implement developmental, behavioral, and cognitive theories in the classroom.