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Case Study

EDUC 340: Literacy and the Learner

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Part I

“All teachers are teachers of reading” is a truly relevant statement when analyzing education and literacy in the United States. This statement is directly evident and necessary in reference to identifying and implementing education strategies. It doesn't matter what subject you are teaching, the concept is clear, all teachers are teachers of reading. Some of my first memories as a child are reading with my parents before bedtime. Parents are often the first teachers we experience as children. Reading is the most important literacy for children to understand and accept, including writing and speaking. If children can learn to read cohesively and comprehensively they will benefit indefinitely. Learning is paramount and reading is necessary to maximize learning in all subjects. Throughout this semester the idea that teachers are teachers of reading has been very apparent. While shadowing Mrs. T. Hartmann's 6th grade visual arts class at Blevins Middle School, I observed multiple learning strategies being implemented, including close reading, CERC, and quick writing.

Our lives feature reading and literacy as the most important aspect of learning. Close reading is one strategy that can excel students reading comprehension. Close reading can assist with reading essays, journals, as well as painting identification in the arts. I have often struggled with reading comprehension. I could have used the CERC method to create a claim, research through reading, report my findings, and assess my readings, stimulating my brain, memory, and attention. Reading is a timeless art form that has been more so evident though this semester. This is not only the job of teacher but as well the job of the parents in our county. We as teachers need to understand that reading is the

transfer of knowledge and growth of the brain. In my own personal experience I feel the importance of reading and comprehension is paramount. Another essential element of literacy is writing. Utilizing proper writing learning strategies like CERC, quick write, and the text-based questions, are a great way to engage students in literacy. No matter what subject of teaching we are going into, we are all teachers of reading.

From the earliest memories I can remember reading or at least my parents reading to me. I think this is the of the deepest literacies and goes hand and hand with spoken language. Reading and comprehension is principal in early childhood. It is important to understand that the brain is a muscle and we need to exercise it daily. I can remember struggling to get through some readings, as many children do. According to Willis (2006) “The loss of native language ability, juggling skills, or learned academic material that is not practiced is the flip side of the brain’s growth response to learning. It is the ‘use it or lose it’ phenomenon”. These connections in the brain during early childhood are extremely important. This is a pivotal time in the development of the brain and needs to be stimulated. I feel as if I always struggled with reading. Reading excites brain growth and memory. The best way I have experienced to get proficient at anything is to repeat the process and practice over and over again. Repetition and making connections to the text are two learning strategies outlined in our class that will enhance memory and brain function. Another strategy for reading that brain attention draws from is student’s prior knowledge. According to Vacca (2011), “new knowledge, if it is to be learned and understood, must be integrated into existing knowledge” (p. 98). I now have a better understand of the importance of reading. Reading is foremost in learning and students need to exercise this part of the brain.

Part II

Reading literacy is extremely important and spans all subjects. Not only is it important for students to be able to read but comprehend the material in an intellectual manner, but as well be able to express themselves in writing. The art of reading is timeless and needs to be worked on a practiced everyday. Looking at my content area of art, reading is essential in the transfer of information. I was able to see the benefits of reading in art studies first hand in Dena. T. Hartmann's 6th grade visual arts class at Blevins Middle School. In her color and contrast lesson Mrs. T. Hartmann had each of the students research a specific artist. I observed many learning strategies in her classroom. In this research the students needed to identify elements of the artists life, style of painting, and media. Students used methods of research using books, Internet searches, and other to study their specific artist. During class we used the learning strategy of quick writing to summarize information from the artist. This allowed the students to organize the information in a cohesive manner. When helping students with this research I remember a student named Aiden needing help with his project. His project was on the painting "Starry Night" by Pablo Picasso. We began scrolling through a book on Picasso that Mrs. T. Hartmann had in her classroom. The first question that Aiden needed help with was the style of painting. He didn't know where to find it and wanted to Google the question, as many people do in this day and ago. I told him it's important to find the knowledge and be able to understand and remember where he found it. Mrs. T. Hartmann used this idea strategy of text dependent questions to draw specific answers out of the text. We began skimming through the book looking for the necessary information. After skimming for about five minutes hidden in the text was the period and

style of painting that Picasso became famous. We discussed Aiden's previous knowledge on Picasso's work. This was another example of how beneficial drawing from previous knowledge can be. Neito (2012) found that all good students education "uses their experiences as a basis for further learning; and helps them to develop into informed, critically aware, and empowered citizens" (p. 58). This was extremely satisfying to know that we searched for an answer to a question and solved it intellectually. I included questioning as my first student lead lesson for the semester. This was beneficial in getting the students to really dig deep and think about the reading. Another learning strategy that I used in class was the RAFT exercise. I addressed this in a creative writing format during the color unit. I created the writing assignment for my first set of three students to pick one color and write a letter to the rainbow. Two of my students wrote a letter to each other as pink and blue. The structure was rather loose and didn't get quite the creativity I was looking for. After the first exercise I decided to identify more constants for my second group and not leave the format so open. I chose for my students to write a letter as the color brown to the rainbow. I explained to them that they could be as creative as they want and write about whatever they want. The students seemed to be reserved in this writing assignment and didn't really want to open up. They didn't know what to write about and after reading my example to them, seemed to copy what I had written. This was a little disappointing but allowed me to learn that I needed to draw on something that was more relevant to them. Young students can be shy and afraid to really step outside their comfort zone.

This semester has been a great learning experience for me. Not only in the lecture but more so in the lab and recitation. Identifying positive teaching strategies and then

seeing them first hand applied was extremely beneficial. All of the strategies from class can be applied to the art classroom. The brilliant thing about these strategies is most of them not only apply to reading but can be functional in the analysis of painting and other art media. All classrooms teachers need to be sensitive to their students and their literacy levels. Practicing teaching different literacy strategies will benefit students of all reading levels. A close attention to students is paramount and they need to be pushed in comprehension and creativity. Text based questions and graphic organizers are great ways for students to take their time and read text carefully in a visual manor. If the time is taken to thoughtfully write lesson plans and assign readings, students will benefit copiously. These are lessons I will take with me for the rest of my learning and on to my career. Learning is timeless and great teachers are life learners.

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