

Reading Reflection 1: Teacher Reflexivity

In Ryan and Webster's (2019) article *Teacher Reflexivity: An Important Dimension of a Teacher's Growth*, reflective practices, reflexivity, and critical consciousness were discussed. Teachers and teacher candidates are often asked to reflect on their teaching practices but do so with an external outcome-based approach (Ryan & Webster, 2019). For example, a teacher might consider if the students were engaged in the lesson, if all the curriculum content was covered, or if there were any procedural issues with the lesson. The authors encourage teachers to consider a values and theory-based approach to reflection (Ryan & Webster, 2019). Reflexivity is when the intentions, values, and theories of an individual's teaching practice are also considered. The person doing the reflection considers their own role in the outcome and how they can improve their practices to better align with their beliefs.

In my practicum, I could reflect on my health lesson and say that I covered all the content that I wanted to. However, with a more reflexive lens, I could question whether rushing through the content aligns with my philosophy of teaching. When a student made a connection to the content, I did not delve deep into how this individual's experience was so important. It was a missed learning opportunity for everyone because I wanted to cover the curriculum content. If I could do that lesson over again, I would want the whole class to listen to and learn from that student. It would have been way more interesting to learn about carbohydrates and fiber from a classmate with type 1 diabetes than from me as the teacher. I would of course help to inform and direct the learning, but it would have been nice to bring relevant student experiences into the focus of the lesson.

The article also talks about critical consciousness and the banking model of education (Ryan & Webster, 2019). When students are conditioned to robotically accept all the information

bestowed upon them by their teacher, they lose their ability to think critically. Everything in the world is accepted as an unchangeable fact, and students lose their curiosity and motivation to challenge the systems in place. I remember one time when I was a student in elementary school, and I didn't understand why something was the way it was. Instead of explaining the theory behind it, I was taught to just follow the steps and accept it. I slowly became obedient and passive in my learning. Paulo Freire encourages teachers to inform students of the ideological systems that are dominant in society, and to consider and dream of alternative ways of doing things (Freire, 1970/2000). Change does not happen without dreams of a different reality.

References

- Freire, P. (1970/2000). Chapter 1. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (pp. 43–70). Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Ryan, A., & Webster, R. S. (2019). Teacher reflexivity: An important dimension of a teacher's growth. In R. S. Webster & J. D. Whelen (eds.), *Rethinking reflection and ethics for teachers* (pp. 65–79). Springer.

Reading Reflection 2: Positive Personal Relationships

In the book chapter, *Positive Personal Relationships*, Miller Lieber and colleagues (n.d.) discuss why relationships in the classroom are so important, and how to build positive personal relationships. Having a positive classroom community and building relationships with students increases their motivation to learn, improves their engagement within the lesson, and leads to better academic performance (Miller Lieber et al., n.d.). Furthermore, good relationships with students reduces the stress on the teacher and reduces teacher burn-out (Miller Lieber et al., n.d.). The most positive impact on students is when teachers act as both advocates and coaches to their students, expressing care for them while simultaneously pushing for student growth (Miller Lieber et al., n.d.).

Two main practices were discussed in the chapter that could help build relationships: “Knowing students and making them feel known” and “Creating group cohesion” (Miller Lieber et al., n.d.). Knowing students’ names and their learning profiles are a first step. Then, throughout the year, checking in on students, and providing them with feedback are the next steps.

In my practicum, it was easy to learn my students’ names because my associate teacher would always address them by their names. She would say their name before asking them a question, or when they entered the classroom after recess. Another way to learn student names would be to use name tags, placed on the student’s shirt, or on their desk.

I like the idea of a learner profile to get to know how students learn best, what challenges they face when it comes to school, and how their family and friends value their learning/school. I would like to implement something like this into my own classroom one day. I remember when I was in elementary school, I did a test to see if I was a visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic

learner. However, I did not see how the information collected was implemented into practice, or how the teacher used that student data to individualize their teaching methods.

Check-ins were used in my practicum as well during the morning routine. Every morning, students would do “Zones of Regulation” and “One Fun Thing”. Zones of Regulation is where students hold up their fingers from 1 to 4, with each number representing a zone. For example, number 2 was the “green zone” and represented feeling happy and ready to learn. Students were then given a chance to explain why they were in that zone. Students also discussed something fun that they did the night before. These activities give students a chance to express their feelings and interests on a regular basis, which helps build connection between students and teachers.

An example of an “anchor experience” from the article was “building the tallest tower” (Miller Lieber et al., n.d.). As a leader for a summer camp, I had kids get into teams and stack plastic cups as high as possible, before the time ran out. The team with the tallest tower won. These types of collaborative games build relationships in a fun, but competitive manner. During my placement, I had students do an Escape Room, where each team raced to solve the puzzles and unlock the toolboxes. In my own schooling experiences, I remember going on a field trip to do a Ropes Course, which required students to work together to cross ropes between trees.

Another topic that the article discussed that I would like to implement into my own classroom one day is “circles” (Miller Lieber et al., n.d.). When I was in kindergarten, we would all sit in a circle, on the carpet. When I was in grade 5, the desks were arranged in a semi-circle. Having the class arranged in a circle, or semi-circle, promotes connection among students. Community-building circles, or problem-solving circles, with equal participation among students, can help quiet students speak out more and talkative students listen more.

References

Miller Lieber, C., Tissiere, M., Bialek, S., & Mehle, D. (n.d.). Positive personal relationships. In *Engaged classrooms: The art and craft of reaching and teaching all learners* (pp. 43–60). Engaging Schools.

Reading Reflection 3: Restorative Justice

For the third week's reading reflection, I read the article by Reimer (2020). In the article, Reimer (2020) discusses the importance of building a sense of community within schools. Through restorative justice practices, relationships can be built, maintained, and repaired. By having strong relationships there will be less conflict and rule violation because students recognize that the rules are not in place to control students or create unequal distributions of power, but rather to protect the relationships and people within the school community (Reimer, 2020).

“Restorative justice (RJ) is a set of principles and practices that position harm as a violation of people and relationships rather than as a violation of rules or laws” (Reimer, 2020, p. 410). Restorative justice practices such as restorative circles (also called community circles, talking circles, peacemaking circles, etc.) are used for two purposes. First, they are used on a consistent basis to proactively build a sense of group coherence (Reimer, 2020). Second, they are used as a response to conflict or harm, where issues can be discussed and overcome. These circles can make students' voices feel heard and respected, building interpersonal, conflict-resolution, and communication skills (Reimer, 2020).

Personally, I think that restorative justice practices would be very effective for classroom management/behaviour management because it is preventative. When students feel that school is predictable, safe, manageable, and they have a strong sense of community, then they will not *want* to act out. When conflict does arise, students know that they will not be punished, but it will be dealt with through dialogue and with everyone involved. Circles seem like an effective way to build community because sitting in a circle eliminates the power inequality of rows facing the teacher, and the physical barriers of desks. Going around the circle, everyone can have

a chance to speak, be heard and be seen within the circle. I would even remove the chairs and have everyone sit on cushions in a circle to help people feel grounded and even more connected to one another. The circle could start with an opening ceremony to lighten the mood and get everyone in the right mindset. Then conversations could be initiated about social emotional learning (SEL) or conflicts that have arisen. Lastly, a closing ceremony could be performed to prepare students for the transition into other curriculum content.

References

Reimer, K. (2020). “Here, it’s like you don’t have to leave the classroom to solve a problem”:
How restorative justice in schools contributes to students’ individual and collective sense
of coherence. *Social Justice Research*, 33(4), 406–427. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-020-00358-5>

Reading Reflection Week 5: Student Voice and Choice

The article by Fox (2016) was about how teachers can intentionally implement strategies into their teaching practice that will give students a voice in their learning. Some strategies for teachers involved: Establishing relationships with students, allowing students to share what they already know about a topic, involving students in the planning of lessons, and allowing for free expression and creativity (Fox, 2016).

From personal experience in my practicum, I found that being autonomy supportive as a teacher helped the students to stay engaged. One of the ideas that I agree with is giving students time to be creative and encouraging students to pursue their own interests. For example, in my practicum there was a student named Frank (pseudonym). Frank would barely do any work during the morning literacy routine, when students were supposed to memorize word lists and write them in various ways. One time, Frank asked me how to spell some words that were not on the word list. I spelt these words for him, and he shared with me that he was writing a story. As was expected by my associate teacher, I reminded him that was not what we were working on. I didn't want to silence his motivations, but I felt like I was expected to keep him focused. What I wanted to do was be excited and encouraging of this expression. I wanted to ask if I could read it. I wanted to help him spell more words for his story. From my perspective, Frank was still learning to spell words, and he was *finally engaged*. When I have my own classroom and a situation like this occurs, I will probably let students free-write for some time or let them make stories that include the vocabulary words. I might have them build stories in partners – or I might do something completely different. Most importantly, I want to encourage agentic engagement where students tell me how *they* learn best.

References

Fox, K. (2016). *Young voice, big impact: Teach young children essential skills, such as asking questions and making decisions*. National Association of Elementary School Principals.

https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Fox_ND16.pdf

Reading Reflection Week 6: Considering Curriculum

The article by Martín-Alonso et al. (2021) was about the purposes, differences, similarities, and amalgamation of the curricular program and the lived curriculum. The curricular program is the formal document that outlines the learning objectives and the knowledge that students should have acquired within a certain timeframe (Martín-Alonso et al., 2021). The curricular program is based on research, theories, legal frameworks, and is intentionally developed by education stakeholders, so to ignore it would be negligent. However, the curriculum program is also generic, abstract, and impersonal, so ignoring the individual personalities and circumstances of students is inhumane (Martín-Alonso et al., 2021). The lived curriculum refers to how the material is taught by the teacher, and interpreted by the student, with both the teacher and student constructing and reconstructing their knowledge in relation to their experiences (Martín-Alonso et al., 2021). The lived curriculum is the recognition that every teacher, student, and situation is unique. Learning disabilities, access to resources, medical emergencies, family dynamics, and other factors must be considered when teaching the curriculum. Sometimes, the two curriculums may seemingly conflict, and demand opposite actions (Martín-Alonso et al., 2021). Martín-Alonso et al. (2021) proposes that we do not view the two curriculums as separate entities, but rather find solutions that create compromise.

I agree with the idea that there are “two curriculums”. During my practicum, I realized that teaching curriculum content to students can take more time than the curriculum document seems to account for. In addition to time creating a divide between practice and theory, there are personal factors that need to be considered. Each student has their own personality and opinion on how they want to learn, but with thirty-something students in a class, it is not always practical to tailor lessons individually. Furthermore, these are real humans with real emotions. I had

students in my practicum class with family members in the hospital, students with low socio-economic status, or students amid social disputes. When a student's sister is sick, or when they haven't eaten, or when they are fighting with their best friend – is it fair to make them learn the curriculum matter? I agree with Martín-Alonso et al. (2021) that there are moral and ethical dilemmas that teachers face when navigating between the curriculum program and the lived curriculum. For that reason, teachers should be given autonomy and be allowed to use their professional judgement in lesson content, delivery, and assessment. I also agree that teachers must not view the two curriculums as separate entities. The curriculum content can still be taught in a way that is sensitive to the social-emotional needs of the students.

References

Martín-Alonso, D., Sierra, E., & Blanco, N. (2021). Relationships and tensions between the curricular program and the lived curriculum. A narrative research. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 105*, 103433–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103433>

Reading Reflection Week 7: Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms

This week's reading was an interview with Joe Feldman, a former educator who wrote *Grading for Equity*, and now works with schools to develop new grading strategies (Anderson, 2019). Joe highlights how grading is outdated, with grading structures dating back to the Industrial Revolution, when grading served a different purpose (Anderson, 2019). Instead of inheriting old grading practices, teachers need to critically consider what and how they are grading. For example, grading homework can be inequitable for students with socio-economic, cultural, or lifestyle barriers (Anderson, 2019). Averaging the grades received throughout the year will not appropriately represent student improvement and learning (Anderson, 2019). Behaviours, including participation and preparation, should not be reflected in the final content-based grade (Anderson, 2019). Feldman says that there are 3 pillars for equitable grading: The grade 1) accurately describes academic performance, 2) is resistant to bias, and 3) increases intrinsic motivation to learn (Anderson, 2019).

I agree with Feldman that homework should not be graded. Homework should be for extra practice only and should act as a tool to help students learn and improve. Grading homework can create an unfair divide between the students who have ideal working conditions (e.g., a quiet space, a desk, free time), available resources (e.g., internet, a computer, books, paper, pencils), educational supports (e.g., parents that are able to help, older siblings, tutors), and students that do not have those things (Anderson, 2019). Furthermore, grading homework for completion can inflate overall grades, cause students to copy homework off other students, and decrease intrinsic motivation to learn (Anderson, 2019). Students should be empowered to make decisions about how much practice they need to do. I liked the analogy that Feldman used, comparing homework practice to practice in sports or video games (Anderson, 2019). Young

children are capable of understanding that practicing will help them improve. Teachers need to give students the autonomy to practice for themselves, not for the teacher or for a grade.

References

Anderson, J. (2019, December 11). *Harvard edcast: Grading for equity*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/19/12/harvard-edcast-grading-equity>