USING LEARNING JOURNALS AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION TO ENGAGE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN CRITICAL REFLECTION

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REFLECTION & ETE 227
Effective teachers reflect on their teaching practice systematically, analytically, and critically (Danielson, 2007; Ostorga, 2006; Walkington, et al., 2001).

Reflection is important for teachers at all levels of experience, particularly new teachers (Melville et al.; Rike & Sharp, 2008; Walkington et al., 2001).

However, finding the time to reflect can be difficult, and many new teachers do not know how to engage in reflection (Ostorga, 2006).
CRITICAL REFLECTION

- Critical reflection:
  - Involves moral and ethical reflections about teaching practice (Ostorga, 2006).
  - Focuses on the what, how, and why of teaching (Mezirow, 1991; Walkington et al., 2001).

- It is a means through which teachers can:
  - Articulate a personal philosophy of teaching and
  - Better understand the beliefs and values that underlie their teaching decisions (Ostorga, 2006; Walkington et al., 2001).
ETE 227

- Development of the Early Adolescent
- 3 semester hour, undergraduate elective course
- Focuses on early adolescent growth and development with implications for effective teaching
- Required for the Illinois middle school endorsement
- One class of 27-30 students each semester
- Reflection-based projects and class activities
RESEARCH PURPOSE & QUESTIONS
RESEARCH PURPOSE

- To better understand written and verbal reflection as learning tools for pre-service teachers
  - Within the context of one teacher education course at a Midwest, private university

- To improve my teaching effectiveness by:
  - Engaging pre-service teachers in learning via written and verbal reflection
  - Fostering reflective habits that pre-service teachers can use in their future classrooms
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are pre-service teachers’ perceptions of written and verbal reflection, and what influences their perceptions?
- What types of assignments and activities are most likely to engage pre-service teachers in written and verbal reflection, and why?
- How do pre-service teachers use written and verbal reflection as learning tools, and how likely are they to continue using them in the future?
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS & PROCEDURES
172 undergraduate college students were invited to participate in the study.

- Enrolled in ETE 227 between spring 2009 and fall 2011 (6 semesters)
- 82% female; 18% male
- 89% white, non-Hispanic
- 93% traditional college-age (24 or younger)
- 98% juniors or seniors

49% (84 students) chose to participate
DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- **Data collection:**
  - Online survey via Survey Monkey
  - Submission of the final, overall entry of their ETE 227 learning journal

- **Data analysis:**
  - Descriptive statistics via percentages based on the survey responses
  - Coding and interpretation of journal entries using constant comparative analysis
TODAY’S FOCUS

- Descriptive statistics via percentages based on the survey responses
- Examples of two activities I use in ETE 227 to engage students in critical reflection:
  - Learning journals
  - Roundtable discussion
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS
How effective was each of the following in getting you to think about the ETE 227 course content?

- **Media Stations**: 82%
- **Guest Speakers**: 76%
- **Roundtable Discussions**: 69%
- **Autobiographical Display**: 69%
- **Sex Education Debate**: 68%
- **Learning Journals**: 56%
- **Chapter PowerPoints**: 45%
Reflection prompted me to think about:

- Myself as a person: 65% Written, 48% Verbal
- Myself as a learner: 56% Written, 52% Verbal
- Myself as a future teacher: 79% Written, 67% Verbal
Reflection helped me to:

- expand my understanding of the course content (43% written, 56% verbal)
- deepen my understanding of the course content (63% written, 60% verbal)
I thought about course content before reflecting.
I thought about things I wrote or discussed in the days that followed.
I shared insights from my reflections with others outside of class.
TWO REFLECTION ACTIVITIES
LEARNING JOURNALS

- Students write twice weekly
  - After reading
  - Following class
- 300 words minimum
- Reflection guide supports critical reflection
- I collect, assess, and respond three times each semester
- 10% of total course grade
“Reading this passage also reminded me of inside jokes, a concept that I didn’t understand until I reached high school! As we get older, our humor becomes different. Unlike in elementary school, when all knock-knock jokes were hilarious, our sense of humor doesn’t always appeal to everyone. When I’m a teacher, I’ll have to make sure that I’m careful with my humor. Sarcasm probably doesn’t belong in the elementary school classroom, and it likely only belongs in the middle school classroom in small doses, and definitely in a very relaxed way, not the way that adolescents throw sarcastic comments back and forth at each other.”
“Katrina, your learning journal looks great! I am glad to know that the roundtable discussions and guest speakers are providing a valuable - and enjoyable - learning experience for you. Even if you disagreed with the Bem [sex role inventory], I see that it caused you to reflect about your own gender socialization and development quite a bit. Great reflections on this topic. I am also thrilled to hear your story about Benny and the garbage can. Isn't it amazing how well "the look" and "the voice" work? But, you have figured out the biggest secret of all, as you explain in your entry about Alexis the bully. You have to act as if you aren't intimidated even if you are. I think you're going to be a great teacher. Keep up the good work!”
Pre-service teachers’ ability to reflect can vary widely (Jansen & Spitzer, 2009).

Formative feedback is not advice or praise (Wiggins, 2012). Rather, it is:
- Goal-referenced
- Tangible & transparent
- Actionable
- User-friendly & timely
- Ongoing & consistent

For the learning journals, I offer feedback using a dialogue journal approach (Tompkins, 2008).
"Riley, your learning journal looks good. I'm sorry to hear that classroom management has been a problem during novice teaching. In addition to the tips in the ETE 228 text, I encourage you to go back and review the assertive discipline note taking guide from ETE 227. Together, these resources should support you in developing your proficiency in this area. I am glad to see that you are taking in a variety of new information about the middle school concept, and making connections to your own experiences. Your entries are heavy on summary though. During your last round, I encourage you to push yourself toward more critical reflection. Use the reflection guide for help!"
YOUR TURN

- Using the reflection guide, write a brief journal entry reflecting critically on what you have learned from this presentation so far.
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

- Student pairs are assigned a scholarly research article.

- Together, they:
  - Read and discuss the article
  - Create a 1-page handout
  - Develop three higher order questions

- Individually, they:
  - Present the article to a small group of peers
  - Engage the group in discussion
  - Consider peer feedback
  - Reflect in writing about the entire experience
“It is through critical reflection that teachers are able to assess the effectiveness of their work and take steps to improve it” (Danielson, 2007, p. 92).

Schon (1983) identifies two types of reflection:

- **Reflection-in-action** involves “thinking on one’s feet” as an experience occurs.
- **Reflection-on-action** involves thinking, talking, or writing about an experience after it occurs.

The roundtable discussion requires both.
YOUR TURN

- Write a higher order question that will engage a colleague in discussion about reflection during and following teaching.

- Now, turn to someone sitting nearby and:
  - Take turns asking your questions.
  - Engage in discussion as it relates to your questions and experiences.
DO THESE REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES "WORK"?
I enjoyed reflecting in ETE 227. Without reflection, I would not have learned as much in ETE 227. As a result of engaging in reflection during ETE 227, I better understand its value as a learning tool.
What is the optimum balance of written and verbal reflection for pre-service teachers?

- 50% written; 50% verbal: 58%
- 25% written; 75% verbal: 21%
- 75% written; 25% verbal: 12%
- No answer: 9%
As a teacher, I will use reflection as a learning tool:

- 56% to engage students in my future classroom.
- 75% for my own professional development.

FUTURE USE OF REFLECTION
QUESTIONS?

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REFERENCES


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