**HAVE I REALLY MADE IT TO THIS POINT ALREADY? FITTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Lee Ann Vecellio

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Committee Chair: Edna Meisel, Ed.D.

L. Eric Lassiter, Ph.D.

Elizabeth Campbell, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Since as long as I can remember, I have always been a good student, though never outstanding. I always completed my assignments and worked toward finishing classes with decent grades. I have had good and bad experiences along the way of my academic endeavors. Having a middle school English teacher tell my mother that I needed special education courses for English, only to test out of English 101 in college. I have had a teacher encourage me to enter my artwork into the county competition, only to come up winning the first place for my division. I believe everyone does not always have strong positive experiences the whole way through their academics. But, what is most important is how you finish, not the marks these experiences leave. In completion of the doctorate coursework and requirements for the Curriculum and Instruction program an electronic portfolio was created. To view my electronic portfolio please follow this link: <https://sites.google.com/site/leeannvecellioportfolio/letter>.

When I started at West Virginia University (WVU), my parents encouraged me to pursue a degree in Business and Economics. I struggled in this major for two and a half years until I decided I needed something else for myself. I looked at the classes I had taken thus far and what I really enjoyed. I came around to Psychology. It was fascinating to me and it looked like it could provide a great career! Once I took transferred my major, the courses were a breeze and so interesting. I could not believe people went to classes for something so fun. My bubble was then deflated a little by Dr. Catherine Karreker, Head of the Psychology Department. We all were required to take a course called Psychology and Professional Practice. In this course she gave an overview of the competitive nature of Psychology. How if you were planning on going to graduate school in Psychology, you needed to be the best and the brightest. The statistics for who were admitted at WVU was dismaying, even for me. I did not let this deter me; I decided I would find a ‘backdoor” into graduate school. That door came in the form of a Non-Degree major. You were allowed to take 15 credit hours in any major before you had to declare a degree. Easy enough, I would take 15 credit hours in Educational Psychology, make A’s and get recommendations from the professors within that department. That was exactly what I did, and next thing I know, I am a graduate student in Educational Psychology. The single most important thing I learned from graduate school is professors wanted to know your opinion regarding what you were studying. They actually cared what I thought, yaghtzee! I could not believe they wanted my opinion. I was hooked after this, working ten times harder than I ever had to impress my professors and prove that I belonged! I say this because I am not entirely sure if I was trying to prove to my professors I belonged or more to myself.

Once I finished my master’s, I intended to sit for the Praxis II exam for School Psychology. I started preparing my paperwork and I called Dr. Stead, my professor and discussed this process. He informed me that I could not sit for the Praxis II because the program is not accredited with the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). I then looked at programs in the state that were accredited and found the only program in the state was at the Marshall University South Charleston campus. At this point, I had to switch gears and look for a J.O.B. Not the most pleasant experience when you are looking in other fields you do not desire to work in. For almost five years, I worked in state politics and learned some new writing techniques along the way. But, I was still unsatisfied with my career path and higher education was calling me back.

One night in a mass of frustration I called Dr. Fred Kreig. I meet him through the tennis community in Charleston and he gave me his number to call if I was ever interested in going back to school. I was almost in tears, unhappy with my academic choices and desiring a usable degree for the long term. He went over my back ground on the phone and asked me to send in an application and transcripts. I had them together within a week and sent them to Marshall. He called on the phone the next week and said the only formality was to get my signature on some paperwork. I was accepted into the program! I could not drive to the school to get the paperwork signed, I cannot remember exactly why. So, Dr. Kreig drove to me with the papers and ‘Voila!’ I’m a graduate student all over again.

Upon starting the program, Marshall cared that you made it through the program and found a job upon graduation. The hands on learning and smaller class size was so exciting and beneficial. I knew right away this program was perfect for me! The experiences were great and it only left me wanting more. Once in the field, I saw many students being referred for special education testing; in fact, too many. In particular, I saw many referrals for Specific Learning Disabilities testing. I wondered if possibly the delivery of the material or the curriculum itself was causing some of these referrals? I talked with a colleague in School Psychology who suggested I look into furthering my education through Curriculum and Instruction. I knew right away where I would look to apply and what the program had to offer, Marshall! Within a couple weeks, I was able to talk with Dr. Heaton over the phone and find out more about the program. She encouraged me to apply and fast forward to today and here I am writing my reflection paper about my experiences of the coursework and program.

The reflection paper chronicles my coursework and take-away from each class. It also touches on how I feel each class built on the one before. I also will discuss the co-teaching experience, conference, research, and presentations this program has afforded me. The paper is arranged into four chapters. Chapter 1 explorers my collaboration between faculty, peers and other work. Chapter 2 focuses on my scholarship. Chapter 3 addresses my experiences with conference, research, presentations, publications and co-teaching. Chapter 4 documents my depth of understanding and reflection. The final section is an Epilogue, it discusses where I am as I venture forward into my dissertation work.

Chapter 1: Collaboration

As I ventured into my doctorate studies I knew I would become part of a cohort. From the beginning of my studies I was part of a cohort that had an unusual dynamic, three women all with the first name Leanne, Leighann, Lee Ann. I knew from the start it was kismet and I was meant to be part of this cohort.

At the beginning of my doctoral studies it appeared that a comradery developed with my cohort. This cohort often used student support as a form of collaboration during each and every class. This aided in providing feedback for papers each of us wrote, listening to ideas we had for assignments, and encouragement of what we had accomplished thus far. Most of my collaboration experiences have been positive. However, it is a competitive group and some voices are often louder than others.

With Faculty

I found with my doctoral program collaboration with faculty is not just working with them on research, it is also taking advice on assignments, working with them to decide what should be presented at a certain class, organizing times and presenters for the Doctoral Seminar, and preparing together the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for future research. Collaboration was also found to be in the form of my frequent visits and phone calls to my chair, Dr. Meisel, bouncing ideas around about dissertation topics.

Dr. Meisel is the guru of all things mathematics and her enthusiasm for math is contagious to students, myself included. I was very lucky to be offered a co-teaching experience with Dr. Meisel for EDF 517 Statistical Methods on the Huntington campus in Fall 2016. This was a little intimidating to me that I would be co-teaching a statistics course to college students. However, Dr. Meisel is always patient with me and offered up topics I should brush up on prior to the next class. My role in this class was providing support to the students when they would start working on the statistics in the second half of the class period. I made some mistakes in the beginning, but I went home and studied and each class I felt more comfortable with helping the students. What I learned from working with Dr. Meisel is always have patience with every student, keep your tone and enthusiasm upbeat and be kind. We had a student that did not attend regularly and she was determined at the last class that she would finish with a great deal of remediation. This is the type of professor I would like to be, focusing on no student left behind in my classes.

In addition to working with Dr. Meisel, I also worked with Dr. Campbell for the CI 677 Writing for Publication course. For my publication piece I wanted to write about a topic that was recurring in my school psychology practice, secondary families raising children. As Dr. Campbell and I were brainstorming the direction to take my paper, it occurred to her that a new category for placement of students might be proposed: outside environmental disorder. This was such a surprise to me, but exactly what needed to be considered. I am still waiting to see if my piece will be published with the Communique newspaper produced by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). My experience with this course has taught me to write often, work with writing groups and cut when necessary if something does not work with a piece. I feel like I have developed better writing techniques that help me focus and shut out the world when I need to write.

With Peers

My peer collaboration experiences have been diverse. During my EDF 635 Policy Studies in Education course, we were assigned a thorough examination of educational policy through numerous assignments. One assignment was to partner with another student to write a Policy Analysis paper as the culmination of our class. I chose to work with fellow candidate Marc Shoemaker on a Retention and Promotion in Public Schools topic. What we learned from this topic was considering both grade retention and social promotion policies presents a conundrum: neither policy has been found to be effective. This leads to what can become an argument between two ideas that seem to be exclusive, yet lead to less than desirable results. A paper from NASP states, “Although retaining students who fail to meet grade level standards has limited empirical support, promoting students to the next grade when they have not mastered the curriculum of their current grade, a practice termed social promotion, is not an educationally sound alternative” (NASP, 2014). This paper showed me you may have your own ideas for the content of the paper, but they need to blend with the other person’s ideas. This paper was not only a success, we also decided to present this information we found at a regional conference.

My next collaboration was with four other students in Dr. Childress’ CI 703 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching course. My group was to present the Personal Family model. This model is based on Maslow’s Theory of Self-actualization and is the most flexible (Maslow, 1943). This just happened to be the most challenging model to present. We prepared for weeks the presentation we would give and the in-class activities that would take place. Geographically our group was challenged, two lived in southern West Virginia and two lived in southern Ohio. We were never able to meet, only share work with each other online. We met with Dr. Childress right before class. He helped us look at the presentation in a different light and so we rearranged a majority of the presentation. This was nerve-racking walking into the class without a firm plan. All in all, our in-class activities went well and our presentation was just alright. The take away from this collaborative group exercise was make time to meet with your group even if geography is challenged.

My next collaboration occurred during the same semester as C&I 703, it was in Dr. Meisel’s EDF 517 Statistical Methods. At the end of the course, Dr. Meisel grouped us into groups of three. I was partnered with Chris Good and Jeff Shrewsbury to review the article differences in job satisfaction between general education and special education. There were nine statistical areas we were supposed to examine. The three of us broke these three areas per person using three slides per person. We wanted to make sure the work was divided equally and that one person did not talk more than another during the presentation. This worked well for us and the overall experience was positive and we each learned how to look at the statistics in a paper and determine if it was an appropriate use of statistical methods and if the analysis was thorough.

In Dr. Anderson’s LS 714 Higher Education Administration, we were assigned the daunting task of working as a team of four to research financial, administrative, and population data on state higher education governing boards. We were assigned half of the states to research that would take the whole semester. We often had to call other states to find the information that was not always available online. My group worked hard throughout the semester with the exception of one teammate. Though this teammate finished his part with a little time to spare at the end of the semester. It was a challenging task and the work was not always evenly weighted. This activity taught me how responsibilities within the group should be clearly outlined and deadlines should be created. In the end we pulled through with a strong paper and presentation.

My last collaboration that I would like to discuss is in Dr. Heaton’s CIEC 700 Technology and Curriculum class. During the Fall 2016 semester I developed severe pain in my gallbladder and subsequently it needed to be removed. I ended up missing a class in CIEC 700 where Dr. Heaton placed us in groups for end of the semester presentations on a specific technology we use within our group. My group, Leighann Davidson and Jeff Shrewsbury, were so kind that they emailed me the night of my surgery to see how I was doing and fill me in on what I had missed that night. They were patient with me trying to go back and learn the missed lesson and we ultimately decided to use organizing students for cognitively complex skills. We suggested thinking logs and audio recording software such as Audacity. We each recorded ourselves for how we use cognitive therapy within our current positions. I loved this activity because we each had unique perspectives and we also found common ground as a group. This group activity was one of the most positive activities I experiences while in the program.

Chapter 2: RESEARCH

Research can be a daunting undertaking if you are not organized with an outline of what you want to learn and why. For myself, using tools such as these and determining what data needs to be collected to get to the answers is a puzzle that I cannot wait to start. I compare this very much to being on a scavenger hunt and needing to find everything on the list to win! You need a strong researcher with an unbiased view of the material, how is not afraid to ask the hard questions, and look at the data in many different ways for significance. Below I list some of the ways I partnered with others and which tools I added to my repertoire after each experience.

SRCEA Conference Charleston, West Virginia

For my research with Marc Shoemaker, we each determined Marc would look at the history of retention and promotion and the changes that have occurred over the years and I would look at the social/emotional impacts and what contemporary politics outlines. We then divided the work into two halves and gave each other a month to research and put together our halves of the paper. The content of my research looked at the contemporary politics regarding retention/promotion and defining what is acceleration. A report by Southern and Jones (2004) listed eighteen types of acceleration including early admission, grade-skipping, self-paced education, advanced placement, and early graduation. Recent research found that students most often retained were in one of the following categories: racial or ethnic minorities, black or Hispanic males, late birthday, delayed development, attention difficulties, limited English proficiency, children of poverty, single parent households, frequent school changes, chronic absenteeism, low parental educational attainment, low parental educational involvement, and social-emotional issues (ASCA, 2012). The research also indicated there has been a shift over the past 40 years of social promotion becoming more common than what it was in the 80’s and 90’s. The social/emotional component was impactful in that removing a child from a peer group their age would normally place them with is detrimental to academic success. This could be by either retention, social promotion, or promotion due to performing at an advanced level when compared to same age peers.

Next we met to work together to create a few paragraphs that would blend the paper together. After this, we proofread the paper and gave each other the revisions. For the presentation, I completed the application to the SRCEA and shared a copy with Marc and Dr. Childress to see if everything looked correct. I then created the abstract with input from Marc. Once we were accepted to present, we each made slides to reflect our respective sides of the paper. We met to determine if the PowerPoint showed cohesiveness and practiced our presentation. We then determined who would bring the handouts and who would bring the thumb drive. We brought handouts in the event that the PowerPoint or the technology failed to work.

ASA Conference Cincinnati, OH

During my research with Dr. Campbell and Leighann we first sat down and discussed what topics that would work with our varied backgrounds. Dr. Campbell was interested in creating a therapeutic writing group after reading the book, “Until We Are Strong Together” by Caroline Heller (1997). This book was a reflection piece of a female writing group in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. The group appeared to have great success and Dr. Campbell was curious if it would work for other topics. For my part, I created the IRB packet with help from Dr. Campbell and then I utilized sentence starters that was used in my professional practice as a School Psychologist. I knew these starters were open ended to get people writing, rather than searching for a topic. During this research I learned that it is OK not to always be in control of the participants and act more as a facilitator rather than an investigator. The information unfolds before you and ultimately stronger information is generated through not limiting the parameters in which the group writes and discusses. Another take away is having support while working toward anything always leads to greater success.

Spring 2017 Charleston, WV

In Dr. Anderson’s LS 714 different members of the team took on greater roles in the beginning and then it shifted midway through the semester where others would take the lead. This happened because some of us were stronger in initiating the research and others were very strong in looking for thoroughness and cohesiveness. As I was conducting my research on individual funding for students, universities, and student populations I felt like I was not being thorough enough. I called one of the team members and talked with her about what needed to be included. She helped me realize that I was missing why the funding may have increased or decreased per student. I tried to focus on what I could control with my part of the paper and not look at the negatives that two members were not doing as much as they should at the time. We all have situations were life gets in the way of are academic goals along the way. It is how we overcome those situations and still complete what is asked of us by our superiors.

Summer 2017 Charleston, WV

In the qualitative research class, EDF 625, we were asked to interview someone with questions we created in class. My interview was with a local police officer in Raleigh County, WV. My questions that I had created and reviewed to make sure they did not indicate bias were approved by Dr. Campbell. When I went to interview the police officer, I found that after he answered one question two more would come to mind. During the interview I recorded what he said and I also jotted quick notes for follow up questions. Based on my qualitative studies, often when interviewing someone you will have more questions after your initial interview. This comprehensive information gathering was so new to me. I not only needed to document what they were saying, but it was important to gather information with my five senses. What was the environment? Were the any smells or sounds that added to or diminished the interview? What was the person wearing? This was almost like storytelling to me, letting the viewer experience the interview as they read my findings.

For all of my class papers that are required I’ve learned to always find a topic and then create an outline. Without an outline, it is very difficult for me to create cohesiveness in my paper and I may leave out important details completely. I always try to go back and review my work to check if it is succinct. I look at the feedback provided by my professors and consider how my next paper for the course can be an improvement on the last. I look to see if this is a publishable paper or something that I could present at a conference. Also, is this paper something I could build on for future research in collaboration with others.

Chapter 3: SCHOLARSHIP

Retention and Promotion in Public Schools

In the Fall of 2015, Marc Shoemaker and I presented our paper from Dr. Childress’ EDF 635 course, Retention and Promotion in the Public Schools, at the Southern Regional Council on Education Administration (SRCEA) conference in Charleston, WV, on October 8, 2016. The theme for this conference was Balanced Leadership: Focus on the Leaders’ Wellness. I thought our topic fit well with the theme of the conference. When Marc and I decided to submit for the conference, it was only four weeks before the actual conference started. We submitted our abstract for review, anxiously waiting to see if it would be accepted. We soon received the good news that we would indeed be presenting at the conference. Our Power point was created within a few days and we practiced our talking points to make sure we did not go over the time allotted for the 15 minute presentation.

During the presentation, our time was cut short and I had to make due with the time we were left. I had to think quickly what were the most important components of the presentation that needed to be communicated to the audience and omit the rest. This was nerve wracking and frustrating, evidently I needed to learn this ‘teachable moment’ of working with what you are given. Often this happens, that technology may fail or room locations change at the last minute or even someone is unable to attend a conference that was supposed to present. Being able to be flexible and preparing for these events not only saves you from an embarrassing situation, but also allows you to become a stronger presenter. At the end of the presentation there was only a minute left for questions, which ended up being great! Moral to the story is, next time I have a presentation I need to practice many times, bring handouts (in case of failed technology) and have an abbreviated version of the presentation!

The Elementary Mathematics Specialist as Teacher and Leader

In the summer of 2017 I realized I did not have enough research experience and went to both Dr. Campbell and Dr. Meisel for guidance. Dr. Meisel emailed me about presenting information about the Elementary Mathematics Specialist at the Association for Teacher Educators in Las Vegas. This sounded very interesting and I told her that I was excited about this opportunity. Then a couple of weeks later, Dr. Campbell got back to me about research with Leighann Davidson on a therapeutic writing group. I said this also sounded great and then I started thinking, “Oh boy, did I just take on too much for this school year?”

Dr. Meisel’s research was very interesting to me in that it was looking at what prompted the creation of the Elementary Mathematics Specialist certification. I was unsure of how to start the research since the program was already up and running. Dr. Meisel offered direction for where to look and shared the classes on Blackboard with me so I could gain a better understanding of what the program entailed. Through our conversations I realized that there may be a possibility for a dissertation topic and I asked Dr. Meisel if a program evaluation of the effectiveness would be a good dissertation topic? She said, “yes” and “voila!” just like that I have a topic for my dissertation!

The other student presenter, Jeff Shrewsbury, came on a little later in the project, but was also on board with the presentation. We prepared our PowerPoint for two months and had it fine-tuned two weeks before the conference. We each arrived at the conference on different days and stayed at different locations. We did not meet up until the morning of the conference and Dr. Meisel was her usual calm and cool self. We went to the room and reviewed our talking points while Dr. Meisel and made sure the PowerPoint worked with the projector she brought with her.

The presentation went well with the other presentation that was scheduled during our time slot. The room had a good sized crowd and they all were very positive and supportive of our presentation. They asked great questions at the end and I was actually prepared this time for those questions! Some of the questions I was making mental notes about, to use in my future research. Participating in this conference left me taking away more than I came to present. It gave me new ideas for my dissertation, left me wanting to partner with the women from Indiana who went after us, and made me feel more confident in presenting at national conferences.

From Hell to Hope: A Collaborative Writing Experience

Dr. Campbell, Leighann Davidson, and I decided to examine the benefits of a therapeutic writing group. We focused the writing group on female participants in recovery. Leighann suggested going to Recovery Point (a female oriented recovery home) and I went to Kanawha Day Report Center to see if they would like to participate. Recovery Point agreed to this with the exception that the writing group would take place during the daytime hours. I continued to go to Kanawha Day Report Center and tried to acquire new participants. Kanawha Day Report Center operates as a drug free alternative to sentencing. The participants check in weekly with a monitoring officer. During my experience collaborating with the other researchers and working with the participants I saw the power of group support and coming to realizations are a process through sharing your experiences with others.

With the experience from the collaborative writing group, we decided to present our findings. At the presentation, we were pleased to see that it was the most crowded room of my three presentations in which I participated. My take away from this experience was as a researcher you are not always the one in complete control of a qualitative study. You need to let the information you seek from others come in a natural and uncomplicated manner. This contributes to less bias and an authenticity to the material that is collected.

Submitting Work for Publication

In Dr. Campbell’s CI 677 Writing for Publication course, I chose to examine and write about Child Count data for my county for the past three years. This data is compiled to monitor numbers of students being placed under specific categories in special education. The first place I thought of to submit for publication was a newspaper put out monthly for the NASP. *Communique* is viewed mostly by School Psychologists practicing in the field and professors. My hope was that the information would act as a platform to talk about the increasing referral rate and increase in outside factors harming students. While conducting the research, my focus changed a few times from looking at the opioid crisis and how it affects school children to the secondary family that raises a child. The submission process was somewhat vague. It almost appeared to be a secret process that you were trying to get a golden ticket in which to take part. I read the different types of articles the Communique would except and narrowed it down to two, they were Communication Matters and Student Connections. The editor read through my submission and sent it on to two external reviewers. He thought my article was an important topic and wanted it to be considered. Ultimately, the two reviewers did not think it would fit into either of the two categories I was hoping to be published under. The next time I attempt to be published, I will look at the specific criteria and if they are still unclear, I will call for clarification. The experience working with Dr. Campbell on revisions was extremely positive and shaped how I look at writing. I see writing now as not so much as a solitary experience, but more as a work-in-process that regularly needs tending. I think this process has made me a better at the writing process as I look towards starting my dissertation.

Chapter 4: Depth of Understanding

When I first started in Curriculum and Instruction I thought the definition of curriculum was the content that is being taught to students and no greater definition. I have since learned how wrong my definition was and that it encompasses more. Curriculum is not some set content that teachers are bond by. Instead, this program exemplified that curriculum is what you add and sometimes omit to the course requirements that can help a student succeed. Instruction is not just presenting the material to students and letting the digest it for a later exam. Instruction and curriculum should be ever changing as the needs of the student changes. It should be diverse in its delivery and development. You as the instructor do not always need to instruct, instead act as the facilitator and let the students come to the knowledge by using critical thinking skills and exploratory learning techniques. The knowledge I have gained will be useful to start my endeavors in teaching, but I need to be a life-long learner and evolve as curriculum and instruction is evolving. To do this one also needs to address the hidden curriculum.

The Hidden Curriculum

Prior to the program, I knew there was a hidden curriculum. Meaning these outside factors and labels placed on children cause teachers to only push students so far based on this label. It is how teachers counter this curriculum with support and caring toward the student that creates a learning environment that is beneficial to all. Often we teach to the curriculum in public education. It is my hope to work with students preparing to be public school educators to think outside the box for what is necessary to include for struggling students. They may need to push the student farther because expectations are too low or they may need to include supplemental work for greater understanding of the curriculum material.

During my studies in Curriculum and Instruction, it has further opened my eyes to the opportunities students from stable homes are offered academically and how the curriculum hinders those in unstable environments. What I mean by this is single parent or grandparents raising children to not always work with students outside of school on homework either because they are working long hours for pay or have to many responsibilities when they get home. These are the students that often end up being tested for special education services that otherwise may not have needed service with familial support.

I believe it was Valenzuela who talked about authentic caring that can combat the hidden curriculum. Valenzuela (1999) defined authentic caring as the idea that pedagogy is based on relationships and all energy is put toward students current needs. In Valenzuela’s book Subtractive Schooling (1999) she said that teachers expect the students to care about school before the care for themselves, while students have expectations teachers should care for them before they care about academics. What Valenzuela meant by this statement is educators need to do more than just attempting to teach the children, instead get to know the child’s background and family history is possible. It encompasses understanding their family dynamics, work schedules outside of school, and genuinely expressing caring of the child’s wellbeing for the child to flourish and make gains.

Dr. Lassiter C&I 705 Multicultural Issues used four books for the course, *Thinking Outside the Girl Box* (Spatig, 2014), *Subtractive Schooling* (Valenzeula, 1999)*, To Change Them Forever* (Ellis, 1996)*, and Invitation to Anthropology* (Lassiter, 2014). I was skeptical about reading any of these. However, each of these books opened my eyes to the social injustices that have taken place over the years to ethnic populations whether it be subtle or blatant. Each of these books touched my heart and made me want to become the best educator and advocate for student rights that I can be. The two that resonated with me the most were *Subtractive Schooling* (Valenzeula, 1999) and *To Change Them Forever* (Ellis, 1996). Both books made me realize first that sometimes it only takes one person to truly change a student’s life for the better, and second, the importance of caring beyond the walls of your classroom. The final assignment was to define multicultural education. I defined it as school environments and academics that incorporate all ethnic backgrounds to create a sense of pride in one’s own culture and a deeper respect of others cultures.

Clyde Ellis’ (1996) book *To Change Them Forever* opened my eyes to the inhuman treatment inflicted on the Indian Tribes. It was well known that the government and white man took land that was rightfully the Indian Tribes across the nation, but the poor education provided to these people was completely new. The way the majority of society at the time viewed Indians as barbarians or sub humans with cognitive impairments only showed Social Darwinism and their ignorance and prejudice.

I think it is naive to believe that in this day and age a person can lean solely toward one ideology. Our experiences constantly shape and reshape our beliefs that point us in new directions. Because of this journey, I initially only focused on educational philosophies that were learner centered in my ideology. However, through the experiences of this doctoral program and working in special education I have found that other educational philosophies, such as social efficiency and scholarly academic ideologies, are important to me as well.

Doll and Dewey

William Doll’s (2013) theory on the four R’s: Richness, Recursion, Relations, and Rigor resonates with me greatly. Richness is described as the curriculum’s depth and layers of meaning (Flinders & Thornton). The second R is Recursion, which generally means to occur again and relates to iteration. The third R, relations encompasses to types: pedagogical and cultural that have equal importance. The final R is rigor, the most important of the four, keeps transformative curriculum from falling into rampant relativism or sentimental solipsism (Flinder & Thornton). Each of these components was built off of previous experiences by theorists including the Tyler Rationale of industrial functionalism.

This concept makes sense to me, because Doll (2013) challenges us to think beyond Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. Curriculum is constantly changing on a class by class basis. It is not neat and orderly but messy and ever evolving. These are the instructors that to me, appear to be the most effective in teaching content to students. He stresses that every ending is a new beginning with recursion. You see this many times in the subjects of mathematics and science. They build on previous knowledge that sometimes you have to revisit to go forward with new material. Through the relations section it highlights how the classroom curriculum is an ongoing process that is revised regularly. The textbook should also follow this notion, of regularly revisions to change with the flow of the classroom. With the rigor section, you are looking for the assumptions that are not outwardly evident. The learner needs to take these into account when formalizing their own understanding. This sort of understanding is where I believe the gaps happen in foundational skills. It is here that learners tend to get the main concepts down long enough to pass a test, but not enough to recall this information years later when needed.

John Dewey (1938) believed that a premium should be placed on activities in the classroom to be meaningful and have a classroom democracy. He believed that that this social consciousness started from birth which would lead to a shared intellectual and moral resources. He viewed this process as having two sides: the psychological and sociological having equal importance. Because the school is viewed as a social institution, the school would be effective in the child taking part in the resources of the population. Dewey thought the social component of a child was at the root of their concentration and maturation. The learning process has to be compatible with the student’s life for success. This is accomplished be making learning consistent with development of life skills for the child.

Many of Dewey’s ideas also resonate with me because at every layer he adds to his educational approach he incorporates the human component that is strong in learning and life. Since he focuses on using psychology and sociology at every step, it shows an authentic caring for the child’s well-being and not just focusing on the learning process. The fear is that it would take the power away from the teacher, but I feel the process would empower teachers to think outside the box when it comes to strategies for student success. This is crucial when you are talking about a student with special needs that does not fit the “one size fits all” attitude of mainstream curriculum.

Learner Centered Ideology

The learner centered approach shows that individuals have to discover the facts themselves or in the case of the baby acquire the knowledge. The components of the learner centered ideology that I find comprise my theory are: encourage students to explore the knowledge being provided through choices; shifting the focus from the teacher to the student; and, tailoring the curriculum to their individual needs. Elliot Eisner noted that psychologists viewed the brain as consisting of a variety of intellectual faculties which could be strengthened if exercised in appropriate ways with certain subject matter (Eisner, 1967). Eisner felt many areas of academics do not yield educational outcomes that are easily predictable, nor measureable. In a 1980 lecture Eisner argued, the perception of literacy should go beyond verbal and numerical skills, looking primarily at the central role of the senses in the processes of conceptualization and expression (Eisner, 1994).

Social Efficiency Ideology

As the student progresses in their education, there is a greater need for social and life skills training, i.e. functional curriculum. Bouck and Flanagon (2010) defined functional curriculum as encompassing financial independence of the student through full-time employment; transportation/moving about independently of others; necessary skills to navigate the community successfully; building and maintaining of social relationships; well-developed daily living skills; self-determination/ skills to be autonomous; and, of course functional academics. This curriculum is the premise for why there is a dash of social efficiency ideology in my curriculum theory. Social efficiency ideologists believe curriculum objectives need to be laid out in behavioral terms: activities people can perform and demonstrable things people can do (Schiro, 2013). These objectives can beaccomplished through embedding social and life skills into the curriculum for those special needs students. Franklin Bobbit believed human life, though varied, consisted of performing specific activities (Bobbit, 1918). By including what the student will need in the future into the curriculum, it allows growth not just in academic knowledge, but also in daily skills.

Scholarly Academic Ideology

The scholarly academic ideology also plays a part in my personal educational philosophy. The notion of supplementing the curriculum with topics that will strengthen a deficit in the student embodies the support students need most. It is sharing the wisdom of the teacher so the student will flourish and will retain the knowledge of the activity. Mortimer Adler in his Paedeia Proposal (Adler, 1982) highlighted three columns of learning, three distinct modes of teaching and learning. In column two of the modes of teaching and learning talked about the development of intellectual skills of learning by means of coaching exercises and supervised practice (Adler, 1982). This theorist believed that all children can learn. Adler was not necessarily fighting for educational equality for special needs students but his statement, “All children deserve the same quality education, not just the same quantity,” illustrates how historically and at present, those with special needs are viewed as unteachable.

My curriculum philosophy is complicated and does not fall into one ideology nor with one theorist; maybe because of the outside the box teaching I am accustomed with in Special Education world. I do think that that many of the theories would benefit my students I work with currently, only with modifications. I feel that by learning these theories Doll’s Four R’s, Dewey’s experience and education for learning, and Adler’s Self-actualization theory I better understand why curriculum is designed the way it is and how it is presented to students.

Conclusion

Prior to coming into this program I was a skilled School Psychologist that had a background strong in assessment and measurement. Now after taking many courses and realizing how much I still have to learn, I want to continue working on my research and scholarship skills, and continue to be the life-long learner that I feel I am. I am a persistent person that once I start something I see it through until the end. I would like to give back to West Virginia through conducting research that will improve our state education system and create programs that other states would like to use as a model.

My experiences in this program have educated me on the larger global issues that impact education and how we need to be an agent of change. I believe this program has prepared me to venture onto my dissertation research reviewing the Elementary Mathematics Specialist program. It is a privilege to have taken courses from accomplished faculty and staff. Much of the advice I have been offered I plan to carry with me and use in my dissertation research and career. Thank you for making me making me a part of the Marshall University South Charleston family and giving me the individualized education that I so greatly appreciate!

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