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**Final Reflection Paper**

**CEP 800/815/822**

**Summer 2012**

**Part 1 – What I Have Learned and What It Means to Me**

On the first day of the summer cohort session, our first task was the Just Shoot Me assignment. Right away, within 30 minutes of the class starting, I was uncomfortable. The very thing I hated most (taking and showing pictures of myself) was a required assignment. Dreading it the whole time, I worked with my group members to photograph ourselves in a way that would show something unique about each of us. Cringing as I watched the photos being displayed on the big screen in the classroom, I thought that everyone else’s photos were much more creative than mine. Even though this assignment made me uncomfortable, I realized that these two weeks on campus would push me out of my comfort zone and would result in a tremendous amount of learning. For me, this summer cohort session was all about challenge. This is, in fact, the greatest lesson I took away from the two weeks on campus and the four weeks following. Challenge yourself and your students, for it results in great satisfaction.

During the first day of class, we also formed our groups for the rest of the meeting days. I am not typically a fan of group work because it seems that in most group situations, one or two people end up doing most of the work and the others “coast” through. However, this turned out to be a different experience. I believe that this is because of the way the groups were formed. We, the students, had some say in who our group members would be, yet there were guidelines to follow when choosing the people with whom we would work. My group, MSU (My Summer Uploaded), turned out to have just the right mix of skills and personalities. Again, I had the experience of stepping out of my comfort zone and being pleasantly surprised at the result.

**Technology That I See Being Useful**

There was so much technology information shared in these ten days that it would be almost impossible to talk about each one here. I have chosen to elaborate on those websites or applications that I feel will be the most helpful and useful for my personal and professional life.

Photo and/or Video Tools

Each year, it seems I am taking more and more photos and using them in various ways in the classroom. I can see working my way up to videos as well. **Picasa** is a great tool for viewing, editing, organizing, and sharing photos. Since I take a large number of photos each year, this will be very helpful in organizing all of these photos. **Pixlr** and **FotoFlexer** are free photo editing sites that I have found easy to use and have provided satisfying results. As I am beginning to design more websites and online activities for my students, I have been searching for photos to use. **Stock.xchng** is a great source for public domain photos. I had my first experience with video editing this summer as well. Thanks to **iMovie**, this process was much easier than I expected and I am excited to begin taking videos of my students! I also used **KeepVid** to save videos and will continue to use this service to back up important videos. **YouTube** is another great resource that I learned more about this summer. Of course, I had watched videos on YouTube before, but I had never uploaded any of my own videos. I now have started my own YouTube channel and have found that this is an easy and safe way (provided you use the proper security guidelines) to share videos.

Websites for Class Communication

I have used **Weebly** in the past and will continue to use it in the future. I like the ease and simplicity of building and changing the content of sites that Weebly offers. This summer, I learned about **WordPress**, **KidBlog,** and **Twiducate** as other sites that can be used to convey information, links, and provide a place for parents and students to leave feedback. I used Twiducate briefly this past year, and I believe that I will continue with that as a means of information and providing easy access to links for my second graders. **Facebook** is another site that would be very easy and useful for communication. In fact, using Facebook in this class this summer provided a quick and easy way to ask questions, share information, and connect with others in the class. However, I feel that my second graders are too young to use this platform. Facebook has too many security and safety concerns to be considered safe for young children.

Presentation Tools

I gained so much experience and knowledge of Google products this summer. I had used **Google Docs** before, but in a very basic way. This summer, we produced many **Google Presentations**, along with a couple of **Google Forms**. Though I like the easy sharing and collaborating features of Google products, I found that I missed some of the word processing functions that are available with Microsoft Word. However, using Google products is still a great way to easily collaborate with colleagues. **Screencast** and **Jing** are great ways to share content with students along with an oral explanation. I have used these with my second graders in the past and will continue to do so. **Voice Thread** is another way to share content along with an audible component. Voice Thread will also allow students or other colleagues to contribute to and comment on the content. My group used **Mind Meister** to create a concept map on two chapters in the Willingham book. While Mind Meister is a colorful tool that was fairly easy to use, I feel that it is too complicated for second graders to understand.

**Reflection on Readings and Other Educational Concepts**

Below is a discussion of some of the readings that stood out to me along with other concepts discussed and researched in class.

Learning Theories

Behaviorism and cognitivism are two of the learning theories we discussed in class. Behaviorist ideas are definitely present in my classroom and indeed throughout the elementary school setting. We “train” our students to behave a certain way by giving rewards. While I believe that this works initially, I have seen over and over how the meaning and the motivating factor of the reward diminish with time. Thus, we must move from the extrinsic rewards to intrinsic rewards. Students must derive some benefit internally from performing the desired behavior, or else they simply will not maintain it. In my opinion, we are not doing enough to make this happen in my school.

While behaviorism focuses solely on overt behavior, cognitive theory adds in the power of our memory as an organizational system and the effect of our prior knowledge on our learning. The issue of prior knowledge in education is extremely important. It is so important that several of our class readings discussed the idea of considering the prior knowledge of our students. Shulman said, “learners construct their sense of the world by applying their old understandings to new experiences and ideas.” Feynman stated that “concepts are piled on top of each other in your brain,” when talking about why people think about things in different ways. Levstick and Barton also said, “instruction must build on students’ prior knowledge.”

Background knowledge is a central idea in Daniel Willingham’s book as well. There are endless references to this idea in the book, but perhaps one that sums up the importance of prior knowledge is this: “Not only does background knowledge make you a better reader, but it also is necessary to be a good thinker. (…) much of the time when we see someone apparently engaged in logical thinking, he or she is actually engaged in memory retrieval.”

The discussions and readings about prior knowledge gave me an “Aha” moment. Of course, I have learned about prior knowledge before, thought about the concept, and have listened to speakers tell me about it. I even thought that I was taking it into consideration in my own classroom. However, I now realize that I can and should be doing more. So many times, I assume that my students know something. I now know that I cannot afford to assume anything because if they do not have the background knowledge, they will not learn the material or concepts that I want them to learn. This may mean taking some lessons a bit slower or backing up in my lesson planning, because, as Levstick and Barton said, “textbooks and other materials rarely devote much attention to students’ prior knowledge.” Therefore, I must make sure that I devote enough time and attention to it. I now see this as a necessary step to take to ensure understanding.

Multiple Intelligences, Learning Styles, and Praise

I have grouped these three ideas together because they all have to do with how our brains work when we learn. Additionally, teachers must consider all of them when planning lessons. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences has been around for quite some time. In my building, we are encouraged to teach to each child’s preferred intelligence, or learning style. However, my thoughts have now changed from considering the preferred learning style of each student to considering the best way to teach each lesson based on the specific content or activity. Willingham’s point about this issue made so much sense to me. He claims that the reason that matching teaching style to a preferred learning style does not offer an advantage is that school tasks involve recalling meaning, not sounds or images. If a student claims to be a visual learner that simply means that he or she may have a preference for seeing things represented visually. This does not ensure that the student is gathering the meaning that is necessary for learning to take place.

The way in which I praise my students is another area that I will strive to improve. The Willingham book as well as the article by Carol Dweck both talk about the importance of praising effort rather than ability. As I think about my teaching style and daily interactions with my students, I realize that I am more likely to either give generic praise (which is also ineffective), or to tell my students how smart they are. I now know that praising by the hard work that my students are doing and giving them specific praise, I will motivate them to work even harder and achieve more. In thinking back, I have had many situations in which a student has done good, quality work and I have told them something like, “Good job. This looks awesome.” The response from my brighter students very often is, “It was so easy!” I now realize that those students are unlikely to work any harder in the future than they did on that assignment. Invariably, the quality of the students’ work declines over time. This is a very valuable realization for me and will have a huge impact on my teaching and expectations in the future.

**Part 2 – Looking Forward**

**Key Topics:**

Networking: Collaborating and consulting with other educators will be an extremely valuable part of my ongoing quest to become a teacher who effectively integrates technology into the classroom. I am fortunate to work with other educators who also see the value of applying technology in innovative ways. Therefore, I have at my disposal several individuals with whom I can discuss specific lessons, techniques, challenges, and successes.

Resources:

* Weekly Grade-Level Meetings: Each week, all second grade teachers in my building, and once per month all of the second grade teachers in the district, meet to discuss grade-specific issues. This is a great opportunity to brainstorm and troubleshoot with other teachers who are doing the same things I am in the classroom.
* Pinterest: Pinterest is an awesome resource for teachers. I have started a “Tech” board and have pinned many resources and ideas that I would like to try. Other pinners who are also interested in technology will be great resources as well if the information I am looking for is not readily available.
* Blogs: I follow and regularly consult several blogs by teachers who are amazingly creative and talented. These blogs are wonderful sources of information and inspiration for those of us who are not so creative! A few of my favorite blogs are:
	+ [Bunting, Books, and Bainbridge](http://bainbridgeclass.blogspot.com/) by Christina Bainbridge
	+ [Ms. Winston](http://www.mswinston.com/) by Jessica Winston
	+ [Mrs. Meacham’s Classroom Snapshots](http://www.jmeacham.com/) by Jessica Meacham

Professional Development: Over the next several years, I will continue my education by completing the MAET program. I will also continue to research and learn on my own. I would like to become a technology resource person in my district so that others can come to me with questions or problems that they are experiencing. An example of how I would like to help my district increase its classroom technology program is in the area of smartboards. At this time, my district does not own or use any smartboards. I am interested in researching the uses and advantages of this technology and submitting a proposal to my district to purchase some for our classrooms. This will require that I utilize the resources available to me and become as knowledgeable as possible in this area. If I am to become a resource for others in the area of technology, I will need to keep up to date with the latest news, trends, and concepts in educational technology. The following are some of the resources I will consult:

* [MACUL](http://www.macul.org/) – Many resources are available in support of teachers using educational technology including job postings, professional development resources, special interest groups, and online learning resources.
* Michigan State University – The educational technology program at MSU has exposed me to many individuals with whom I feel I could consult for information or help solving problems.
* [Teachervision Educational Technology Resources](http://www.teachervision.fen.com/educational-technology/teacher-resources/43743.html) – Many resources for teachers can be found here including basic computer skills and information, Internet safety tips, Internet research tips, and information about the history of the Internet and integrating technology into the classroom.
* [Educational Technology Resources](http://edutechnoresources.blogspot.com/) Blog – The description of this site reads, “A blog to help 21st century teachers find their bearings in the digital classroom.” This blog is written by educational technology consultant Edwige Simon from Boulder, Colorado.
* [EduHound](http://www.eduhound.com/) – This is a free directory of categorized resources, lesson plans, clipart, and sites for educators.

Going forward, I feel that I have a lot to learn and look forward to the challenges and opportunities that await.