Reflective Teaching and Philosophy Statement

Fayetteville State University

Kimberly Smith Burton, November 17, 2021

Since becoming a faculty member in the College of Education (August 2002), continuous improvement of teaching and advising/mentoring has been a priority. Courses are consistently monitored and revised to ensure quality; professional development and scholarly endeavors take precedence, and the development and sustenance of lasting collegial relationships with advisees/mentees, students, and fellow faculty members throughout the university are valued and fostered.

As a higher education educator, an unprecedented pandemic, made me reimagine my definition of a classroom; however, it did not change the meaning of “Good Teaching.” Moving my courses that were designed for face-to-face and hybrid delivery to a fully online “remote teaching” environment undoubtedly posed certain challenges. I was posed with questions such as how to communicate clearly to students on how they would be expected to interact with new course materials and/or new modes of communication, instruction, and delivery. Some aspects of face-to-face and hybrid courses may have remained unchanged; others, however, had to be adjusted to accommodate the new ways in which students interacted with me as the instructor, the course materials, and with each other. I was fortunate enough to have gained access to technologies that would allow me to continue to facilitate instruction as if I were still teaching in-person. Therefore, in my courses I began infusing remote learning pedagogical and technological tools and strategies such as Mursion (virtual reality simulator system), Flocabulary, Nearpod, Study.com, Quizizz, GoReact, Flipgrid, Whiteboard.fi, Whiteboard.chat, Brainingcamp, Teachermade, Canva, MS Teams, and ZOOM.

Each semester, student evaluations and feedback guide course modifications and revisions to improve learning experiences for all. To disseminate quality and relevant information to candidates, great care is taken to provide a broad spectrum of current theory, research, clinical practices, and initiatives. Courses provide opportunities for students to engage in relevant research, gain experience in clinical settings, and engage in professional discussions through Canvas (Learning Management System), readings, videos, video-teleconferencing, in-class discussions, and professional participation at state and College of Education conferences. The goal is to train quality, well-rounded teachers who think critically about effective instructional design, learning experiences, assessments, and use the data generated daily to better understand each student’s learning needs, understand environmental factors that can adversely affect learning, and further understand how to mitigate opposing factors in the classroom. All courses and learning activities are aligned with the most current university, state, professional, and national standards. Course content (texts, readings, activities, standards, clinical experiences, and assignments) is reviewed and updated each semester for relevance to
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ensure all course content is suitable and meets state and national standards. In addition, several courses contain clinical experiences and early field experiences within public schools that align with course assignments to provide real opportunities for broader understandings, integration of acquired skills and knowledge, and sustainable professional growth for pre-service teacher candidates.

Over the almost thirty years of my teaching career, I have had the opportunity to look back and reflect on some of the ideas and opinions that I had about what my educational philosophy should encompass. After much reflection, my philosophy towards education at the beginning of my career was based on my thoughts from a student’s point of view. While making the transition from student to teacher, the ideas and perspectives that I once possessed have changed drastically.

As an educator, it is my duty to facilitate the learning process through modeling and instruction. As a mathematics educator, I believe that students can understand the most complex concepts if their background possesses prior information that will be an aid in the grasping of new concepts. I am in solid agreement with David Ausubel’s Meaningful Learning Theory that the learner’s cognitive structure must be assessed beforehand so that material is introduced at the appropriate level. The construction of knowledge begins with observing and recognizing events and objects through ideas we already have. We learn by constructing a network of concepts and adding to them. Mathematics is like a foreign language to some individuals, and for them to learn, it must be translated into their own language, whatever that may be.

Over the years, I find myself using the models and concepts of constructivism and am a proponent of Jerome Bruner’s Discovery Learning Theory that students should be actively involved in the learning process. Therefore, I attempt to establish a classroom environment, whether in-person or virtual, that accepts and reinforces new ideas and encourages creativity and active learning. From time to time, students should be placed on their own to work on projects, to make their own mistakes, to toy with new ideas, and to follow up hunches. Creativity and active learning opportunities motivate students to experiment; thus, developing learning that can be called their own.

It is pertinent that real life examples and technology be used to enhance classroom instruction. These sources provide students with application and the usefulness of mathematics in everyday life. In today’s workforce, corporations are looking for individuals that synthesize and analyze to solve day-to-day problems. Through representation, a student can exhibit evidence that they have accommodated mathematical knowledge to communicate thoughts and ideas, show the connection with real-world situations, and illustrate reasoning skills to solve complex problems. It is my job as a facilitator of learning to help students progress to this point. As previously mentioned, I infuse the Mursion software, an immersive virtual reality artificial intelligence
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simulator that provides a safe practice space in my courses. The Mursion software allows K-12 teacher candidates to practice what they have learned in the classroom with an opportunity to get direct feedback from virtual students, peers, and myself as the professor. Mursion provides teacher candidates with a unique opportunity to practice collaborative and communication skills that are not often addressed in teacher education programs. I incorporate Mursion’s technology in my courses to prepare teacher candidates for the challenges of teaching in today’s classroom, such as classroom management, eliciting student thinking, and leading classroom discussions.

In keeping with the tradition that students should be active learners, I attempt to involve my students in class discourse. In comparison to Piaget and Vygotsky, I feel that the impact of social interaction plays a significant role in the learning of mathematics and other content areas. Since March of 2020, the teacher candidates I instructed appreciated learning through various web-based applications, as evidenced from an informal Remote Learning survey I conducted in my Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 courses, stating: “The professor introduced interactive technologies such as Brainingcamp, Flocabulary, Quizizz, Whiteboard.chat, Canva, TeacherMade, and Nearpod.” “The professor incorporated mathematics literature books (Read Aloud YouTube Videos) which helped reinforce the mathematical concepts we were learning and vocabulary (Academic Language).” “The professor used musical videos from Numberock and YouTube to reinforce math concepts and strategies.” Teacher candidates also appreciated the engagement and sense of belonging that was developed within a remote setting: “The professor called on students by name to keep us engaged and promoted participation and attentiveness.” “If we missed class or had an issue, the professor would personally call us on our cell phone to check-in and find out what was going on.” “Constant emails on Canvas and via our FSU email kept us informed at all times.” High levels of interactive engaged learning were possible to attain within the remote setting I provided in all my courses.

Learning is a life-long process for all students. Therefore, I must provide every opportunity to challenge their minds. I provide learning experiences in which students can learn to become active participants in their own growth process. As an educator, I try to reach students by any means at my disposal to provide them with the experiences that will help them make sound decisions throughout their school career and adult lives. Professional educators must remain current in the field(s) in which they teach. I do this through cooperative clinical relationships and service within public schools, membership in professional organizations, community service, and scholarly endeavors.

As I work to ensure an optimal learning experience for all students, professional development (seminars, workshops, conference and meeting sessions, webinars, and trainings) is also
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essential for advancing pedagogical, technology, and content knowledge. Moreover, evidence of engagement in multiple professional development activities demonstrates a sincere commitment to Fayetteville State University students, quality teaching, and caring mentoring/advising.

Priorities of the university, College of Education, and the state of North Carolina are regularly updated and aligned with my professional priorities as an advisor/mentor and instructor to increase student persistence, accessibility, and academic success. My goal in all interactions is to get to know my students and provide each student with information and the support each individual requires and deserves. As an educator, advisor, and mentor, time is well spent helping students navigate the vast expectations of teacher preparation. In addition, student course evaluations remain consistently high, with 2018 – 2021 course and instructor evaluation average ratings ranging between 4.89 and 4.92 with 5.0 being the most positive on the Likert scale for Question #6 Assess the extent in which the course contributed to your learning [set aside your feelings about subject matter, course difficulty, and other similar factors].

Teaching, advising, and mentoring are the core of our mission at Fayetteville State University, and I am deeply committed to providing the utmost support and quality instruction for students. Additionally, I am committed to being an accessible, well-prepared educator, and preparing profession ready, highly trained, knowledgeable teachers/leaders in the field of education is my mission.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Smith Burton, Ph.D.
Professor of Mathematics Education