

## *Chapter 6: Reflection*

### ***Left out in the cold....***

It was a cold snowy morning and I was off to school, not happily. I looked at my feet, tennis shoes (no boots), my hands (no gloves), no scarf or hat, and a coat that was not fit for such a day. My stress had already begun. I did not want to go to that first grade classroom, especially in the cold winter months. My mind was already scheming how I was going to get out of going outside for recess today.

I was not disruptive nor a problem student. Whenever I asked to stay in for recess, primarily due to the weather, I would express that I would like to stay inside and read; the answer was always no. If I told the teacher I “forgot” my gloves and may I stay please stay inside; the answer was always no. I resorted to writing my own excuse letter so I could stay in inside (signing my mother’s name in first grade); the answer was always no. I did not know what else to do so frequently I would look in the lost and found and use odd gloves that were left behind, returning them after recess. To avoid confrontation with her some days I just went without. Today was no exception and out I went lacking the proper clothing, meanwhile the teacher sat behind her desk and knowingly made me do so.

Didn’t she see me as an individual, someone in need of help and compassion? We were all very different from one another and I recognized this at a very early age. My continuous battle with this particular teacher was frustrating and embarrassing. Now into my adulthood the stinging experience is still with me, a wound that mended but left a scar. How in the world did I ever concentrate on school work or feel a part of this first grade community? I didn’t.

The second grade was not much better for me, I loved to learn but not under the circumstances of humility and shame in who I was. If I had been provided with confidence,

pride, and given an opportunity to feel successful at school maybe “that place” would have become a source of escape from home life. Instead my first years of school lead to frustration, humility, and distancing myself from the classroom community. Fortunately this took a turn before it was too late for me.

Many of us may remember that one teacher who made a difference in us. I will never forget the first teacher who inspired me, she cared about my background, my ability, and she encouraged me to do and learn new things on my own in a manner suitable for me. She believed in me and instilled the confidence that I too was worthy of an education and a safe environment to practice it in, and that being a part of the community is important. There was a path for me, a journey that I hadn’t seen before then.

My past experiences with education have led me to wonder how many of my students come to school without boots, gloves, hats or scarves. How may I better serve their individual needs? Not one, not some, but all? It was no wonder to me that my action research question evolved into, “What happens when I use differentiation to design multimedia projects?” My frustration was fueling from the varying skill level year after year in my multimedia classes. I had been struggling with how to manage classes full of students from various backgrounds, interests, multiple entry points, varied skill level, some students had access to technology yet others still do not. The variance in student skills and needs each year has increased at an alarming rate. This may be due to technological advances and the increased outlets for learning in newly found mediums. I have seen the disconnection of students’ interest and what they value as important not only within my classroom but in many other areas of our school.

I observe students remembering only what they need to at the minute to pass the test, studying minutes beforehand memorizing only the necessities, writing their paper at break,

rushing through a project so they can do whatever else but not working on class content; these are not signs of engagement. The one size fits all mentality simply is not successful. I have been trying to meet the needs of all the students in the past but it never was successful. I made personal connections with students but on the project level I wasn't meeting the needs of the individual learner as best as I felt I could. I was consistently looking for an effective way to deal with the difference in student levels that kept reappearing. I wanted all of the students to be involved with the classroom community and feel the value of the content not one, not some, but all. What was I going to do? The problem would only continue to grow as the years passed by. I could see the need for change but I wasn't quite sure how to get there. What existed? Did anyone else care it was just a multimedia class?

I went on a journey to discover what more I could do to provide further positive learning experiences and interactions for myself and my students. I went through many bouts of trial and error pedagogy and experimentation of projects and still I did not feel satisfied or as successful as I thought I could be. I continued to find myself searching for something to magically answer my questions. It was not until my graduate school program and the support of my peers that I started to see the light. I was so fortunate to have found not only a place that valued my profession and content but was also interested in me as a teacher and a person, and the change that I might make as a leader in my classroom. They instilled in me the belief that it was possible to find the answer to my questions and they guided me towards the answers. I found it wasn't the content I was teaching but the importance of how. I was thrilled to be a part of a group that placed so much value on students and teachers learning alike. We were able to discuss our problems, ideas, and whatever we needed help with all while working as one whole the way I

want my classroom to function. The value of my peers in graduate school cannot be discounted. My students and I would not have come this far without them nor would have my research.

I always had a great connection with students but I wanted to get all of them working at an equally challenging level and increase their intrinsic motivation when learning and executing the course content. Through the course of my study I did achieve effectively engaging the needs of the individual student but it did come with challenges. I came to find out that it wasn't only about getting them to a certain skill level; it was much deeper. If I was going to reach all students and increase motivation for the course content and product there were many facets I must focus on; student readiness, interest, and learning profile.

In the beginning I was primarily focusing on learning styles missing the other differentiation components that are important to learning. I was not focusing on the whole student and it became apparent as I executed various assignments throughout my study. The criteria for each animation project changed based on quality outcome of assignments and student feedback but it took time to realize the missing links. It was then that I saw the importance of student control and ownership, the significance of incorporating the main features of differentiation into my curriculum, and the positive outcomes that would then prevail. The power of the students' voice and showing them the importance and incorporation of it is priceless. The value of sharing, being honest with one another, respecting the importance of the students ideas and voice, and creating a safe community for learning for all made a significant difference in the learning outcomes of the student and myself.

There were many stepping stones along the way to finding my first notable success with differentiation and multimedia projects. The first project showed me the importance of attaining the interests of the students and getting them to further interact with one another, the second

phase of the study proved to me the significance of why not only looking at learning styles was important but talking in the student as a whole, and that the projects are supplements to the real world they live in and should be treated as such.

*I see skies of blue and clouds of white...and I think to myself what a wonderful world...*

The close, now what? How do I continue, my next steps? There are so many other possibilities and avenues that differentiation tools have to offer to me. I know that I will continue to follow through with and use further methods and combinations of theories to evolve my teaching practices to further make connections to students' individuality, personal growth, and create a wholesome learning experience. I want to provide the best of what I have to offer for my students' experience so that they may do the same for me.

I know now what I can do to make a better place for my students to insure a safe community for learning, failures and successes, and a place where individual differences can be expressed and explored without fear or shame. A classroom where we all come together and learn as a whole and as individuals we will feed from each other's experiences, spirits and souls. We will thrive from our journeys together and learn at a pace that is comfortable for all of us, not one, not some, all. That is what I want for the now and future for my students and myself.