

Reflective Essay

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July 11, 2010

Introduction

Throughout my semester in MEDT 8484, I have been introduced to many new ideas and concepts regarding educational research. I received my bachelor's and master's degrees in education and have not had many opportunities to become familiar with the research process. Through the courses taken during my studies, I was exposed to classes that focused solely on the on the results of the research – teaching practices, learning strategies, etc. My only experiences to date with the actual educational research process, was a single research class taken while working towards my master's degree. The course did not focus on the actual research process. Rather, the class discussed measurement tools, and I was expected to create a “mock” research study. This class has given me an opportunity to learn more about the many aspects of educational research.

Review of Learning

Rather than merely focusing on research measurement tools as I did when receiving my master's degree, this class has offered me the opportunity to learn more about the background of conducting a research study. Before being enrolled in this course, I was unfamiliar with the process for conducting research and the steps that one would take to produce an educational study. One major component that I was unfamiliar with was the idea of a literature review. Literature reviews have multiple roles. They can act as a summary and/or synthesis of existing sources, “a new interpretation of old material,” evaluate the existing research or track the progress of the research (The Writing Center, n.d.). A literature review is intended to provide the

information needed to “summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of others” (The Writing Center, n.d.). They are critical for understanding the existing research, theories, and ideas surrounding the topic in question. Additionally, literature reviews can “act as a stepping stone” when there is limited time to conduct actual research (The Writing Center, n.d.).

While searching for the information needed to write a literature review, you want to be able to address the following: an overview of the research, a categorized summary of the reviewed articles (i.e.: for or against your position), similarities and differences between each reviewed article, and conclusions of which articles best support the research topic (The Regents of the University of California, 2010). My professor provided me with a template to use in searching for the specific information needed from each article. However, in order to create an effective literature review, information such as topic, summary of position, information about reliability and validity, etc. should be addressed. Through the creation of my literature review, I was able to hone my skills when reading educational journals and other reviews of research. The text in an educational journal can often be cumbersome and not especially user friendly. As I had to find several details from the study, I had to be efficient and thorough when reading articles that could be up to 60 or 70 pages long. Searching out specifics in a sea of research can be daunting, and it is something that takes time. This was one major mistake that I made within my own studies – not allowing enough time, and it is one that I do not seek to repeat soon.

Implications

Many teachers are content to merely receive their bachelor’s degree, pass the GACE, and enter the classroom. I was different from many of my fellow graduates when I decided to return to school for my master’s degree rather than enter the classroom. I felt that I had so much more to learn. After five years of teaching, I chose to return to school to pursue my specialist’s degree

and will graduate in Spring 2011 with a degree in Media and Instructional Technology. I consider myself a lifelong learner and am always seeking ways to be a better and more effective teacher. While I already am seeking degrees above most of my colleagues, I desire to eventually enter into a doctorate program. I would like to move from the classroom into an administrative position. To be an effective administrator, I feel that it will be crucial that I continue my education and obtain my doctorate degree. To obtain a doctorate degree, I know that I will be required to write a dissertation that will necessitate some sort of research or data collection. In order to be successful in this endeavor, this class has been invaluable. It has certainly set the foundation for my future research programs and projects.

I have been involved in an excellent research endeavor for the past three years. With the assistance of a fellow teacher, I helped pilot a single-gender education program in Barrow County Schools. My colleague and I conducted our own research into single gender education, relying on a lot of research conducted by Michael Gurian of the Gurian Institute in Colorado. The Gurian Institute's core belief is to "[help] boys and girls reach their full potential by providing professional development [to educators] that increase student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and parent involvement" (Gurian Institute, 2010). In addition, I have been trained by the Gurian Institute as a trained trainer in single gender education for Barrow County Schools. Due to the initial success of the single gender program, the superintendant required that all middle schools implement a single gender opportunity for the 2009-2010 school year. The program continues to be a success and the qualitative and quantitative data has been encouraging.

Conclusion

The assignments in this class have been quite different from the assignments that I have experienced in my collegiate education. I have spent my time learning about how to become a better teacher – best practices, educational theories, etc. The information presented through the activities and discussions in this class have been in an educational field different from those that I have been previously exposed to. The knowledge that I now possess regarding the ins-and-outs of educational research will be invaluable in my educational and professional lives. Though the assignments presented in this class have been slightly outside my normal comfort zone, the information that I have learned is invaluable to my future.

References

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