Reflection on Learning:

Application to Professional Practice

Kim Mulkey

**Introduction**

In reflecting on the course Research 8484 at the University of West Georgia, I will reveal the impact this course has had on me. I am currently an instructional technology facilitator at an independent upper elementary school. In this job, I teach students, support teachers, and provide staff development in the area of technology. The students we teach range from fourth through sixth grade. The school is part of a larger academy ranging from Pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, and it is a college preparatory school. Our school has been educating students successfully since 1900.

Since the school has been around for many years, and is not part of the main stream of public education, formal research is not always used for educational decisions. Over the past nine years of employment, I have seen decisions made based on informal qualitative research methods, grounded on what is being observed and compared with what has worked in the past. Considering what I have learned in this research course, I would like to explore the use of research for future decisions at my school.

**Review of Learning**

In order to meet the course objectives in this class, I followed the module order of the course. There was a deeper construct of content than I remember doing in my master’s program. The book *Educational Research Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* (Johnson and Christensen, 2004) explained research in a relatively readable manner. The companion website helped to clarify and consolidate the material. It allowed me to meet the first objective in the course of expanding and refining my knowledge of the philosophy of research.

I have definitely gained more knowledge about using technology in the classroom. Even though my topic was specific to electronic response systems, I researched other topics that relate both directly and indirectly and could be transferred throughout the classroom. In this course I also attended a webinar on 21st century learning, which aided in my theories I concluded about the methods of instruction that needs to happen in our classrooms today. The instructors of this webinar also wrote the book called, *21st Century Skills*. I have ordered and received this book and plan to begin reading it when this semester is complete. The website <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/> offers a tremendous amount of information on this topic, as well.

The area of research design was the most interesting to me of the topics we read about. It was fascinating to see the different approaches a researcher could take depending on the circumstances. It also allowed me to evaluate other research better, as I read. I wish that we had read this chapter earlier in the semester in order to gain a clearer understanding for the chart assignment. I did go back and look at the designs of my literature research after reading this portion.

The development of the literature review was not as difficult as I had feared in the beginning of the course. The progress of the chart and map helped to consolidate the information into a workable format, which in the end, aided in the formulation of the paper. I used the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) for help in the development of my paper, as well as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

**Implications**

The implications of taking this course will change my approach to teaching. I think I will be more conscious to check for research that has been completed on the changes that I want to implement. The research is easier to find now that I have better strategies for location. The use of references cited in a high-quality paper will give a quicker avenue for finding more resources. With the use of databases like Galileo, finding information has become easier, so research can be a great way to make changes (or not) beneficial to my learning environment.

I will be able to look at the research critically for validity and whether or not it can be generalized to my situation. While in this class, I have learned that anyone can skew research to go the way they want it. There are certain key points to look for while assessing the research, for instance, the type of sample, the design method, and the analysis of the data. Any one of these can determine if the research has been conducted in a meaningful manner. Locating research that is valid and accomplished in a mode that is transferable is vital to have before making major changes in education.

**Conclusion**

While completing this course on research, I feel that I have been given a new avenue of which to explore before making changes in my computer classroom. I also look at the opportunities my classroom creates to provide research on topic areas that are new. Often times educators jump on the next band wagon that rolls around. Sometimes it yields beneficial results and sometimes not. Researching the topic and learning the pitfalls can aid educators by allowing them to create better methods of instruction. I plan to use this tool to help me in avoiding problems that could occur and also to evaluate the learning that occurs in my classroom.

As a technology facilitator, I will also be providing staff development for my teachers. This needs to have research support, as well. I think it would be valuable to have evidence of success to show teachers when providing them with instruction of best methods of technology use in their classrooms.

Through this course, I believe that research can be a valuable tool to help me as an educator to design my classroom and staff development instruction in a more meaningful and successful manner.

**References**

(2004). *Parnership for 21st century skills*. Retrieved from <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological* *Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2004). Educational research: Quantitative qualitative, and mixed approaches. Boston: Pearson.

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL). ( 2009). Retrieved November 28, 2009, from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.

Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). *21st century skills*. Jossey-Bass.