Course Reflective Essay

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I felt a sense of calmness with the opening activity in Dr. Crowell’s class on Saturday morning of September 27th 2014. This sense of calmness motivated me to look forward to class on Saturday mornings and be an active participant. I looked forward to the opening and closing activities, rituals, the sound of the charming bell, memories of Dr. Crowell’s leadership practices and holding on to every word of encouragement from Dr. Crowell. i.e. My doctoral degree is a way of paving a new path to find my own voice to continue to advocate for preschool children with special needs. Concepts I learned in this course helps me to broaden my perception and knowledge of leadership as a generative leader to look for new directions by gearing up to face global issues in the profession of early childhood education. I enjoyed Dr. Crowell’s method of teaching and learning of active participation, reflection, movement and being engaged with all senses as a learner. This is a testament of what Dr. Crowell explained throughout the quarter about the connection between the brain and the mind: cognitive neuroscience

The facets of leadership such as the purpose, vision, culture, capacity, ownership and service were discussed in great detail. Our purpose is our intention. As an instructional leader, my purpose in embarking on my doctoral studies and choosing my research topic to Assess the Quality of Inclusive Practices in Head Start programs to Improve Access of the Preschool Curriculum for Children with Special Needs, is to continue to be an advocate for preschool children with special needs. Instructional Leadership and Learning Strategies were explored with rich discussions based on our own experiences and discussions based on assigned books.

This essay consolidates highlights of the 5 books I read for this course and weave the connections between major concepts such as brain & mind, power of attachments & relationships, and creativity & story telling. The first book is *Generative leadership: Shaping new futures for today’s schools* by Klimak, Ritzenhein, and Sullivan (2008). The authors discuss the importance getting everyone’s input involved in accomplishing a common goal. Leading horizontally and vertically as open systems and moving away from the traditional top down approach as the closed systems were emphasized as generative leaders. Generative leaders follow systems thinking approaches. Paying close attention to mental models and a shared vision are crucial. I can relate to some of the key concepts because when I applied these concepts to encourage staff involvement, make decisions to best meet the needs of children, when I served as a Program Director. I got positive feedback and active involvement of staff members. I did not know the term of generative leadership back then. Klimak, Ritzenhein, and Sullivan (2008) shares how open systems can be successful as they are process oriented with boundaries with openness because what matters is not who the leader is but who is leading at any given project or goal. Generative leadership concepts will be successful in complex work environments such as school settings.

The second book is *Attachment-based teaching: Creating a tribal classroom* by Cozolino (2014). The four core principles-tribes, secure attachment, neuro plasticity and work-around shared by Cozolino (2014) helped me to conceptualize the creation of attachment-based classrooms and to understand the human story as related to brain development. Coming from an early childhood education background, I felt this book helped me to put pieces of a puzzle together. A preschool classroom functions as a tribe, every child thrives with the love and care of a teacher who provides a secure attachment, children’s brains are constantly changing and shaping with the new information they receive (neuro plasticity) and the work around are gives me purpose to help others from my learning. Cozalino (2012) reiterated the importance of play and storytelling.

The third book is *The art of changing the brain: Enriching the practice of teaching by*

*exploring the biology of learning* by Zull (2002). Complex concepts of the brain and the mind were explained in a simple manner when Zull (2002) introduced and summed up the brain function as “Learning is physical.” I must agree with Zull (2002) that” teaching is the art of changing the brain (p.5). I find this really applicable in the profession of early childhood education because in order to make learning meaningful to young children teachers must think of hands on learning activities so that children learn by actively engaged in their learning environments using all senses. Zull (2012) shares the importance of concrete experiences and building on existing knowledge in order for neurons will fuse and neuro plasticity takes effect. Zull (2012) explains the learning cycle in a simplified manner based on theories of Jean Piaget and John Dewey: Concrete (experiences) —Reflective (observation) --Abstract (hypothesis) – Active (testing) (p.17).

The fourth book is *Emergent teaching: A path of creativity, significance, and transformation* by Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013). According to the authors the universe is connected, relational and constantly changing. “Emergence occurs out of the movement and interplay of these relationships (p.17). I found it fascinating to learn that emergent teaching takes place in this connectedness with the energy between the teacher and students in their learning environment. It was interesting to learn about emergent teaching because I am familiar with emergent curriculum because of my background in early childhood education. I know the importance of creating a stimulating learning environment for young children because of the rapid development of the and the importance of meaningful concrete experiences.

The fifth book is *The integrative mind: Transformative education for a world on fire* by Hart (2014). The integrative mind comprises of 5 minds put together: Contemplative Mind, Empathetic Mind, Beautiful Mind, Embodied Mind and Imaginative Mind according to Hart (2014). His advice is for educators is to pay attention to students and help them to cultivate each of these minds so that students will be successful. This reminded me of Dr. Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. “The roots of education is preparing us for life of flourishing and fulfillment by developing our humanity, our human consciousness, our mind and soul” (p.2).

**Summary**

Dr. Crowell imparted his knowledge, passion and life’s work as an instructional leader in a unique manner which validated my role as leader in the profession of early childhood education. In addition to the books, we discussed the importance building and maintaining relationships as leaders. We also discussed about authoritarian leadership, authentic leadership, distributive leadership, facilitated leadership, systems theory, types of systems (open and closed) and the effects of these in schools and business organization. I found the discussion on hegemony to be particularly fascinating and to learn that every society experience hegemony and individuals should play according to the rules of the game is a powerful experience.

This course also validated my teaching style when I began my career as a preschool teacher and now as an adjunct instructor teaching early childhood courses at College of the Desert and serving as an administrator at First 5 Riverside. I still remember the excitement, eagerness and the active involvement of my preschool children twenty four year ago in 1992, when the children were given an opportunity to paint real fish as an extended activity followed from a field trip to the trout farm. Dr. Crowell shared the importance of consolidated experiences according to neuroscience.

**References**

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