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Unit 8/Final

Part A.

I would have to argue that a teacher's experience is a fruitful approach to studying education. I state this not only from the learning that I have gained from this course, but also from personal experience in teaching with (as a student teacher, substitute and colleague of) phenomenal, experienced teachers. In this class we have learned from many different teachers' experiences; and thus have become more knowledgeable because of their experiences being shared with us. As a reader throughout this course I have been able to imagine the experiences of those that we have read about, and gain a better understanding of inquiry teaching. Through learning through others teachers experiences, I have been able to "see" how a teacher can use inquiry in the classroom, how some educational problems and issues can be addressed and learn through the experiences of those that have "been there, done that."

Being able to become a part of another teacher's experiences allows us to not only learn how they approach the use of inquiry in their teaching, but also uses a unique form of inquiry to teach us. Through the experiences of great teachers, such as Vivian Paley, we are able to "dive into" their teaching experiences and almost feel their experiences first hand by reading about them. Paley was able to capture her teaching experiences in such a way as to allow her readers to become part of the experiences as well. As a reader, I could feel the excitement of the classroom as they acted out the different books of Leo Lionni. Paley was able to teach us through her experiences what can be a great way of teaching in the classroom. I do not think that if Paley just told the readers, "storytelling is a great teaching tool; here are all the statistics showing that it is a great teaching tool; you need to use this in your classroom to be a great teacher," it would have had the same impact on the reader. It would not have had the same degree of influence that her teaching experiences does have with the reader. The reader can capture the understanding of the learners in the classroom, the struggles of teaching in a new way, and how a teacher can learn from the experiences in the classroom.

What better way to learn how to be a great inquiry teacher then to actually be (or put yourself in the place of) great inquiry teaching experiences? Throughout this course we read about many different teachers' experiences. Howard Gardner described to us the great successes of the Reggio school. Although he was not giving us first hand experiences of teaching at the school, he was giving us great insight on how they have become a successful inquiry based school. This may not be the same as learning from the experiences of the teachers of the school; it does however allow the readers to gain an understanding of successful inquiry teaching in the classroom.

Jane Addams was a great intellectual influence on many "agents of change" throughout her life. Although she was not a "teacher," she taught many individuals throughout her life. I think her experiences could be a great influence on teachers. How was she able to engage the Hull House members and the community in intellectual debate? How was she able to inspire the leaders of her tomorrow? These are the things that educators could learn from her "teaching" experiences. When studying education, we do not have to only study those that are labeled educators, we can learn from any person that teachers others successfully.

Every teacher has a unique set of experiences to share with others. There are many educational problems and issues that surround us on a daily basis. How do we engage the advanced learners of our diverse classroom without losing those that have learning disabilities? How do we use technology in the classroom to its fullest potential? How do we

not “teach to the test” but yet make sure our students are achieving “adequate yearly progress”? These are only some of the many educational problems and issues that we encounter and have to solve on a daily basis. Why would we not look towards those that have been through the same trials and tribulations for guidance and support? This is the most reasonable source of knowledge of the problems- those that are in the classroom and have experienced these issues are our best resource. Our best resource is not from statistics and someone in an office telling us what we should be doing in the classroom- they know nothing of the going-ons of the classroom. Again looking at Paley, as a reader of her experiences, I was able to see how her storytelling approach to teaching addressed many different issues in the classroom. Paley was able to challenge the most avid learner while at the same time engage and encourage those that struggled.

Many great teachers are willing to share their experiences with other teachers, scholars, administrators, and other groups of interest in education. They can share their experiences with others in many different ways. There are many different educational journals that they can write in, or they can write their own book about their experiences. Teachers can also share their experiences through speeches, group discussions and much more. Technology can also be of a great assistance in the accessibility of a teacher’s experiences. Not only is this course (and the other MAED online courses) a great example of how great teaching experiences can be shared to many individuals, but there is an abundance of ways to communicate and “broadcast” to others who are interested in learning with the use of technology. Websites, blogs, discussion forums, and so much more.

It is through the experiences of teachers that we can learn how to become great teachers ourselves. We can use the experiences of others to put to use in our classrooms, to adopt to fit our particular needs, to address the issues of our own classrooms.

Part B.

I have been a strong believer in the saying “Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.” Students will not gain anything from a lecture, besides learning how to zone out and doodle on their notepads. The blank stares on their faces are not an indication of understanding! It is an indication that everything that was just said went through one ear and out the other. The students need to experience what they are learning, to literally put their hands and minds into their learning and not just be passive learners. But I have never put this belief farther than its use in the classroom. Once students have left my classroom, hasn’t my duty of their being their teacher been fulfilled? Bateson’s book, Peripheral Visions, has challenged me to think otherwise. I should not be just teaching the students how to learn (and what I want them to learn about) in the classroom, I should also teach them how to learn from their experiences outside the classroom. I should be getting the students excited and interested in the world around them, in the events that they could be taking part in and teaching them how to learn from those experiences. Because, let’s face it, students will remember more about their life experiences outside the classroom in twenty, thirty years, than what they will remember about what was taught in the classroom.

In Peripheral Visions, Bateson was able to show how important life experiences are to a person’s learning. But, Bateson argues, these experiences are being “ruined” by a student’s

lack of desire to learn. Students are not learning from their experiences as they should because they have been so turned off by their learning experiences in the classroom. Young kids go into school with an active desire to learn, to question, to explore the things that are around them. Those desires are soon squashed and battered by the formal methods of teaching, eventually turning students away from learning outside of the classroom- a place where they should be learning the most. I am not saying that either Bateson or I believe that there is no learning taking place outside of the classroom, because there is. This learning, however, is not at its fullest potential when students leave school wanting to “veg out” and not have to think at all. Schools should instead be multipliers of the students desires to want to be continual learners throughout their lives.

Although it is important to have students know how to solve algebraic equations, and who the 23rd President was, and why we shouldn’t use double negatives, it is also important to learn how to engage in the world and our community around us. Bateson shows us through her international experiences how much we can learn from the events (big or small) and the surroundings of our life. When Bateson took her daughter to a ceremonial sacrifice she used it as a learning opportunity for her daughter. By describing to her daughter the different body parts of the animal, she allowed her daughter to feel comfortable in a new situation and learn from it as well. Even though she was very young, her daughter was able to gage the actions of the other people during the ceremony and interpret how she should act and respond- to not be scared. This is a powerful example of how, even at a young age, we are learning from the world around us and the people that surround us. If the people that surround us engage and learn from the world and our experiences, we will learn that ability from them.

We live in a time when, unfortunately, the economy has required schools to make enormous cuts to “un-needed” learning experiences. This has resulted in schools not being able to afford field trips- which can be a great learning experience for students. What better way for students to experience firsthand the artist (for example) they have been studying about then to go to the museum and see their works of art for themselves? But we cannot change this misfortune; instead we have to be more creative in teaching our students how to learn from the world that surrounds them. The biology teacher may not be able to afford to purchase all the different bugs that they are studying; instead the students should investigate, find and capture the bugs that are native to their communities and study them. This would really excite the students outside the classroom- every time they see a bug fly by or land, they will be inquisitive about the type of bug they just saw.

Not every student will be able to have international experiences to learn from as Bateson did. In fact many will not even have the opportunities to explore much of the world outside their city, state or country. But students can still learn so much from the world that surrounds them. They can gain much from the experiences that they take a part in. This can only happen, unfortunately, if the schools strive to change the way teaching is done. Students should not be put off by learning in the classroom. Instead, students should be excited and more motivated to learn each and every day the leave the classroom.