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Introductory Integrative Essay

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Walden University

EDUC-6600-T1004 Program Portfolio

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April 18, 2008

My experience in this Masters Program at Walden University has been very beneficial for me. I have learned a great deal about how students learn, new strategies with which to reach them, and effective ways to integrate technology into the classroom. I have grown both as an educator and a leader. I fully expect this degree program will have a long-term impact on my teaching career.

The core courses of the curriculum were in themselves very valuable. I had never before taken an education class, so these ideas opened a new world for me. One of the earliest courses, *Effective Teaching*, introduced me to Dr. Silver and his coworkers. In the book *So Each May Learn*, I discovered the four learning styles and Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (Silver, Strong & Perini, 2000). Since learning about these, I have been careful to take differing learning styles into account when planning lessons. I make sure that I do not use the same style all the time, but vary how I teach the material. Instead of simply lecturing, I add in manipulatives, simulations and activities, to ensure that I am engaging all of my students, not just those that learn the same way I do. Dr. Silver and his colleagues again came to my attention with the book *Teaching Styles and Strategies*. These ideas gave me new additions to my "bag of tricks" and allowed me to find new ways to teach. I have especially had success with Concept Attainment Strategy, and look forward to using lessons I have developed employing the Jigsaw Strategy, Mystery Strategy and Graduated Difficulty Strategy. These strategies are helping me to move away from being the center of attention in the classroom and allow the students to shine; to help students develop the skills to learn with guidance from the teacher, rather than robotically copying and repeating the teacher's words. I keep in mind the three-story house metaphor from *Habits of Mind* and I engage the students' higher-order thinking skills with projects designed to help them analyze and synthesize, rather than simply memorize (Costa & Kallick, 2000).

The specialization courses have also impacted the way I teach. One early reading that stuck with me was about three teachers who were at differing levels of technological competence (Pierson, 2001). I could identify so readily with those teachers. I understood that, just like Steve, I was making technology too much the center, and not integrating it in for a purpose. This was followed by Dr. Thornburg and his ideas of Just-in-Case vs. Just-in-Time teaching (Thornburg, 1996). It was a revelation to me when I read “Content is not king; context is king” (Thornburg, 1996, p. 62). I have since worked very hard to move away from just teaching facts and make sure that all the content is put in context for my students. One project that has evolved through the assignments in this degree program is about global warming. I am using this topical subject as a backdrop for chemistry content. As I read through my portfolio, I was struck by how I took this idea that I first had in the class Habits of Mind, a course halfway through the program, and developed it through later courses. That first paper I have chosen as evidence for General Standard G3. I expanded on the basic idea in the next course, Integrating Technology in the Curriculum Part I, as seen in the assignment I chose for the specialization standard S3.3, and refined it further in Integrating Technology in the Curriculum Part II, as seen in the assignment I chose for the specialization standard S2.4. This latter assignment I modified into a proposal for a grant, which I was recently awarded. I am looking forward to implementing this project into my classroom.

All of these courses have combined to help me become more of a leader. One early application that I wrote was an assessment of my school’s Technology Plan. I wrote that, while we had an abundance of technology available, I felt that what was needed was more integration of that technology. When I wrote that paper in December of 2006, I had only just begun my graduate training the previous September. I believed I knew the direction the school should take,

but I was reluctant to share those opinions. Sixteen months later, I have much more confidence in my opinion, and the knowledge that I have learned in these courses to back it up. I scheduled a meeting with my principal, discussed why I felt the school was lacking in integration, and spoke to her about ways to improve the situation. One result of this meeting was a faculty in-service, in which I presented ideas and resources that I had learned about in this degree program. I have also created a web page of resources from which teachers of all subjects can draw ideas (<http://faculty.sha-excelsior.org/christophy/TeacherResources.htm>).

Sharing what I have learned with other teachers continues to be a goal of mine. I chose as my Collaborative Action Research a project studying the interactive whiteboard in the secondary science classroom, a topic which has had very little written about it in the literature. I fully intend to continue this study and publish it in a peer-reviewed journal. I have already discussed this project, and other interactive whiteboard lessons and ideas, on the SMARTBoard Lessons Podcast (Hazzard & Badger, 2008). I will take my experiences integrating technology in the classroom and develop them into conference presentations. I will continue to use resources such as Tapped In (TappedIn.org, 2008) to exchange ideas with other teachers.

My studies in the Masters of Science in Education, Integrating Technology in the Classroom, program at Walden University has been overwhelmingly positive. I have learned a great deal, not only about integrating technology, but about teaching in general. I have made friends through the program that I will continue to share and learn with. I am fortunate to have had this experience, and I know that my students will reap the greatest rewards.

## References

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