Beth Horihan

Due: December 5, 2013

EDU 361: Lansing

Final Reflection

After a semester of working with my students, I have been able to see a tremendous amount of growth in their reading as well as my teaching. One of the key observations I have made is the students are much more comfortable with the tutoring situation. They understand my expectations of them and they understand that there is a routine for how the tutoring session will work. The more we have worked together, the more motivated they have become to try out the skills and strategies I work on with them. Additionally, instead of appealing immediately or omitting the tricky word, both students not only use strategies to decode words (notably stretch it out and break it apart) but also to verbalize and offer advice to each other about the strategies they are using and why.

As I have watched my students’ progress and begun to set more and more challenging goals for them, I have also looked at how I am progressing toward the goals that the course outcomes present for me. These goals include: demonstrate success for the at-risk reader through the use of diagnosis and corrective activities, apply effective instructional techniques to completely develop word analysis and comprehension strategies, demonstrate the ability to make instructional decisions based on evaluative reflections, demonstrate sensitivity and empathy for children with reading difficulties, engage in the process of using evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her actions on others, and adapts practice to meet the needs of each learner in the practicum environment, identify and use a variety of methods for teaching vocabulary, reading fluency, comprehension, phonemic awareness, and phonics, and create a tutoring situation that fosters an interest in reading and writing about reading. To demonstrate my growth and goals in these areas I will go through each one by one.

*1. Demonstrate success for the at-risk reader through the use of diagnosis and corrective activities*

Throughout the semester, I feel I have reached this goal quite well. While there is always room for improvement I have demonstrated, both in previous tutoring experiences and in practicum, that I can effectively administer assessments and create instructional goals and plans based upon the results of those assessments and personal observations. In the case of this course, I have effectively administered the pre and post phonemic awareness assessment, taken running records to find the students’ instructional reading levels before tutoring and after the semester, and completed an initial sound sort to further assess phonemic awareness skills with the students. From these assessments I discovered the students both demonstrated weaknesses in applying knowledge of phonemes to break down new words in a text. Therefore, I began introducing games like a word wheel and find the secret word that had the students identify the different sounds in a word as well as look for sound patterns. After repeated explicit instruction on these strategies as well as scaffolded supports during lessons, my students demonstrated growth in areas of phonemic awareness and use of decoding skills while reading during my final assessments.

*2. Apply effective instructional techniques to completely develop word analysis and comprehension strategies*

My progress toward this outcome has already been highlighted to an extent in my response to the previous outcome. However, this is an area I have seen a lot of growth in this semester. I set a goal for myself at midterm to utilize a broader selection of decoding strategies and instructional techniques with my students. I spent a lot of my planning time on lessons really thinking through how I would best explain things to the students and what approaches would be most accessible and engaging for my students. Additionally, I worked on expanding my knowledge of comprehension strategies to use with reading since currently my main approach is through graphic organizers. I began trying to incorporate revised versions of comprehension strategies we were learning about in Reading Across the Curriculum informally in my writing work with the students and saw great success with these strategies.

*3. Demonstrate the ability to make instructional decisions based on evaluative reflections*

During the lesson as well as at the conclusion of each lesson, I always take time to write down a few notes about what worked for me and the students and what didn’t. I think back about what I was able to tell the students comprehended, what they didn’t, and what activities most effectively engaged them in the learning process. Overall, I think that this is one of my strongest areas as a future teacher. I am continually setting and re-evaluating goals and how I go about achieving them as I go, further refining them since there is always room for improvement. Even though this was already an area of strength for me at the beginning of the semester, I have seen growth in the ease at which I can select tools and strategies to suit the needs I notice during instruction.

*4. Demonstrate sensitivity and empathy for children with reading difficulties*

I think this outcome is also one of my strengths as a future teacher. As someone who was once a struggling reader and took part in reading interventions throughout grade school, I understand just how frustrating it can be to not be able to decode a word no matter how hard you try. Therefore, I am very deliberate about the scaffolding I provide for my students. I want to ensure that I model the strategies carefully and do it in phases so they tutees gradually take over the strategy instead of feeling pressured to use the strategy independently right away. One way I found that was effective with the students I was working with was to have them brainstorm solutions together. For a few lessons, the three of us walked through the text and all of us wrote down a few tricky words we wanted the group to help with. This allowed the students to realize everyone (even the teacher) needs some help to think of strategies sometimes. Using this as word work really improved the rapport I had with my students and the overall dynamic of our tutoring sessions while also building up the students confidence when thinking of strategies!

*5. Engage in the process of using evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her actions on others, and adapts practice to meet the needs of each learner in the practicum environment*

This outcome is, in my opinion, very closely tied to outcome three. Therefore, my response is very similar. I think that as a future teacher, my evaluative approach to my instruction is a strong point. However, I think that occasionally, I do not adequately adapt the instruction to fit the needs of multiple readers. It has been a bit of a struggle for me this semester to try and think of ways to allow a student who needs more think time to be part of conversation with a peer who enjoys sharing frequently and quickly. This is something that I hope continue to work on by being very deliberate about how I structure the collaborative nature of text readings and word work in the future.

*6. Identify and use a variety of methods for teaching vocabulary, reading fluency, comprehension, phonemic awareness, and phonics*

My progress in this area is similar to that of outcome two. While I have a toolbox of a variety of strategies and methods for instruction in these areas, I do not always utilize them. However, I have spent a lot of time planning to make sure I use a broader variety of strategies in my instruction and have seen improvement in this area. While I have been careful to try and bring in more variety to my lessons, this is still an area I need to continually monitor and reevaluate so that I don’t slip back into my old habits of sticking to strategies I’m more comfortable with.

*7. Create a tutoring situation that fosters an interest in reading and writing about reading*

Overall, I think I do a good job of achieving this outcome. My students are always excited to come to tutoring and this excitement has only increased as the semester went on. I work hard to create a positive safe environment for them to try out new skills as well as play games and select texts that not only fit my teaching goals for the day but really engage the students in the active learning process. When I was able to extend a topic over several sessions or give them a sneak peek into what we were reading the next session, it really increased their motivation and made them feel like a part of the decision making team which is something I aim for in my teaching.

I am so proud of how far my students have come on our journey this semester. They both have made significant progress in skills and confidence when reading. Through goal setting and continual reflection, I know that I have been help my students move further toward reaching their full reading potential, and they have helped me move along to reaching higher levels of effective teaching as demonstrated throughout this reflection. Additionally, my students have helped me to realize areas I would still like to grow in and to start brainstorming ways that I can set and reach my ever changing goals in these areas as I go on in my teaching career.