Reflection on Theory Paper

ED 380

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Teaching is one of those professions that can become simply, “running through the motions.” One might say, “No way! Students change. Rules change. How could teaching become monotonous?” By having a fixed method of teaching and never considering a different one. Too often, I’ve heard of teachers who are not teaching the newest and best researched-based practices. It’s difficult to keep up with all of the new findings. It’s true. But isn’t it worth it? Being a reflective teacher is one of the most important attributes a teacher can have. In order to be, not only reflective, but also effective I have to fall in line with the latest standards in the field of teaching.

 The first step in the process of reflecting on whether or not I’m a “good” teacher is to know both the history of my field, as well as the major concepts and theories. I show a clear understanding of both of these by mentioning Stephen Krashen’s Acquisition-Learning theory, which made the study of second language acquisition a top priority in the education sphere. Krashen’s theory was focused primarily on the idea of comprehensible input, providing students with accessible information for learning.

 Krashen’s theory, however, did not include any strategies for teaching academic language, most important for a student’s success in Business or University. Newer research by Robin Scarcella, has changed this. She has revealed a real and vital part of teaching our students in such a way as to set them up for success. Indeed, applying Scarcella’s strategies to our classrooms will change the way students learn for years to come, for the better. One option for implementing this strategy is direct instruction: explicitly teaching the semantics, phonetics, and morphology of words needed across content areas. Also, input is nearly unimportant without immediate and constructive feedback from the teacher. Students need to know that they are correct or incorrect and how to fix their mistakes, rather than be allowed to continue making the same mistakes.

 Applying this knowledge and practice to a classroom is another challenge altogether. Several ways to do this is to pay attention to the way my classroom is arranged. Group work is ideal for ELLs, so tables are perfect. If tables are not an option, I would try to arrange desks in such a way that group work is easily and quickly organized. This way, students can work together to get feedback from both classmates and teacher. However, I know that some students are intimidated by group work because they feel so far behind. In these cases, I would make sure that this student could work with a partner, rather than in a large group, floating to that pair often during work time for assistance. Group work also fulfills Scarcella’s model by giving students the opportunity to interact with the language through reading and speaking. Another way to assist students in interacting with the language is by labeling. I may not label everything; it would depend on the level of my ELLs. Sometimes context clues are a better way to learn. Most importantly, for Scarcella’s model, I need to directly teach academic language, every day. This can be accomplished by integrating it into my curriculum or novel. Important words to teach are those that will be vital for two or more content areas, not just English. As mentioned, teaching morphology, semantics and phonology will allow students to retain the information easier and quicker.

 I would change many aspects of my teaching right now, namely my tendency to fall into “teacher voice,” but also I need to be ready to alter any of my strategies at any time if a better option is discovered. And I need to be searching for ways to improve my own classroom, not only waiting on research. I need to be altering my work to fit my students, who might not respond the same to an activity from year to year. Doing this will not only make me a good teacher, but a good learner.