

RUNNING HEAD: Reflexive Journal

Reflexive Journal Assignment

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I had convinced myself that university just wasn't ever going to be for me... and that was okay. Maybe I just wasn't cut out for it, and that wasn't my fault. I was going to be like all the males in my family; finish high school, get a 9 to 5 wage, and pretend like I was happy with what I was, and wasn't, going to accomplish. You see, I come from a long line of men with addictive personalities, who struggled with professional perseverance when things get tough. Alcohol, food, and illicit substances are some of the vices that have come to define the men who share my family name and who have come before me. Thing was, I was okay with that... until one day I wasn't.

School came easy to me as a child. I didn't have to work hard to see success, I was "extending," to use the current vernacular, in all subjects academically, but I still didn't enjoy education, schooling, and academia. Something was missing. I didn't come to realize what this was however, until I was almost thirty years old, and had already got married and become a father. I was missing *purpose*. To put it simply, I had flunked out of university in my early twenties. I was going through the exercise of post-secondary without understanding what I was there for, and I subsequently created the self-abnegating story that "it just wasn't for me." This continued for almost ten years, and only after seeing what I've now come to realize was poor management and leadership from my "superiors" in my *safe*, dead-end job, I realized that I needed to do something different, "something for *me*." This is, where after many nights of deep conversation, tears, and frustration, I found my *Path with Heart*, as Cynthia Chambers would say.

A career in education would be my direction, but I still didn't know what exactly that meant, and, truthfully, maybe I still don't. After rectifying the apathetic approach and lacklustre effort of my previous undergrad experience ten years earlier, I settled on a

History degree and convinced myself that I would teach high school Social Studies. I mean, I now “knew my stuff,” and got good grades after all, so that’s where I was meant to be right? Wrong. I had originally intended to dabble in multiple ages of volunteering and had just planned on checking off the box that I had in fact stepped foot in an elementary school. After five days volunteering in a grade 4/5 split, I never entered a high school classroom again.

Somehow these inner-city classrooms, amidst the organizational chaos, colourful personalities, and challenging student behaviours that illuminated legacies of familial and systemic trauma, actually provided me with professional peace for the very first time. This is where I was meant to be. Chambers (2004) stated that “...in the English language, to be true is to be steadfast, loyal, honest or truthful.” While perhaps not the context that she had originally intended, this was *my* place that I could be steadfast, honest, and truthful, while simultaneously giving me my place to be, *and* the purpose I always wanted but didn’t know it yet. I wanted to be a leader, and an example for others that I could be proud of.

Many of the students that I’ve come to know over the years of teaching, and that I’ve been lucky enough to share experiences with, have brought my purpose to light and have channeled much of my energy, in both my professional practice, as well as how I have begun to shape my journey as a researcher. Remaining in socio-economically depressed communities with many of the accompanying traits, (trauma, poverty, substance use, mental health challenges, etc.) have led me towards who I hope I am, and who I continue to aspire to be: a positive male role-model for the boys and young men that I interact with on a daily basis. Recognizing the importance of Social-

Emotional Learning (SEL) and passing on my knowledge, and care, to these children who may not receive it anywhere else, is what motivates me. “I know something matters when it keeps me awake, or when I’m compelled to rise from my bed in the middle of the night or the early dawn...” (Chambers, 2004) rings clear to me, as some things are worth the pain, sorrow, and heartache because of the promise of fulfillment and joy somewhere down the road.

As I’ve continued this trail for nearly ten years as an elementary teacher, I’ve learned many truths in education, one of which is that “you don’t know what you don’t know.” This has proven especially true as I began my graduate studies just several months ago. While I know that I am not unique in my experience at feeling overwhelmed by the seemingly endless abundance of information that is presented in front of us, I know that I have never been on this particular road before, and I will be changed, and will grow as a result. (McCotter, 2001)

UNBC has highlighted several forks in the road that my practice and research, could follow. Without recognizing it until this semester, my perception of education, and the larger world around me, has been formed by a Constructivist understanding. Even if “the environment I perceive differs from the one you do,” (McCotter, 2001) I must recognize the reality of those that I wish to conduct research with and interact alongside. Mayan (2023) echoes this, as “...it is our job as researchers to understand the experience from the point of view of those who have lived or are living that experience.”

These multi-layered understandings of social reality have started to influence my day-to-day practice and are informing how I wish to approach future research.

Particularly, taking part in *narrative research* will, I believe, provide the “methodological tools to capture and interpret personal, community, and social narratives.” (Mayan, 2023) As much of my intended research will be dependent on pre-existing relationships between myself and students, as well as investigating the absence of male educators in primary grades, particularly those specializing in SEL with trauma-informed backgrounds, the importance of all stories and personal experiences can’t be understated.

Oral histories and legacies are something that didn’t originally carry a lot of significance to me. Statistical “fact” and written work carried far more weight, and the way which experience, and histories were written only further validated their significance. Unfortunately, I didn’t give this much thought of how that was taking a euro-centric, colonial viewpoint on how research could be conducted. I’ve been honest in past discussions as to the way you *do* history: you don’t take a holistic view when writing undergrad history papers. If the research doesn’t match your belief set and viewpoint, then it simply doesn’t exist. Little did I realize though, was that this approach ignored a number of indigenous ways of thinking altogether, primarily the holistic approaches and the reflexive nature of the learning itself. Rather than recognizing the value in multiple viewpoints and all understandings of knowledge, much of my pre-existing research did not recognize or validate the unique lived experiences of indigenous peoples whatsoever. (Lavalley, 2020)

This is where I believe my approaches to conducting research may need to grow the most, in my ability to listen, observe, and understand that there are knowledges that I know very little about. While I may not be able to fully understand how the legacies of

trauma, discrimination and systemic distrust affect the students that I work with and the communities that my research will reside within, I must acknowledge that these are real and may construct the realities that the research participants believe to be true.

Despite this recognition, I've realized that my own personal interests will need to continue to be met, otherwise what's the point of my participation and research? Much like the joy that I experience in my professional practice, this will need to be present in my research too, or it will inevitably stagnate much like my earlier career experiences did. This *purpose* that I've desired to have previously will need to permeate through the work that I do with others too. Much like Sik's (2023) point that "enjoyment has been somewhat neglected by phenomenological tradition," enjoyment has been neglected in my previous professional and academic endeavors.

The concept presented by Sik "that joyful experiences are characterized by a sense of completeness" mirrors many conversations and concepts in our EDUC 610 class, most clearly the inclusion of the idea of the *learning pit*. Much like many difficult tasks "worth doing," enjoyment and the sense of accomplishment will often not come until very close to the end of an individual task. Academic courses and degrees clearly among these, the previously mentioned *learning pit* phenomenon is a perfect example of how enjoyment is not reducible to pre-intentional moments of completeness, (Siks) as the pleasures of the past (ie. Undergrad degrees, accomplishments in professional practice, etc.) motivate the subjects to intentionally strive towards the objects and situations promising joy in the future, ie. Graduate and doctoral degrees.

While embracing the process that will provide enjoyment and joy at their completion, there will also need to be the acknowledgement that it will at times certainly

be difficult to remain positive. Despite the previously mentioned “chaos” that came with the original elementary class that I volunteered in years ago, there have been times where it has been challenging to see the joy and cheerful aspects of the daily classroom environment. This perhaps will make the need for my intended SEL research even more topical and relevant, as the challenging behaviors and obstacles that occur regularly highlight the need for diverse, skilled educators versed in trauma-informed teachings, including properly trained male teachers in the primary grades. Tourigny (1998) highlights that poverty and minority status exacerbate the impact of cultural conservatism that often accompanies economic depression. Working in transient populations with disproportionately high numbers of indigenous and visible minority families, I have found the willingness to partake in liberal educational activities greatly diminished.

While this has been admittedly frustrating, it clearly shows the need for skillful communication in both professional practice as well as educational research. Sean-Jason Schat (2023) concurs with this sentiment, as he brings up the facets of *care theory*. Within it, he states that all human beings have two care-related needs: the need to *receive* care from others and the need to offer care *to* others. As he continues that these care needs can also play a formational role in teacher-student relationships, it brings me back as to the ‘why’ of pursuing graduate-level studies and research: *purpose*. In this context, I believe my own purpose as an educator, and researcher, to be to help provide young students with positive male guidance. Additionally, as I’ve come to realize that there aren’t nearly enough other professionals that seem to feel the

same way in my opinion, I want to investigate why this is, and see if there is a way to influence more male teachers to become involved in the younger grades.

In my own practice I have seen many educators, many of which are male, seem to forget that education and teaching is first and foremost about relationships. These will need to be cultivated and respected for me to conduct interviews and hear the stories that will be integral to following a *narrative inquiry* scope of research. Second, I will need to recognize that these relationships will need to be fostered with many other populations of the educational community, not just students. While students may give insights as to why it is important to have male educators in the younger grades, it won't give answers as to why there aren't more working in primary and elementary classrooms. This portion will take cooperation with certified teachers and administrators, as well as prospective student-teachers in a number of different institutions. While the scope of this intended research may be vast, I believe that it will be worth the investment.

Finally, the last aspect that I've begun to consider is if the larger community surrounding the elementary schools that I've experienced feel the same way that I do regarding the disproportionately low number of male educators. As such, I've also come to wonder if there may ever be a movement towards *participatory-action research* (PAR) attempting to increase the number of male teachers working with younger students. While I recognize that this would need to be a community-led initiative, it is something that would garner a lot of interest for myself and would connect back to the most important aspect for my practice and research once again, *purpose*. While potentially

very significant in its scope, I believe the need for and importance of such an undertaking would be time and energy well-spent.

As this semester comes to an end, and I am nearing the midway point in my graduate studies at UNBC, I continue to look back at the wide variety of experiences that I have had in the myriad of educational settings that I've lived through. Unlike the addictive pitfalls that were experienced by many of the men in my family before me, I know that my educational journey is still not finished, even if I may still not know the destination. What I do know however, is that even though I know that I am going to continue to face hardships in the future, both as an educator and a researcher, I know that unlike my experiences as a young undergrad student, this time I will persevere through it all, because I have now found my *purpose*. And as it turns out, I'm pretty okay with that.

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