



MIT Matters

Your place for all things MIT

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Getting to know you: Insights into Jan Term

By OJ Cotes, Visiting Professor of Education

“Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The Earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekht has spoken for his people.”

– Chief Joseph, Nez Perce Indians

Our MIT students are experiencing new settings, students and communities as they participate in Whitworth’s multicultural Jan Term. In addition, they are experiencing personal challenges as they encounter different cultures and communities from their fall settings. This is the purpose of Jan Term. We hope that this lack of familiarity and comfort creates dissonance in their stereotypes and beliefs about those who are not from their personal backgrounds and communities. This course and set of activities assists them on a lifelong journey of moving from their current understandings of their personal culture of one, to the multicultural experiences of their students and a broader context. During the fall term, MIT students were provided with research, current texts and speakers who helped them to broaden their concepts of diversity and disclose personal biases that could have an impact upon their ability to meet the needs of their students.

Jan Term classes have traditionally brought about significant growth in the our students’ understanding of those whose cultures are new to them. They are asked to keep journals on each day’s experiences and to determine when they have made judgments based on prior knowledge or personal biases. The goal is to increase students’ self knowledge as well as their empathy for

and understanding of those from different cultures. Here are a few quotes from our MITs at the end of their first week in new settings.

- *I found the first practice, attending to judgment, very helpful. Everyone judges in some way. Judging can be either positive or negative, depending on the circumstance and event at hand. I often judge people, and too quickly. I often do not think about my judgment and feelings until I have expressed them and “let the cat out of the bag.” Personal Leadership teaches me to suspend judgment in order to reflect on what I know about people or events. When reflection occurs, a different perspective may take shape. Therefore, when I suspend judgment and reflect, I am given a mirror into my own life, expectations, assumptions and biases. However, I must not let my judgments affect how I interact with students. Rather, I must suspend judgment and listen to my students.*

- *This is stereotyping on my part, which is something I’m going to get over. I shouldn’t be too quick to judge just because people say that Title I schools are so rough, and I can’t let myself believe that every school and every class will be exactly the same way. I was expecting that many of the students would be very difficult to handle. I am also terrified of getting lice! I know that sounds terrible, but somebody told me that if I’m going to a low socio-economic school I’d better wear my hair up every day to protect me from getting lice.*

- *Having never been to a school with such a strict dress code, I did not know what to think at first. I believe this is where the intercultural skill of suspending judgment comes into play. The Personal Leadership book says that “becoming mindful of our judgments is a transformative act. It allows us to explore rather than to confront, and opens the door for deeper experience” (42). After spending some time thinking about this policy, I find that a lot of classroom challenges can be avoided by taking away the privilege of dressing one’s self. Exposed underwear is not a problem, financial status is not as obvious, and bulky jackets are not cluttering the classroom. I discovered that I initially did not like the idea just because it was different.*

Today the thing that I seemed to notice most was the differences between the haves and the have-nots. These students really appreciate what they are given. I’m not so sure that students would show the same level of appreciation at my school, because most of them have much more than these students have.

- *Downtown areas of big cities are still intimidating to me. However, a major difference that I noticed is the variety of people I was able to see there. Men in business suits, skateboarding kids, and families of five were just some of the people I saw. There were also a multitude of nationalities, heritages, and languages represented. Overall, the experience was very enlightening because I have not often encountered so many different types of people at once. Very rarely am I the minority, but in downtown Denver and at my school that is the case.”*

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• For reading comprehension, the topic was Thurgood Marshall. The four paragraphs were an overview of his fight against the separation of blacks and whites and how he made changes to the law; the author also addressed the fact that Marshall was the first African American voted onto the Supreme Court. During the course of this discussion, students asked where Chicanos fell in this scenario and wondered why whites got preferential treatment. This made me completely aware of my skin color, my culture, as I sat there as a white person in this group of nine children of Hispanic background. Their questions were thoughtful and heartfelt; they were not attacking, just inquisitive. It was then that I felt such white guilt. I didn't have answers that sounded fair or supportive of the cultures of the students sitting in front of me. It was humbling to listen and observe these students asking important questions about race relations in our country. My mentor said we shouldn't shy away from any of the questions students ask in the classroom, because this should be a safe place for them to ask and learn.

• Many students at this school are disgruntled and feel disenfranchised. I went in realizing that poverty and family issues affect many students, but I came to learn that the effects were broader than I had imagined.

I heard stories of how many students have essentially raised themselves since the time they were toddlers. Many, if not most, students live with extended families that include their grandmothers and aunts/uncles. Many will be the first in their families to graduate from the eighth grade, just as I have been the first in my family to graduate from college.

Empathy builds within me for these students. It is difficult to observe these situations and not have my heart break. Most students simply want someone to love them and care about them.

• The idea of the real culture made me question what my culture truly is. I've realized that my culture of one is broader and deeper than it was when I started the multicultural course. I have also been able to see the difference between the surface culture and the culture that objectively exists. This realization has given me a deeper look into myself and others. I no longer want to look at the cover of the book; I want to get to know the pages as well.

• I am starting to love these "kids". They are talkative and they find humor in silly things, but they generally seem to have a thirst for learning. When you get past the Chuck Norris jokes, the constant poking of their neighbors, and their need to dance in their seats, you see students with great hearts and a lot of stories to share. I am loving this experience!

These snippets provide evidence of this powerful learning experience in the lives of our students. Our MITs will make such a difference in the lives of their students and their communities!

The Importance of the WSPA Form

by Brad Beal, '72

MITs are entering the stage of pre-service teaching where the rubber meets the road. College coursework is beneficial, but the public school setting provides hands-on training. Washington state has developed the Pedagogy Assessment Instrument, which provides a summative evaluative tool to assess teacher-candidates' knowledge and skills in the classroom. This form could easily become a checklist. I found that my candidates were often focused on individual tasks, losing sight of the other aspects of the school environment.

I found the WSPA form, developed by the Washington School Personnel Association, beneficial for guiding an MIT because it focused on the big picture in the classroom. The form is clear and distinct in regard to the areas school districts feel

SUPERVISOR'S CORNER:

Communication Is Key

by Joan Barden, Student Teacher Supervisor

For student teachers, mentors and supervisors to work well in the fall semester it is important that communication be well developed and open. The following are a few ideas I came up with at the Fall Mentor Dinner.

It's very important for mentors to remember that this is a new culture for many of our candidates. They are nervous those first few days as they work with the mentor. This means that they may not remember some of the many important things that the mentor tells them. Mentors can expect to repeat themselves often (even when they're sure they've covered a topic well). Student teachers may need to keep asking questions or to find alternate ways to find out about schedules, where things are stored and the other minutia of school life.

As school gets busier during the fall, it is important that student teachers and mentors discuss the best time to talk over the day and to catch up on questions of curriculum and the like. Some teachers prepare for the day before school, and some have home schedules that require them to leave as soon as possible after the end of the day, so it's good to sit down and work out a convenient meeting time early in the semester.

Supervisors would very much like to be invited during the fall to observe candidates working with single students, small groups or a whole class. In the spring we receive lesson plans 24 hours ahead, and student teachers realize the importance of scheduling our visits before putting all that work into a lesson we are unable to observe; but in the fall, nothing is built in to make that happen. We realize that sometimes you don't know what you'll be doing until you get there on Monday morning. I would love to have more phone calls from my students to keep me informed. If you call in the morning I may be able to be there for the afternoon, but I might not check e-mail. Also, please let us know as early as possible if you experience problems communicating with your mentor. The earlier we know about such problems, the more quickly we can help solve them by assessing situations and/or facilitating communication.

This leads to my thoughts on communication between mentor and supervisor. Please tell us early about any problems. We know you love our student teachers and want them to be successful. So do we. Mentors, please trust us to help solve problems by letting us know if you see any developing. We will meet at any time with you alone or in a three-way discussion. None of us like to be blindsided by a previously unreported problem.

are crucial for hiring a strong teacher. The form was especially useful when a student teacher was having difficulty in any area addressed by the form.

At the beginning of February, I plan to share this form with the MITs I supervise. I think they need to know exactly what their supervisor and mentor will be asked to fill out regarding their performance in the classroom. The hiring teams that I've been involved with used this form as a screening device before reviewing the files in more detail.

I'm looking forward to working with another group of outstanding teacher candidates!

Folding the Line: The Samurai Sword

Exploring the Power of Student Voice

By Peggy Johnsen, Visiting Professor of Education

The Mead-Whitworth collaborative grant group continues to wrestle with the particulars that differentiate Student Reflective Voice from student products. Fine-tuning and learning about SRV components is a challenge for all of us. This article will share a kinesthetic exercise, “Folding the Line” (and its accompanying metaphor, the samurai sword), which allows the crafting of student self-reflection, student self-assessment, and, finally, student reflective voice. This exercise allows students to discern the differences, to practice the craft of use, and then to own these three important thinking skills.

Folding the Line

Step One: Students form a half-circle curve that takes the space of the back and into about half of both sides of the room. The instructor chooses a non-threatening topic – e.g. soccer, cooking, bicycling, swimming – then offers the following instructions: Think about the amount of experience that you have had with soccer. Now move to the place within this curved line that would indicate the amount of experience that you have had. You cannot talk to any other student while you find your place within this curve. You may find that you have clumps of people taking the same place or empty spaces between people. (The teacher will have to decide which end of the curved line represents the most experience and which the least.) Notice the wording for this exercise: It asks how much experience a student has, not how much ability. It is imperative that experience is used. This component of the exercise asks students to practice the thinking skill of student self-reflection. After reflecting upon their own personal experience, they decide where they place themselves in the half-circle. Students should be reminded that they are practicing student self-reflection. This completes Step One.

Step Two: Students are instructed to talk to several people around them and compare their experience in soccer. Tell students that they are now practicing student self-assessment as they compare and match up their soccer experience with that of others around them. They should move and change places after this discussion to show where they now believe they belong in the curved line. Step Two in this kinesthetic exercise, folding the line, is similar to students comparing their work or comparing a product to a rubric. Students need lots of practice in student self-reflection before they can be successful in student self-assessment. A deficit here might be a factor in an inability to maximize the use the WASL rubric; the “comparer” needs more practice in using student self-reflection. Again, let students know how powerful they are in assessing where they belong in the curve. Also, this allows students to begin to hear their own reflective voices when sharing with others. Student reflective voice will be heard

even more meaningfully if the instructor asks students whether talking with others assisted them in repositioning on the curve. What would they need to do to be in their most perfect placement within the curve? Should they visit with people toward the ends of the line? This ends Step Two.

Step Three: The final step uses the metaphor in the making of a samurai sword. The craft of making a samurai sword is shared with students, explaining that the sword’s material is heated, shaped and then pounded out and flattened to a thin

substance. It is then folded and pounded out again and again until the sword is strong and flexible. Using this metaphor and relating it to the curved line, the instructor will take the two students who are most experienced with soccer and match them up with the two who are least experienced to form a quad of learners (folding the line). This allows the most experienced students to share their knowledge with the least experienced. The curved line continues to be folded, grouping the next least-experienced with the next more-experienced until most students reach the center of the line, where they share a similar level of experience. These students will be able to support each others’ learning. Metaphorically, as the samurai sword is strong and flexible because it is folded and re-folded in the making, the group will also be strong and flexible. Student reflective voice is most effective when students are allowed to talk about how these groupings assist their learning and when instructors sincerely honor these personalized student voices to adjust the way they design instruction.

The focus and purpose of this exercise is to allow students to learn and practice the craft of the three thinking skills: student self-reflection, student self-assessment, and, finally, student reflective voice. It also provides for the instructor a unique way of grouping students to learn important concepts in the classroom. Remember, only after practicing folding the line several times with non-threatening topics will it be time to use this exercise to teach difficult concepts in the classroom. The time it takes is certainly equal to the time spent crafting a samurai sword.



Mark those calendars!

March 3: Mentor and Supervisor Collaboration
at Whitworth University

7:30-11:30 a.m.

Upstairs HUB Conference Rooms A, B, C

R.S.V.P. to Assistant Director Millayna Klingback
mklingback07@whitworth.edu • 509.777.3769

Ready, Set, Reflect: Action Research Begins

By Kathryn Picanco, Assistant Professor of Education

Action research is a practical approach to classroom inquiry and reflection in which the practitioner takes a close look at student evidence to make educated decisions about each one's practice. The students in the MIT program are all conducting action research projects during their student teaching to engage in this essential practice.

This year, the primary focus of the research is on the effective use of differentiation strategies. Each MIT teacher candidate selected one of four strategies to implement and study in a unit of his or her choice: flexible grouping, tiered assignments, choices, or student self-reflection. Teacher candidates created their own action research plan to conduct at some point during full-time student teaching. Each study involves looking at three types of student evidence to gain a broader perspective of student achievement. The types of evidence include student work samples, observations, and personal inquiry. Many start collecting student evidence the first day of student teaching in spring semester.

Mentor teachers can assist their MITs in a number of ways to ensure that each project runs well and the research question is answered. Your support, expertise and knowledge of students are invaluable. Suggestions include:

1. Clarify with your teacher candidate what his or her research question is and how s/he plans to answer it. Your insights and questions will assist the teacher candidate to focus study and use effective methodologies for collecting student evidence.

2. Continue to ask your teacher candidate how his/her research is going. Being there as a sounding board for ideas is helpful for the teacher candidate to continually monitor progress and make adjustments as needed.

3. Encourage your teacher candidate to share his or her findings with you, and possibly with others, when the research is completed. Although the purpose of action research is to improve one's own practice, the results are often interesting to share and can lead toward powerful discussions regarding best practice.

The journey of reflection can be challenging, but it is worth the effort in the end – especially when it results in improved student performance and success.

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Whitworth Master in Teaching Program

300 W. Hawthorne Road

Spokane, WA 99251

509.777.3769 or 800.777.3769 • Fax: 509.777.3785

mklingback07@whitworth.edu • www.whitworth.edu/mit

Master in Teaching Program
300 W. Hawthorne Road
Spokane, WA 99251

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