

Synthesis of Theory and Practice Self-assessment

I. "MY SYNTHESIS PRODUCT SHOWS THAT..."

(adapted from the "Phases of research and engagement" in the Practicum course in the expectation that these are also relevant goals for students' work in moving towards the synthesis product)

A. I can convey who I want to influence/affect concerning what (Subject, Audience, Purpose).

Other teachers, administrators, and those otherwise involved in education are whom I want to influence. I feel I can most confidently influence them through my uses of relevant teaching examples from my own experiences that can then be translated into their own experiences. By getting feedback throughout this process from colleagues in the field of education, I was able to clarify my subject in response to their needs, so they were further able to help me develop this synthesis as accessible and "teacher friendly".

B. I know what others have done before, either in the form of writing or action, that informs and connects with my project, and I know what others are doing now.

I have read extensively the works of Senge, Issacs, Bohm, and others related to the concepts of systems thinking and the dialogue process. I have interviewed/read stories of teachers who have introduced related concepts in their classrooms previously. I have worked with teachers currently in the classroom, and become familiar with new avenues of research in the area of systems thinking (such as the efforts of The Society for Organizational Learning).

C. I have teased out my vision, so as to expand my view of issues associated with the project, expose possible new directions, clarify direction/scope within the larger set of issues, and decide the most important direction.

After initially attempting to apply all of Senge's concepts to my classroom situations, I selected only those that had true relevance to my personal application. This selection of only the concepts of "systems thinking", "mental models", and "the dialogue process" became the most important direction for my research and efforts.

D. I have identified the premises and propositions that my project depends on, and can state counter-propositions. I have taken stock of the thinking and research I need to do to counter those counter-propositions or to revise my own propositions.

My project depends on many premises and propositions. Perhaps most difficult is that teachers applying these concepts must have some sense of control over their own classroom situations, and often today teachers are not in a place that enables them to initiate systemic change. I have strived to adapt my suggestions to fit many situations, for many teachers of various backgrounds. I have taken stock of further research needed in these areas.

E. I have clear objectives with respect to product, both written and practice, and process, including personal development as a reflective practitioner. I have arranged my work in a sequence (with realistic deadlines) to realize these objectives.

My clear objectives helped me get through the more confusing sections of my research. My work was carefully sequenced, to allow me adequate time through the CCT program to “test out” some of my theories in my own classroom, as well as observe the efforts of others in a timely fashion.

F. I have gained direct information, models, and experience not readily available from other sources.

Much of my direct information has come from my own classroom, and the descriptions of others’ that I have sought out. These unique experiences led validity to my assertions, and are unique to my own perspective.

G. I have clarified the overall progression or argument underlying my research and the written reports.

I have clarified the overall argument - these methods are helpful and adaptable. I have shown this to be true through examples from my classroom and stories of others’ classrooms.

H. My writing and other products Grab the attention of the readers/audience, Orient them, move them along in Steps, so they appreciate the Position I’ve led them to.

My writing begins with “snapshots” that grab the reader’s attention. My later research refers back to these stories, thus creating the relevance of them within my paper. These “snapshots”, and subsequent examples from my teaching, serve to further clarify and illustrate my points.

I. I have facilitated new avenues of classroom, workplace, and public participation.

In my own classroom, I have adopted the concepts of dialogue and systems thinking, and will continue to use them extensively. I have also introduced these concepts to colleagues, who are adapting them for their own classroom needs.

J. To feed into my future learning and other work, I have taken stock of what has been working well and what needs changing.

As referred to in the text of my paper, I see education as a continual changing entity, both in my own classroom and as an institution. What has worked well in individual instances for me might not be applicable later on. I have made efforts to embrace not only my specific actions within my classroom, but also the concepts behind them, which will enable me to further adapt my work.

II. DEVELOPING AS A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER, INCLUDING TAKING INITIATIVE IN AND THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

1. I have integrated knowledge and perspectives from CCT and other courses into my own inquiry and engagement in social and/or educational change.

I have consistently used the theories and concepts I have been introduced to within CCT. These include (but are not limited to): the dialogue process, organizational change, group dynamics, creativity, systems thinking, and collaborative methods. They have enabled me to enact educational change within my own classroom, and in my extended educational environments.

2. I have also integrated into my own inquiry and engagement the processes, experiences, and struggles of previous courses.

I have linked these newer CCT concepts and theories to my previous courses in education. I have chosen to look at struggling through a course as a challenge that provides new insights, rather than an insurmountable obstacle.

3. I have developed efficient ways to organize my time, research materials, computer access, bibliographies, etc.

I have learned new ways to research, and have become much more efficient in utilizing them. I have become especially proficient in the area of computer editing techniques. I have also been exposed to new avenues of research, and new materials which I will continue to use in the future.

4. I have experimented with new tools and experiences, even if not every one became part of my toolkit as a learner, teacher/facilitator of others, and reflective practitioner.

I have used the techniques of free writing, dialogue as inquiry, action research, and others. Elements of each have become part of my "toolkit".

5. I have paid attention to the emotional dimensions of undertaking my own project but have found ways to clear away distractions from other sources (present & past) and not get blocked, turning apparent obstacles into opportunities to move into unfamiliar or uncomfortable territory.

My teaching itself, like this project, is often filled with obstacles. I have persevered at each obstacle, and eventually found new avenues to examine my research and findings.

6. I have developed peer and other horizontal relationships. I have sought support and advice from peers, and have given support and advice to them when asked for.

The CCT program in general has provided me with a strong and supportive community of learners. Both professors and peers have been helpful in my endeavors. I have also strengthened relationships between my colleagues and I within my employment situations.

7. I have taken the lead, not dragged my feet, in dialogue with my advisor and other readers. I didn't wait for them to tell me how to solve an expository problem, what must be read and covered in a literature review, or what was meant by some comment I didn't understand. I didn't put off giving my writing to my advisor and other readers or avoid talking to them because I thought that they didn't see things the same way as I do.

I developed through this process a more respectful consideration of "feedback". I have struggled at times to see the value in commentary on my work that seemed confusing, but still endeavored to further examine and react to the comments. Often my struggle to further clarify my opinions and assertions led me to new insights, and created a final project of richer context that incorporated many views.

8. I have revised seriously, which involved responding to the comments of others. I came to see this not as bowing down to the views of others, but taking them in and working them into my own reflective inquiry until I could convey more powerfully to others what I'm about (which may have changed as a result of the reflective inquiry).

Serious, thoughtful revision has continued to take place for me throughout this process. At times I have chosen to remain steadfast in my view despite the confusion of others, but I have managed to convey my understanding of my topic, even if my position was not always agreed with. At other times, I was able to change my views as a result of further reflection.

9. I have inquired and negotiated about formal standards, but gone on to develop and internalize my own criteria for doing work—criteria other than jumping through hoops set by the professor so I get a good grade.

I have proven to myself that these processes are helpful and useful. Although formal standards of presentation were followed, I also adapted many procedures to better fit my own learning style. This lends more validity to them for my personal future work.

10. I have approached the CCT synthesis course and the CCT program as works-in-progress, which means that, instead of harboring criticisms to submit after the fact, I have found opportunities to affirm what is working well and to suggest directions for further development.

I have adopted an attitude (supported by my research) that most programs of value are still open to future revision. CCT teaches an attitude of life-long inquiry and self-evaluation. This is not only for the students, but the continual development of CCT itself. I have, at times, taken issue with some of CCT's requirements and mandates. I have chosen to explain my disputes in terms of continual evaluation and change, and supply examples of not only what I felt was not working well, but how it could be modified to work better in the future. This form of criticism is helpful to others, and also serves to explain my reasoning process. It is testament to CCT's overall value that the very tools I may use to criticize some of CCT's procedures are tools I have learned within the CCT program. Thus, both my affirmations and criticisms demonstrate true learning processes.