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TLEE 342 – P1

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Professional Development Reflection

For class, we were required to attend a cultural or professional development event. I ended up attending the Illinois Council for Social Studies (ICSS) Annual Conference in Lisle, IL on October 15, 2010. It was a long day, but it was definitely worth waking up at 5:00am on my only day to sleep in during the week. I learned so much by attending the ICSS conference.

The first session I attended was one of my favorites. The presentation was *Using Literature Discussion to Look at Curriculum through a Social Justice Lens*, presented by Dr. Jennifer Kohnke from Aurora University. I decided to attend this presentation because I am interested in finding out different ways to incorporate literature across the curriculum. Another reason I decided to attend this presentation is because it was one of the only presentations all day that was targeted towards preservice teachers*.* From the presentation, I learned that Aurora’s elementary education program is very different from Northern’s. At Aurora, their Social Studies Methods course is entirely based on using children’s literature – they don’t even have or use a textbook! I absolutely love the idea of teaching social studies through literature and poetry. During the presentation, we received a booklist with over 100 titles of historical children’s literature. The booklist is categorized by popular social studies topics and time periods in history. All of the titles focus on some type of multicultural issue, such as sexism or racism. I can’t wait to add some of these books to my collection for my classroom library.

During the next session, I attended *Illuminating the Future of Social Studies with Civic Ideals*, presented by Dr. Frederick Isele from Western Illinois University. The reason I attended this presentation is because I aminterested in learning more about getting students involved in community service projects. As our textbook mentions, service learning is one way to give life and meaning to social studies for students. Getting students involved in service learning also has many benefits, including a heightened sense of personal and social responsibility, a more positive attitude toward others, more complex patterns of thought, improved learning of content, and improved self-esteem (Savage & Armstrong, 2008, p. 95). Another reason I attended this presentation is because I also saw the word “free” in the description. Who doesn’t love free things? As a future teacher, I will take any free teaching materials I can get my hands on. I was very disappointed when we ended up leaving the room with nothing but a small packet of paper. The packet had various webpage printouts with instructions on how your school can order certain materials dealing with different community service projects, such as Habitat for Humanity or Living Lands & Waters. Unfortunately, I didn’t learn much from this session. The presentation was so disorganized. By the end of the session, I was left wondering what the session was even about in the first place. Dr. Isele was a great speaker and very funny, but he was all over the place.

For the third session, I attended *Historical Fiction Meets Fact in the Social Studies Classroom*, presented by Kelli Hamilton and Jennifer Cantu, two middle school teachers from DeKalb. The two teachers discussed how they taught Korean history through literature and Wikis. I love the idea of using online message boards to facilitate group discussions about a particular topic, and would love to incorporate something like that into my classroom someday. I only wish the presenters would have explained more on how to set something like that up. Don’t get me wrong, learning about Korean history was interesting, but I wanted to learn more about how to use a Wiki since I have never used one before. From this session, I received another list of historical fiction literature. This time, it was a list of chapter books for teens and young adults. I plan on teaching middle school, so having this list in addition to the children’s literature list I received during the first session is great. Before I consider using any of these books in my classroom, I will have to conduct research on the topics presented in the books and read through them for any inaccuracies. Our textbook brings up a good point about using historical fiction in the classroom. Savage and Armstrong (2008) write, “These books, although roughly based on real events, sometimes distort and change historical facts to fit the author’s need to tell a story. You need to read books carefully to spot any historical inaccuracies. You can use information you gather from a careful reading of these books as a basis for helping learners distinguish between historically accurate and historically inaccurate content” (p. 272-273).

Next, I attended lunch and listened to the keynote presentation, *The Forgotten Genocide: Teaching Students about Human Rights, Diversity and History Thinking*, presented by Dr. Hatzidimitriou. I was very disappointed by the keynote speaker. The topic could have been interesting, but it honestly was putting me to sleep. It just felt like a lecture. I felt like I was back in high school with my awful, boring history teacher. Unfortunately, this was the worst presentation I saw all day. I didn’t take anything from it to apply to my own classroom.

After the keynote speaker, I attended *Quality Teaching and Merit Pay* for session four, presented by Larry Pahl from Bartlett High School. I was surprised to see a teacher from Bartlett High School at the conference. I went to Bartlett High School and graduated back in 2007. I never had Mr. Pahl as a teacher, but both my younger sisters had him, and my youngest sister currently has him for Civics. He is passionate about everything he does, and it really shows. During the presentation, he had a lot to say about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Studies show that merit pay does not increase state test scores. Unfortunately, the literature and research is not reflected in NCLB and Race to the Top. I wish I wrote down the title of the book he was referring to throughout the presentation. I am interested in reading it. By attending this session, I learned a lot about NCLB and Race to the Top, including the myth about tenure teachers. Bad teachers can be fired, even if they are tenured. Administrators just have to make the initiation. Tenure just means that teachers have to have a hearing at court. At some points, the presentation made me a little uncomfortable. There was so much tension in the room. However, this session had the greatest impact on me. It really had me thinking, especially afterwards. It is scary to think how our education system seems to be falling downhill.

For the final session, I attended *Illuminating the Future for 21st Century Learning: A Closer Look at Technology Integration in the Social Studies Curriculum*, presented by Steve Ryan from Butler Junior High School. This was without a doubt my favorite presentation from the day. I am so glad I stayed until the end of the conference just to see this presentation. In class, we learned some way to incorporate technology into the classroom. For instance, we were required to use Inspiration for our mini-conceptual unit. Inspiration is nice, but the free trial only lasts a month. So, unless your school district purchases the program, you’re sore out a luck. But, wait! There’s a free version on Inspiration online! It is called Bubbl.us. What I loved most about this presentation is that every technology he presented to us is free! As I mentioned earlier, who doesn’t love free things? This is especially true if you are a teacher. I hope the websites and programs he recommended using stay free. It will be a great tool to use in the classroom. My cooperating teacher is always asking me how to incorporate more technology into the classroom since I am considered to be part of the “technological generation.” However, that doesn’t mean I have all the answers. I made a copy of the packet we received from this session for my cooperating teacher. She loves it. I’m hoping to incorporate some of those technologies into my future classroom as well. Out of all the presentations I saw at the conference, this one was the most useful towards my future career as a teacher.

One session I wish I attended was the one on the Holocaust. The presentation had a live webcam interview with a Holocaust survivor. It is hard to believe that people are still alive from that time period. All I could think about is doing something like that in my own classroom. What a great way to make learning about WWII and the Holocaust more meaningful for the students. As we learned in class, community resources are a great tool. With things like Skype and other technologies, it makes it easier than ever before to get in touch with people and bring them into your classroom, even if it’s just virtually.

Attending the ICSS Conference was a great experience. Not only did I gain a lot of insight into my future career as a teacher, I had a lot fun as well. I attended the Illinois Education Association (IEA) Student Program Conference last semester at NIU, but ICSS was different. The IEA Spring 2010 conference was just for preservice teachers; ICSS was the real deal. That is why attending the ICSS was a “stretch” for me. I actually felt like a real teacher by being there. I hope to attend more conferences like ICSS in the future.