Kerry Morton-Shelton

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**Part B**

Throughout this course there were ideas that caused me to reflect or challenge my current teaching practices. As I read various articles I could find myself being persuaded one way and then the other. When reading articles that contained conflicting views I was able to see pros and cons on either side. The work that has had the most influence in my inquiry this semester is that of Vivian Paley. I believe there are a couple of reasons for this. First, Paley is a kindergarten teacher like me. Second when I attended Michigan State University as an undergraduate student my major was Child development, which embraces teaching philosophies that are similar to Paley’s. Third, I admire the way that she embraces and values each child’s thoughts and ideas. In the following paragraphs these three reasons are discussed further in depth.

There is not one specific article that prompted me to rethink my teaching practices. Instead there are pieces from each of the Paley articles that caused me to stop and think. As I mentioned above my first reasoning is that Paley is a kindergarten teacher. Since all of her inquiry takes places within kindergarten I am able to easily identify with the age group. In Paley’s article *The Mouse that Roared* she talks about children pondering certain matters as a story is read. She says, “We could not have simply read about Frederick and Tico and Swimmy and Cornelius; had this been the limit of our involvement their secrets and ours would not have been uncovered. When I read this I stopped to reflect on story time in my classroom. Many times I read a story and then I ask some questions to check the children’s comprehension of the story. I do allow questions and comments after I have finished reading if someone has their hand raised. However, I don’t usually have time to listen to everyone. I feel pressure to move onto the next thing so that we don’t get behind with the curriculum. In Paley’s article *Must Teachers also be Writers* she says that “Everything is supposed to make sense; if it doesn’t, ask questions, go over it again, find out why the picture is blurred. The range of possibilities for misunderstandings is quite astonishing.” What I began to realize from reading this is that it is beneficial to the children to take more time to listen to and understand what they have to say. Instead of skimming off the surface and never really diving into the content of the book or lesson (breadth vs. depth). Also, in the same article Paley says,” I have put away the scorecards and relearned what I once, as a child, could do quite well: make sense of the classroom by watching the children and listening to what they say. “I admit that this may be a bit too extreme for me or the administration at my school. Although I couldn’t never completely put away the scorecards as she refers to them I certainly feel that I could find more time to listen and watch if I was to relax a bit when working with the curriculum.

The second point I mentioned was having my degree in child development. The child development approach to education is that everything is developmentally appropriate. This means that all activities are appropriate for each child’s developmental level. These activities should be meaningful, engaging, hands-on and most importantly the children are able to be active (physically) in their learning. Everything that I had experienced about this type of learning made sense to me and I graduated feeling like this type of learning was my philosophy of teaching. Shortly after graduation I had my first interview. After answering many questions to which my answers reiterated the importance of developmentally appropriate practice the interviewer said, “so how do you feel about using worksheets?” My response was that I did not believe in worksheets. I backed up my response by saying that they were good at reinforcing what the children already knew and were not a form of teaching. Needless to say I did not get that job. I quickly learned not to make such strong opinions. The public schools do utilize worksheets and feel that it is important for young children to show their learning on paper. Regardless of how much I still don’t like worksheets they are required in my district as part of the curriculum. Because of this I have found that I have become a much more structured teacher than I ever thought I would be. Reading Paley’s work made me ask myself am I the teacher that I want to be? For the most part I am. I am happy with many things that I do, but what I realized is that the play is missing. Don’t get me wrong the children have time to play, but probably not as much as I would like them to or that they could benefit from. If I let the play time go a little longer than usual I feel really guilty because of the curriculum. I also know the response from other teachers would be, “all they do is play all the time.” From the child development perspective the belief is that children need to be given long enough intervals of play in order to full y engage and learn from their play. In Paley’s article *The importance of Fantasy Play* she talks about how much she used to play when she was young. She said she would go out to play in the morning and afternoon, go home for lunch eat quickly play again and then come home from school at the end of the day and play. She says, “The odd thing was, no one thought we played too much. It was what children were supposed to do.” I completely agree with this now days it seems like we make play out to be “bad” for children. When, in fact the learning opportunities are amazing. For example, children in the kitchen area are learning about manners, respect and turn taking while the children in the block area are beginning to learn the basic laws of physics through their own natural experimentation with the blocks.

The last point I want to make is that I admire the way that Paley values each child’s thoughts and ideas. Paley takes the time to listen and understand what each child is trying to tell her. In her article *Wally’s Stories: Conversations in the Kindergarten* she says, “Each year I come closer to understanding how logical thinking and precise speech can be taught in the classroom. These skills are, I believe, the important precursors to formal schooling and the main business of the kindergarten teacher.” By allowing the children to play and interact with one another frequently they are constantly developing their logical thinking and speech. Evidence of developing these two skills can also be seen through the storytelling that the children do. After thinking about this it is true a child can accomplish so much if they have the ability to think logically and speak precisely.

In conclusion, Paley found a way to enjoy her students even as she neared retirement. This cannot be said for every teacher. I truly love my job as an educator and like Paley I hope to enjoy it just as much the day I retire. In order to achieve this goal I need to reconsider the importance of play in the kindergarten classroom. Paley had helped me to rediscover some of those thoughts and beliefs that I hold deeply about learning and young children.