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Professional Development Plan  
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### Professional Development Plan

Spending three months teaching in the urban environment of Chicago has given me the opportunity to form some very strong opinions with regards to the potential school and district in which I hope to teach. Some of my biggest challenges in student teaching came from pressure from the administration to adhere to strict curriculum. Because I found it difficult to add the necessary creativity into lesson planning while teaching directly from the textbook, I know that I need to teach at a school with a higher degree of teacher autonomy in curriculum planning. I am interested in working in a school (district) that encourages teachers to stray from the pre-planned curriculum of the classroom textbooks in order to better address students' needs and interests. In my first years of teaching, I need a school that provides a supportive environment in which teachers are expected and encouraged to break from the mold, apply creativity, and teach to their students' needs.

The likelihood of finding this type of school in a district in which school struggle with achieving Annual Yearly Progress set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act is slim. In my student teaching placement, most of the pressure to use certain curricular materials comes about from the necessity to meet and surpass the standards measured by the state achievement tests. In order to make sure it meets the demands of the state and federal governments, Chicago Public Schools administration dictates not only curricula but also certain classroom elements such as word walls and the posting of learning objectives. In order to feel comfortable with the curriculum and my own classroom environment, I need more freedom to choose how to teach and what my classroom looks like.

Finally, I will look for a school district that embraces bilingual education rather than English only instruction. I firmly believe that students should learn to read in their native language. As a presenter at a professional development session said, “You only learn how to read once.” The transition between literacy in Spanish (or any other language) and English is far smoother than the process of trying to acquire a second language and simultaneously learning how to read in that second language. I will look for a school environment in which educators value students’ first language just as much as their second. In my experiences, I have found that schools that implement bilingual education have a much more positive attitude towards their bilingual students’ culture(s) and language acquisition process than schools that implement English only instruction. Therefore, it is important to me to work in an environment that shares my opinions regarding first and second language literacy acquisition. Whether or not I teach in a bilingual program, I would like my English language-learning students have the experience of a bilingual education so that they are more competent at reading and writing in their both their first and second languages.

Finding a school that is the perfect combination of all of the preceding elements is surely impossible. I know that in my job search I will have to pick and choose between the most important components of my ideal school. However, I believe that having an ‘ideal’ in mind is important as it allows room for picking and choosing. If I know what I am looking for, I will have a better chance of finding a school that fits most of my criteria.

Wherever I end up, I will have the option of joining a teacher’s union. I think I will end up joining the union in my district for a variety of reasons. First, one of the classic benefits of joining a union is security in salary and health care benefits. As a young, single teacher, these two elements of my job will be important. Also, unions

provide a certain amount of protection against firing. Depending on where I teach, my style may or may not be very accepted. If my teaching is not accepted within the school culture, being a union member could be very useful. Other than those typical benefits, being a part of a union will allow me to connect with other teachers. Having a connection with other teachers that I work with is important to me, and being a member of the union will most likely be a good way for me to establish that connection. Overall, I think that joining a teacher's union will be a benefit to me as a teacher.

In order to investigate other possible career options within the educational setting, I interviewed three staff and faculty members at my school. My methods for choosing these individuals were varied. I chose to interview Teresa Fraga, the School/Home Coordinator because I knew absolutely nothing about her job. I interviewed Mrs. Gila Hernández, the third grade bilingual teacher, because I am extremely interested pursuing an endorsement in bilingual education. Finally, I interviewed Mrs. Ammon, the Media Specialist/Technology Coordinator, because she is instrumental in planning professional development days and I was curious to learn more about that planning process. Although none of the interviews inspired a change in my future career plans, each did provide me with more insight into the inner workings of the elementary school environment.

I gleaned from my interview with Teresa Fraga that I certainly do not have the qualifications or desire to be a School/Home Coordinator. While I see the value in the position, I am not qualified for the job as I am not a parent and therefore have little idea of how to best involve parents in school-wide activities, meetings, classes, etcetera. I did gain a huge appreciation for Mrs. Fraga and her work from my interview of her; I was pleasantly surprised at the beginning of the school year with the level of parent involvement in the school. Now I know that Teresa Fraga is

behind all of that excellent parent involvement. Perhaps what I can learn from this interviewing process is the huge effect parent involvement has on the school community. I know that as a classroom teacher, I can encourage parent involvement, albeit in different ways than Mrs. Fraga does, but hopefully to the same positive affect.

My second interview took place with Mrs. Gila Hernández, the third grade bilingual teacher. My main goal for my interview with her was to learn about the certification required of bilingual educators and also to gain insight into how a bilingual classroom functions. I learned that in the state of Illinois, the certification requirement for bilingual teachers is simply a bilingual endorsement. The coursework Mrs. Hernández took for her bilingual endorsement involved classes on strategies that facilitate students learning a second language such as vocabulary acquisition. One component to the bilingual certification process is an oral test that measures the candidate's speaking proficiency in the language of the certification for the purpose of assuring that teachers are able to teach in the first language of his/her students.

Pursuing bilingual education is a goal of mine. Because I feel so strongly about students becoming literate in their first language, I would love to become a part of the process of students achieving first-language literacy. If I am to become a bilingual teacher, though, I do need to pursue extra schooling in order to complete the coursework necessary for bilingual certification.

My last interview took place with Mrs. Ammon, the Media Specialist and Technology Coordinator at Orozco Academy. She is also in charge of grant writing for the school and planning professional development days. My motivation for interviewing Mrs. Ammon did not come from my desire to be the Media Specialist or the Technology Coordinator. Rather, after attending one professional development day in which the staff engaged in a cooperative learning activity, I

became very interested in the planning aspect of professional development days and wanted to find out more about the planning process. My interest stemmed from my experience with other teachers engaged in cooperative learning and their lack of attention to create a similar cooperative learning activity for their students in their classrooms. During this particular activity, the teachers discussed their vision for the school in the future including its values and methods of instruction; cooperative learning was mentioned with great frequency. I became interested in helping teachers make the connection between their own activities within professional development and their planning of activities for the classroom that would lead towards their goal of cooperative learning. I have noticed that many teachers ascribe to the theoretical constructs of constructivist teaching, yet have a difficult time of creating constructivist learning in their classrooms. My interest in leading professional development stems from the desire to help teachers connect the theory of constructivism to the practice of their teaching. My conversation with Mrs. Ammon helped me realize that being involved with many aspects of the school community such as serving on a variety of committees with other teachers and parents as well, will help in gaining the opportunity to plan for professional development days. As a professional development planner, I would strive to be like Mrs. Ammon and address the needs, concerns, and desires of all of the various components of the school, and now I know that the best way to do so is to be a part of and interact with at least a few of those different components.

In addition to professional development days provided by the school and pursuing graduate courses, journals and professional conferences provide methods for continuing professional development. Ideally, a teacher would subscribe to journals in each of the content areas (s)he teaches. I will not discuss that many journals here, but focus on those that have special significance to me.

First, I plan to subscribe to *Lectura y Vida*, a Latin American reading journal sponsored by the International Reading Association. Because at this point, I do not have formal training in bilingual education but want to teach bilingual students, this journal would be a valuable resource. Because it is an international journal, it has interesting and applicable information about current reading trends around the world that would aid in developing a more global knowledge base in reading. Also, it provides Spanish language resources such as a book database that is valuable as I have not read extensively in Spanish language children's literature. If my Spanish-speaking students are reading in their native language, it will be important for me to support their reading of valuable literature; this journal will help me do so.

Another journal I am interested in subscribing to is *Social Studies and the Young Learner*. This journal focuses on integrating social studies into the elementary classroom and provides ideas on more engaging and interdisciplinary lessons. Personally, I feel that I lack creativity when planning social studies lessons. This journal would be a valuable resource to help stimulate creativity to make social studies lessons more meaningful and enjoyable for students. Subscribing to *Social Studies and the Young Learner* and other journals that address content area that I am not as comfortable with is beneficial because the journals will provide me with opportunities to further my learning in those content areas as well as gain ideas for lesson planning and teaching.

Just as there is a journal for every content area, there is also at least one conference for every content area as well. Conferences are great ways to network with other teachers, gain ideas for teaching in that content area, and present material. One conference I came across that I am interested in attending is the Constructivist Design Conference on Educational Improvement. I am attracted to this conference because of the opportunity it provides for educators to learn how to better infuse their instruction with a constructivist philosophy. Furthermore, if I end up teaching in a school that did not embrace constructivism as much as I would like, this conference would be a good chance to connect with and exchange ideas with other teachers who are practicing

constructivist teaching in their classrooms. The strategies and ideas presented in this conference would likely span all content areas, therefore making it broadly applicable.

Presenting work at conferences will be a step to take further down the path of my teaching career. However, I encountered some useful and general guidelines for presenting work at conferences. First and most obviously, the material must be relevant to the topic of the conference. It will be important to keep updated on the upcoming conferences and their topics for a variety of different organizations. Once I begin attending conferences, I will get a better idea of what types of focus the presentations have. Then, as I develop and teach lesson plans and activities in my classroom, I can begin gathering materials that may be useful for a presentation. Research is also frequently presented at conferences; I will be on the lookout for conferences that match the area of my research as I complete my graduate studies as well. Along with subscribing to journals in various content areas, attending conferences is another valuable means to continue developing professionally.

A step beyond attending conferences and subscribing to journals for professional development is attending graduate school. In the future, I know I want to acquire both a Master's degree and a Doctoral degree. Before pursuing further education, though, I want to teach for about three years. I want to have a wealth of experiences on which to base my graduate program learning; I also want that time to develop questions that will inform my learning. Because I cannot predict the questions that will arise as I teach or the general course my life will take in the next three years, I feel somewhat silly planning out the rest of my educational life at this moment in time. Nevertheless, I will offer some plausible options for my graduate education.

I focused on two different graduate schools in my research for this paper. First, I researched Arizona State University because it is near Buckeye, Arizona. Because

many Cornell graduates have found jobs in Buckeye and they report that the school district is supportive of constructivist teaching, I am considering Buckeye as an option. Arizona State University offers a Master's degree in bilingual education, which is one area of education I am very interested in pursuing. While simply speaking Spanish is a highly sought-after skill in many districts that often qualifies teachers to teach bilingual students, I am interested in expanding my knowledge of the best practices in bilingual education. With little formal training in bilingual education and a desire to teach English language learners, I think that a degree in bilingual education would be ideal for me. If I end up in Arizona, I know that Arizona State offers such a degree.

Following a very different train of thought, I researched graduate schools that follow a constructivist philosophy in their Master's programs. At the top of the list I found courtesy the Institute for Learning Centered Education was Antioch New England Graduate School. Upon browsing this school's website, I discovered that they offer a Master's degree in Education focused on integrated learning. The coursework involved in this program seems to be focused on providing opportunities for students to make a connection between the theoretical components of constructivism and their practical use in the classroom. This very issue is something that I am interested in pursuing as well, and it seems as if this program would provide an excellent continuation of learning how to incorporate constructivist theory into my classroom.

Both the bilingual and integrated education tracks would be valuable to my career as an educator. As I complete my first few years of teaching, I will be better able to decide which I would benefit from most. It is always helpful to have investigated various options, and these two will certainly continue to be on my mind as I think further about pursuing at Master's degree.

Thinking beyond the Master's degree at this point seems much too overwhelming. At this point, I am interested in pursuing a Ph.D. in instruction or

educational psychology and one day becoming a professor of education. One of my strongest beliefs about education deals with the value of *having* experiences before teaching them. Therefore, I will make sure to gain adequate experience with teaching elementary-aged students before teaching others how to do so. When I feel that I have the necessary experience and am ready for further academic learning in education, I will look for a Doctoral program. This is the area in which the questions that I have gathered from teaching will be influential to my search for a program: I will make an effort to attend a school that best allows me to investigate my questions. Since I do not have those questions at this time, I am not sure what type of program I am looking for. Generally, I think I will look for a program that allows me to use my classroom as my research arena. Once I attain my Ph.D., I think I will teach at a small college that does not have a focus on further research. I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience as a student at Cornell because I have had so much personal interaction with my professors. When I become a professor, I will look for a similar school at which I can establish frequent and meaningful personal interactions with my students.

Even though the specifics of my plan for further education both formally and in my own classroom are fairly vague, I definitely have a good idea of what my main career goals are. It will be an interesting and exciting adventure to see how I achieve them!