

Introduction

As the course nears its end the time has come to reflect upon the presented ideas and look at how to apply them in my own practice. In this short essay one idea will be highlighted that was presented which I started to apply in my personal practice. This is the idea learning does not stop outside schools (as presented in week 1 and further developed in week 4). I will present this by describing what I used to do, how I have changed my teaching practice during the course and how I want to improve these activities in the future.

What I used to do

As I have just started my teaching career (it is my 2nd year as a teacher) my main focus is on teaching the curriculum as it is. In doing so I did not put much attention to questions of students regarding the why of the learning and what it meant for their futures. Although, I incorporated real-live problems and applications into my classes I regularly got the question why people learned this. My usual reply was that the things they learned were useful in their future and providing them with some real-world examples. However, this usually did not satisfy my students and they would not see the usefulness (or non-usefulness according to them). In my first year as a teacher this did not bother me that much (as I still needed to get some routine in my teaching habit). However, as I started my second year I made it a priority to work on this essential element of teaching (if your students see the usefulness of something teaching it becomes much easier).

How I changed my teaching practice

As a result of this course I realized that more integration between formal and non-formal/informal education is limited. This was true for my class but also for education in general. It is even so wide spread that the European Union¹ considers it a key problem when it comes to ensuring employability (European Commission, 2012). As I realized I needed more non-formal learning methods in my lessons, I remembered my Scouting² background. As a result of this I decided to include activities I did when I was a scout. We did a bridge building project in which students had to traverse a 5 meter gap to learn about forces and created mini hot air-balloons (with small candle lights to learn about gasses and heat. Students really enjoyed themselves and were much better at identifying what they learned and explaining this to each other. I even got some phone calls from some parents that their children were really enthusiastic about what they learned.

What I intend to do to improve these activities

¹ I live in the Netherlands

² See www.scout.org for an explanation of Scouting

As a student in educational science (besides teaching part time) I believe it is my responsibility to look further into this problem besides just improving this problem by doing research into strategies to make greater use of non-formal and informal learning in formal education (as this can have an impact on education that goes further than the classes that I teach). Hart, Howieson and Semple (2009) identify three ways to recognize learning outcomes: valuing, explaining and proving achievement. Of these three the focus seems to be on proving achievement in the formal education sector. Non-formal and informal ways on the other hand tend to focus on the other two types of recognition. I intend to do some research into how formal education can focus more on valuing and recognizing learning outcomes (and non-formal education to focus on proving learning outcomes). In doing so I hope teachers can show their students the value of their learning and students will be better able to identify these outcomes for themselves.

Bibliography

European Commission. (2012, September 5). *Commission urges Member States to recognise skills gained outside school and university*. Retrieved July 23, 2013, from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-936_en.htm?locale=fr

Hart, J., Howieson, C., & Semple, S. (2009). *Recognising achievement: literature review and model for managing recognition processes*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.