

Big Picture Action Plan

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Education 5130

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## Abstract:

An overview of Jordan Wheeler's personal experience and take away from Nebraska Wesleyan University's Masters of Education course 5130 (Reflective Practitioner). Throughout the semester Wheeler participated in daily reflections, multiple classroom observations and read Angela Duckworth's *Grit* as well as Taylor Mali's *What Teachers Make*.

## Appendix A

### Brief Background of How I Ended Up Here

When I first applied for the Masters of Education program at Wesleyan I did not know what exactly I was getting myself into. During my undergrad I had been torn between Education and Mathematics, two subjects that I am so passionate about. I had taken a few class with Dr. Randy Ernst and talked to him about being torn between Education and Mathematics. That's when he recommended the Wesleyan program and gave me the idea of also doing my Masters in mathematics. He also pointed me in the direction of substitute teaching or being a mentor of the LPS gifted students program, which I am currently a mentor for. He has been a huge mentor and a big reason I am apart of this cohort.

During the first meeting of this class, we did introductions of everyone and I was the only one that did not have a teaching endorsement and that scared me because I felt like I would not be able to contribute to class discussion. After that first class meeting, I talked to Dr. Gudgel for a brief moment about my overall education plan, which I said I wanted to do educational research. He told me that I

would need to spend a few years actually teaching to gain credit for my research. He went on saying that it's hard to do research in education if I had never experienced teaching and the experience would make my research more valid to outside readers, (aka teachers). At first this made me panic because that would mean I would have to go and get my teaching endorsement and then teach for a few years before getting my PhD. This means I would have to be patient with the process, which patience is sometimes not my expertise when it comes to myself. After this first class meeting, with feeling that I could not contribute to class discussion and the brief conversation with Dr. Gudgel, I started to question if I was doing the right thing by being a part of the cohort. I never voiced this fear to anyone and I was close to dropping the program all together, however, I decided to stick with it for the semester, and I am glad I did so.

## Appendix B

### What Teachers Make

During the course the class read chapters from Taylor Mali's book *What Teachers Make* and every student had to present on the chapter they read. However, these presentations were far from the norm, instead of just doing a quick summary of the chapter and asking a few discussion questions, we had to create a lesson plan that not only allowed open discussion on the chapter but also encapsulates our own teaching style. This made each chapter lesson interesting and shared different ideas about how we can use other's teaching styles to shape our own.

During the first sections of Mali text leads, the class went over the chapter “Making Kids Work Hard.” Unfortunately I did not write down who led this chapter but I wrote down multiple notes about the lesson that was taught. When you are teaching a subject in high school you will have multiple students who do not find your class interesting or students that will struggle. I am a realistic person and I know that a lot of people can get through life with just knowing simple arithmetic, they will not need to know how to factor a quadratic function and I am fine with knowing that. So it brings up the question, “why should we teach it in the first place to students who will never use it?” During this chapter, Mali answers that simple question by stating, “in the long run the ability to work harder than you ever thought you could may be the most important thing a teacher can teach” (Mali, 2012). Even though a student may struggle with certain topics that they will never use again, the more important lesson being taught is how to work hard to try to understand the topic/material.

Teachers go beyond just teaching their students. We have had many conversations about how we can shape our students into the people they become. We spend 8 hours (a third of their day and a half of their waking day) a day with students. We interact with them more than some parents do. We go beyond teaching – we become mentors and guides to the people that they become. We see students' potential without any influence of background, it's completely objective and we can help our students thrive and extract their potential from them (Mali, 2012).

## Appendix C

### Grit, a Self-Selected Text

A portion of this class we were assigned to pick out a personal text to read throughout the semester. I find positive psychology an interesting field and believe that positive psychology can lead to many successes. Since I find positive psychology interesting, I decided to read Angela Duckworth's *Grit*.

Grit is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth, 2007). We tell our students to set goals and when they do this they will often face adversity and shoot for the stars and fall well short. So how do we, as teachers, foster grit within our students. One way we can foster grit is to take less emphasis on talent. Our society has put talent on a pedestal and uses it as an excuse for being average at something or uses it as an explanation for being good at something. Do not get me wrong, talent is important, but effort and work counts more than talent. As teachers we can help students realize that with effort and work, they can start achieving things they thought were impossible. We can also tell them that "not having talent" is not a valid excuse.

Another way we can help students become resilient is by helping them goal set. It is important to have students set goals that they want to achieve. However, setting a goal is not good enough. We need to help them create a plan of action to achieve their goal. Then the last step is help encourage them and help them follow through with their plan.

## Appendix D

## Joslyn Art Museum: A Difference We Made That Helped Create Greatness

One of our eight classes for the semester took place at the Joslyn Art Museum. At first I was wondering what we were doing there and how it could possibly relate to our class and teaching. We then received a piece of paper from Dr. Gudgel with the assignment on it, we read it and then he performed an example of what the assignment will look like. He wanted us to spend an hour walking around the museum looking at different artworks and then fabricate a story from the artwork. The story had to explain how something we said or did to a student caused this masterpiece to be created.

At first I did not quite understand the purpose of the assignment. However, while I was looking around at the artwork, it occurred to me that the assignment, to me at least, was to point out something we are doing in our current classrooms that is great but the students may not see how it is great. It was to encourage us to continue to fight for our students and for their development. Even though students will sometimes not listen to us or not like us, it is still our jobs to develop into the people they will become. This assignment was to show us, and our classmates, how much teaching can impact our students outside of the material they are learning; how great our careers are.

## Appendix E

### Days and Days of Reflection

I have always found it hard to reflect on my daily work. I do make an effort every day to hunt the good things but to make thoughtful reflections have always been hard

for me. I think that was shown in my first few reflection journals, they were pretty shallow and not very insightful. I think made it an effort to try to focus on one specific thing that happened during the day to dig deeper on. Once I started to do this, I found the ways I thought about my own teaching style changed.

When reflecting upon my day, I found that it was easier to look at things that did not go well. Often this led to me pondering why it went the way it did. A common theme in some of my reflections was my students not doing well on tests. This led to a small intervention on my part to examine why they were not doing well. Through this intervention, which became my analysis paper for Dr. Cypert's class, I realized a common factor of poor test scores – not showing work. I then did research on the benefits of showing work on math tests and how to encourage students to show their work.

## Appendix F

### Observation Portfolio

Teachers are use to doing observation hours, especially during undergrad. I only took a few education classes in my undergrad and had observations to do almost every semester. Dr. Gudgel wanted us to do just five observations this semester, which is not many, however, he wanted them to be thorough. He wanted us to take away things that can help shape our teaching styles, whether it were positive or negative things. I these observations were much different than the ones I did before. Previously, my observations consisted of me paying attention to the material being taught, not the actual teaching style that teacher was using.

Since I want to focus on secondary education and college education, I observed a few professors and a few high school teachers. I also feel that math teachers can often make the lessons dry due to the nature of the material, so I wanted to observe teachers in other subjects to see how they kept students engaged and participating. I learned through observation it is important to come up with multiple explanations for one concept, meaning do not keep the explanations in terms of “x” and “y,” rather put them in terms of real life examples that the students can relate to. Also when you use multiple explanations it allows the students to receive the repetition they need to learn the material, but, it comes in a more engaging manner.

Another thing I took away from observing non-math teachers is to allow the students become the teacher. I obviously cannot expect my students to teach each other the lessons, but I can have them teach by solving an example on the board and having them explain the steps they are doing to the class. By doing this, a student who understands what I am saying is allowed to say it in their own words, which will help them learn, and could help other students understand more clearly.

## Appendix G

### The Metaphor that Stuck

One of the first classes we were talking about our impacts that we have on our students. How we can shape them into the people they become and give them the encouragement that they may not get at home. It is our jobs to develop people into



who they become and without us, no learning can be achieved and we would not have the technology, the doctors, the medicine, the food, ect. that we have today.

At the end of class Dr. Gudgel created a metaphor for teachers. He compared us to artists and our students as our clay. Just like an artists shapes and creates things out of clay, we shape and create the people our students become. Often times I think about this metaphor while teaching becomes tough and I become overwhelmed. I think about the great artists in history (Mozart, van Gogh, Picasso, ect.) and think about the masterpieces they created. They definitely did not have smooth sailing the entire way, things become tough but they did not stop and give up. So when students are being difficult or I am stressing out, I try to remind myself that I am an artist and that if it were easy all the time, then everyone would be a teacher. This thought causes me to relax and makes me enjoy what I do more.

## Appendix H

### My Future Goals and Expectations

When I started this semester I was slightly lost and uncertain with what I wanted to do. I felt like I would not provide any insightful thoughts to the class because of my lack of experience and almost decided to quit.

Now that the semester is almost over, I am glad I did not. I may not have provided as much insight as I wanted, but I did take away from the class, whether that was different forms of teaching styles or personal values when it comes to teaching. I have more direction with what I want to do. I want to take Dr. Gudgel

advice from the beginning of the semester and teach for a few years and obtain my PhD to help with positive psychology within schools.

## References:

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals. *Personality Processes and Individual Differences*.

Mali, T. (2012). *What Teachers Make: In praise of the greatest job in the world*. Penguin Books.