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Using the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm to Frame the Reflective Practice of Special Education Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

This article describes the application of the elements of the Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm (IPP) to the reimagined curriculum in the graduate special education programs at Regis University: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. The shared learning experience of a reaction journal, employed frequently in a *Methods and Strategies in Special Education* graduate level course, is also described addressing the practical application of the elements of IPP to more fully develop educators in service to others.

“The School of Education, through its commitment to Jesuit ideals, prepares learners to become educational leaders who improve and transform society. Through reflective practice emphasizing values and social responsibility, learners mindfully pursue the answer to the question, ‘How ought we to live and lead as educators?’”¹ This expressed vision of the School of Education focuses on the use of reflective practice as a way to transform future educators from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge in service to others. The graduate programs in special education were reimagined to leverage the use of the Ignatian Pedagogy, designed to infuse opportunities for critical reflection throughout the curriculum, in order to allow for the transformation of teacher candidate’s habitual patterns of thought “through a constant interplay of experience, reflection, and action.”² The inclusion of reflection as the essential dynamic within the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) is used to frame the teaching and learning experiences of special education teacher candidates in this graduate program.

This article presents both the application of IPP as a conceptual framework that guided the curriculum development of the special education graduate teacher preparation program and the specific use of a reaction journal to accompany teacher candidates on their growth as they progressed through their *Methods and Strategies in Special Education* course. The reaction journal was designed to employ the constructs of context, experience, reflection, and action; the evaluation

component, a meta-reflection, offers both the learner and instructor valuable insight into how to guide the learner through this transformative process in service to others. In the following, the conceptual framework is described in more detail and organized according to the five aspects of the IPP.

Context

The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE) outlines the definitions of the five principles of the IPP: context, experience, reflection, action, evaluation. *Context* is the first principle which anchors the rest of the teaching and learning experiences of both learners and faculty.

The contexts of graduate students in the graduate special education program at Regis University was examined and considered prior to developing the learning activities in their *Methods and Strategies in Special Education* course. Although context was the first consideration during the re-imagining of the entire program, this article focuses on the learning experiences during this final course in the program’s sequence.

Context in teacher education is concerned with any and all factors that help or hinder the development of effective and reflective teaching practice. In an Ignatian sense, context refers to a teacher candidate’s readiness to learn and grow. For teacher educators, this means personal engagement with and care for our teacher candidates as well as creating a learning

environment in which our Jesuit values are both espoused and experienced. The teacher candidate's own life situation (i.e., who he or she is coming into the classroom) and the larger contexts which surround the candidates (e.g., classroom, institution, local, national, and global) are identified, examined and applied. The designed learning experiences within teacher education enable candidates to be more attentive to their own experiences with the ultimate aim of helping them to move beyond a preoccupation with individual context and become responsive to the larger contexts. Quality teacher preparation includes instruction of candidates with contextual field experiences with students in the K-12 environment and connects their practice to the actual contexts of their students as well.³ The ICAJE defines context within the IPP as:

Teachers, as well as other members of the school community, therefore, should take account of the real context of a student's life. . . the socio-economic, political and cultural context. . . the institutional environment of the school of learning center. . . what previously acquired concepts students bring with them to the start of the learning process. . .⁴

The expressed vision of the graduate special education program at Regis University states:

The special education teacher preparation programs in the College for Professional Studies seek to develop effective teachers through transformative experiences that utilize multiple approaches and partnerships to create collaborative and compassionate educators who integrate research-based practices to serve the unique and diverse needs of students with disabilities and their families.

From a teacher education perspective, our ability to also integrate research-based practices to serve the unique and diverse needs of our teacher candidates is of parallel importance. In order to best serve our learners, we must first consider the multiple contexts from which our learners operate. Figure 1 illustrates the multiple contexts encountered by learners and those that directly

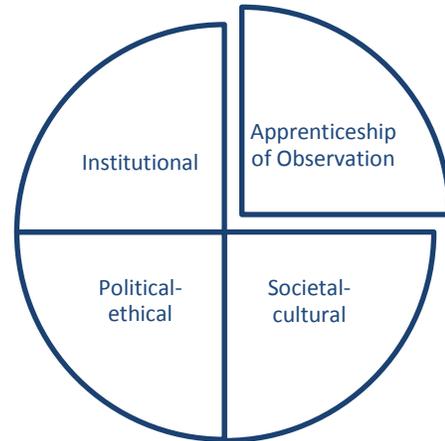


Figure 1

influence their perspectives toward learning to teach.

Within their preparation to become special educators, we include learning experiences intended to illuminate, validate, and even disrupt the current paradigm in which learners' perspectives are situated. During the final course in the program sequence, *Methods and Strategies in Special Education*, the focus on the selection of research-based instructional strategies for students with disabilities cannot be separated from the above-mentioned contexts. The School of Education pursues the goal to make the Jesuit values explicit in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The intentional design of Ignatian pedagogical principles into those three areas makes these values visible in the curriculum.

Apprenticeship of Observation

Successful teacher educators seek to develop professionals who are cognizant of their own contexts and who critically reflect on those prior and current experiences for future practice.⁵ One of the first experiences they reflect on during their preparation is that of the many years they spent as observers during their own K-12 education. This type of apprenticeship, as described by Lortie,⁶ fosters deep-seated notions about what teaching is and is not, and is often at odds with the preparation goals of teacher educators. In reality, it is an autobiographical context that can be explored, validated, and also challenged for relevance to current and future professional practice.

Societal-Cultural Perspective

Societal and cultural beliefs and norms are patterns that perpetuate the values that bind together institutions and individuals.⁷ These norms include one's beliefs about life, what is good and evil, what is beauty, what is normal, what is healthy, what is deviant, to name a few. In education these norms may also include what defines a family, what causes poverty, and what is privilege, entitlement and the expectations surrounding personal responsibility. Personal and institutional actions and attitudes (e.g., dispositions) include assumptions made about the above mentioned norms and impact the teacher candidate's perspective about teaching and learning.

Political-Ethical Perspective

The political-ethical context explores the notions of the obligations of a democratic society and the structural equalities and inequalities that are found in our past and current definitions of social roles. How has legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), shaped our identities, roles, and our place in society? How individuals are defined as contributing members of society or whether their socioeconomic status defines their level of citizenship are both ways in which the political context categorizes both difference and commonality.⁸ Teacher candidates, during their professional formation, are continually challenged to address difference and commonality in their interaction with a widely diverse student population. Their predisposition toward difference is formed or malformed through the continuing political dialogue surrounding the principles of the equalization of rights, entitlements and dignity.⁹ How we make decisions on behalf of others, as teachers, is an ethical practice. Examining how class privilege impacts decision-making is crucial for teacher candidates to make sense of their experiences in and outside of the classroom.¹⁰

Institutional Perspective

Social institutions, such as education, participate in the formation of laws, policies, practices, and norms in both intentional and unintentional ways.¹¹ The institutional context of a university teacher preparation program shapes the perspective of the teacher candidates as they are

inculcated into the policies, practices, and norms of their particular preparation program. The institutional perspective contributes greatly to the identity formation of teacher candidates during their preparation. It is during this transitional time when teacher candidates "negotiate their images of themselves as professionals with the images reflected to them by their programs."¹² They must learn how to mediate their personal identity, formed primarily on the apprenticeship of observation, the societal-cultural context, and their political-ethical context, with the professional identity while navigating among the different images offered by their programs and cooperating teachers in the field. The institutional perspective provides early professional socialization and clinical fieldwork is often considered the primary influence in this transitional experience through the models of professional identity encountered from interactions with program instructors, supervisors, and mentors in the field.¹³

Standards and the Teacher Education Context

Societal, political, ethical, and institutional expectations towards education and teachers have been translated into a specific view on education, educational goals, and explicit competencies towards beginning teachers.¹⁴ These competencies are expressed through state and national accrediting standards for teacher preparation in an effort to describe what makes a good and successful teacher. These standards address and define the knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions expected of beginning teachers. Teacher preparation programs, like the graduate special education program described in this article, design learning experiences that align to these expected competencies but with the view that professional identity formation is an ongoing developmental process that fits well within the Ignatian pedagogical principles of *context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation*. In this way teacher candidates become active players in the process of their own professional growth and identity formation.

Experience

The Jesuits describe *experience* as the affective components of the learning experience. The affective components include any activity in addition to the cognitive grasp; some sensation

that is registered in the teacher candidate (e.g., perception, perspectives, attitudes, dispositions). Ignatius urges that the whole person – mind, heart and will – should enter the learning experience.¹⁵ Within teacher education there is an emphasis on developing perspectives, attitudes and dispositions that promote the advancement and learning of all students in the K-12 environment. Providing this experience of an affective nature is essential to the idea of adapting Ignatian Pedagogy to teacher preparation.

Reflection

Within the IPP, *reflection* is the ‘so what?’ of learning. It is the mediator or mitigator between *experience* and *action*. Both memory and the imagination are used to capture the meaning and essential value of what is being studied, to discover its relationship with other aspects of knowledge and human activity, and to appreciate its implications in the ongoing search for truth and freedom.¹⁶ Teacher candidates will deepen their understandings of the implications of the learning experiences by examining their own underlying reasons for reactions to those learning experiences. In order to foster this type of reflection teacher educators need to provide frequent and meaningful feedback to fully capture the value of the learning experiences and offer candidates opportunities to apply learning activities and experiences to their own future professional practice.

Reflective Practice and Teacher Education

With an eye toward developing reflective teacher candidates, as expressed in the School of Education’s vision and outcomes, and a primary emphasis on developing learning activities that positively impact student achievement, teacher educators seeks to offer teacher candidates opportunities to reflect both *on action* and *in action*.¹⁷

Reflection-on-action is described as the skill to reflect back on lessons that have been taught, interactions that have been had, and decisions that were made in order to use that information gathered to adapt or adjust teaching practices. *Reflection-in-action* is described as reflection conducted concurrent with teaching and accompanying professional interactions and

involves acting immediately to improve or adapt teaching practice.

The desired outcome of this reflective practice is to transform both the teacher and their practice in service to students in the K-12 environment. Teacher candidates gain information from their own observations of themselves, other teachers, coupled with their own reflections. This enables them to generate new knowledge to inform their current and future professional practice.¹⁸

Applications of Reflective Practice in a Methods Course in Special Education

The Special Education graduate program at Regis University formulated eight course outcomes for its teaching and learning framework that address the characteristics of a reflective educator:

1. Analyze the educational implications of various exceptionalities’ characteristics in a case study to determine evidence-based instructional strategies for the students represented in the case.
2. Skillfully assess, diagnose, and evaluate the progress of learners with mild to moderate disabilities.
3. Implement developmentally appropriate instructional strategies and materials for students with mild to moderate disabilities.
4. Create daily lesson plans that incorporate Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals for students with mild to moderate disabilities.
5. Collaborate with appropriate school personnel to determine the needs of a student with a mild to moderate disability.
6. Interact with school personnel, in and outside of formal instructional situations, in a manner that adheres to the best professional and ethical practices.
7. Advocate on behalf of students with disabilities in a collaborative and competent manner by promoting data-driven instructional recommendations to school personnel.
8. Provide a rationale for how you will apply current special education evidence-based practices in your future work with students with mild disabilities.

Action

According to Ignatius, new-found knowledge leads to some action. *Action* may manifest as a concrete activity, but can also take the form of an understanding, a disposition, a decision, a belief, a commitment, or simply the desire to try something new.¹⁹ Within this theoretical frame, the external choices or actions are made as a result of an attitudinal change based on the learning experiences encountered by the learner. Teacher education is not intended solely as a way to collect knowledge and skills about teaching; it is preparation for accomplished practice in the service of others. Preparation to become a special educator prepares candidates for good work with the most vulnerable student populations. Action, therefore, is the movement from *reflection-in-action* to *knowledge-in-action* enabling candidates to shift from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge. At its essence this process transforms the teacher candidate to a *contemplative in action*.²⁰

Evaluation

The final element of this process in which teacher candidates have an experience, reflect on and in that experience, and then act as a result of that reflection is *evaluation*.

Ignatian pedagogy. . . aims at formation which includes but goes beyond academic mastery. Here we are concerned about students' well-rounded growth as persons for others. Thus periodic evaluation of the student's growth in attitudes, priorities, and actions consistent with being a person for others is essential.²¹

Evaluation is the practice of reflecting on the process of reflection – this is a meta-reflection. It is during this time that instructors coach candidates on this process of meta-reflection encouraging them to go beyond the surface response of summary or comprehension. This evaluation or meta-reflection is not easily assessed by a summative rubric as a graded assignment. However, as a formative activity, it can be practiced over time and developed as a way of proceeding where “certain attitudes, values, and

patterns of behavior join together.”²² The teacher educator's role, similar to that of a spiritual director, is to accompany the teacher candidate, challenging them to grow on this voyage of discovery.²³ The following example illustrates the IPP as learning activities and experiences in a methods and strategies course in special education through the use of a weekly reaction journal.

Reaction Journal

The IPP, as it applies to teacher education, is a way of proceeding that promotes skillful teaching through the development of contemplatives in action who are in service to others; for special education teacher candidates this service is to a vulnerable student population. Service learning and school-based clinical experiences provide one context of this development. Course-based learning that explores the depth and breadth of their teacher education provides another context. Finally, faculty or instructor interaction and relationships provide the connections necessary to make meaning of the knowledge, skills and dispositions encountered during a course and/or program of study. The reaction journal is a formative learning experience that fosters meaning making and transformation (see Figure 2).

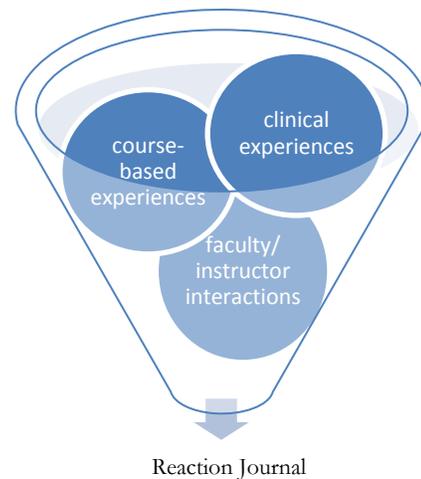


Figure 2

The goal of the reaction journal is not simply reflection-on-action; instead the goal is to sensitize learners to their own reactions to their learning experiences in an effort to uncover the emotions, assumptions and beliefs that may be the source of their reaction and move them toward action. The reaction is an emotional response to the learning

material and provides an imaginative connection between the self and the broader social world. The emotional response, or reaction, reflects the contexts in which it arises.²⁴ One of the crucial elements of the reaction journal is the learner's ability to express in what ways they may apply what they've learned to their current and/or future professional practice as a teacher. The task description for the reaction journal appears below:

Learners will complete weekly reaction journals over the course of the term (1 to 2 pages each). Journal entries should include discussion of course readings, activities, clinical experiences, and discussions as well as how you felt and thought about the material. Journals should consist of a critical reflection of experiences rather than simply stating readings/activities were enjoyed or not enjoyed or simply summarized. Feedback will be provided using a rubric provided by the instructor. This is a private space between you and the instructor in order to encourage reflection-for-action and growth.

Although it is difficult to assign a grade to a reflection, a rubric was designed for the reaction journal that aligns with the five elements of IPP and used primarily as an opportunity for faculty to provide meaningful feedback and operate as guide to the teacher candidate during their professional identity formation much like a spiritual director in Ignatian spirituality practice. An example of this rubric appears as Appendix A. In addition, a sample reaction journal entry appears as Appendix B.

More Practical Applications of IPP in Teacher Education

The IPP provides a framework in its practical approach to teaching and learning. Critical reflection and rational dialogue are important elements to any transformative learning and as such can be infused as discussion topics both for classroom-based and online learning experiences. Formation of such topics or questions also moves faculty and instructors from transmitters of knowledge to co-constructors of knowledge with learners.

Base discussion topics on the five aspects of IPP throughout a course. Pose questions, situated in the topic of the course/weekly topic that access one, two, or more of the IPP elements (context, experience, reflection, action, evaluation). This approach can be used as part of a class discussion, an online discussion forum, or as a written prompt as a summative assessment of a topic. The following questions were formulated within the context of a course within the special education teacher preparation program:

Context: "What understanding do you already possess about the use of research studies or statistics to persuade a point of view or move people to action?"

Experience: "Consider a classroom that is part of a Title I school in which 85% of your students are on free/reduced lunch and within which 30% on an IEP. What challenges do you perceive you would face as a first year teacher and what about your own prior experience either magnifies or diminishes the impact of these challenges?"

Reflection: "Based on your current understanding of the dominant qualitative research methods, what implications of this learning experience can you identify as impacting how you anticipate this will apply to the study of your own practice or classroom?"

Action: "Now that you have learned and understand that the issue about classroom size has both negative and positive attributes, how does this impact how you will address the inherent challenges of either (1) teaching in a rural community with a smaller than preferred classroom size, or (2) teaching in an urban community with a larger than preferred classroom size?"

Evaluation: "Based on your new understanding of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) as a framework for tiered behavior intervention, reflect on the process you went through to align this process with your previous understanding of the best way to work with children with behavior challenges. Share any elements of either dissonance or harmony you have experienced through reflecting on this process."

Concluding Remarks

The application of the IPP to curriculum development in the graduate special education program offered learners and faculty an opportunity to answer the question from the guiding vision of the School of Education – “How ought we live and lead as educators?” With a profound emphasis on going beyond theory, the learning experiences provide practical tools that make a difference in the way we prepare teachers, so that future special educators act on behalf of and in service to others. In an effort to take into account the real context of a learner’s life, balancing the influence of a variety of contextual factors, faculty engage with learners to promote a deeper understanding of what the implications are of what they have learned for themselves and the students they will teach. Additionally, the use of a reaction journal as one way to leverage the IPP elements of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation provides a shared learning experience that can reinforce, challenge, encourage reconsideration and then give assurance that the action to be taken is consistent with what it means to be an educator for others.²⁵ If transformative teachers are reflective teachers that are constantly developing new ways of teaching and learning, it is assumed that they are passing these skills and behaviors to their students in order to positively impact their learning.²⁶ As such, the employment of IPP includes regular evaluation of both learners’ development and, equally their development in attitudes, priorities, and actions (i.e., dispositions) in order gauge their progress toward the expressed outcomes of their teacher preparation programs. Future directions may include connecting the documented growth of a teacher candidate from their reaction journals to their ability to reflect critically on their practice as student teachers and then beyond as beginning teachers. What impact on student learning can be accounted for using IPP as a framework for teaching and learning beyond the college classroom experience? 

Notes

¹ Regis University, College for Professional Studies, School of Education, “Teacher Quality,” accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.regis.edu/CPS/Schools/School-of-Education-and-Counseling/Quality.aspx>.

² Gonzaga University, “General Congregation 34, Decree 26,” accessed March 25, 2014, <https://www.gonzaga.edu/about/mission/docs/GC34Decree26.pdf>.

³ Hillary Hertzog and Nancy O’Rode, “Improving the Quality of Elementary Mathematics Student Teaching: Using Field Support Materials to Develop Reflective Practice in Student Teachers,” *Teacher Education Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2011): 89-111.

⁴ International Commission on the Apostolates of Jesuit Education (ICAGE), *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Rome: International Center for Jesuit Education, 1993), 12-13.

⁵ Linda Darling-Hammond, “Why Teacher Education is Important- and Difficult,” in *Powerful Teacher Education*, ed., Linda Darling-Hammond (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

⁶ Daniel Lortie, *Schoolteacher* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

⁷ Rita Hardiman, Bailey Jackson, and Pat Griffin, “Conceptual Foundations,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed., Warren Blumenfeld, Carmelita Castaneda, Heather Hackman, Madeline Peters, Ximena Zuniga, and Maurianne Adams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26-35.

⁸ Wendy Turgeon, “Multiculturalism: Politics of Difference, Education and Philosophy for Children,” *Analytic Teaching* 24, no. 2 (2004): 96-109.

⁹ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. A. Heble, D. Palmateer Pennee, and J.R.T. Struthers (Petersborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1997): 98-131.

¹⁰ Karen Pittelman, “Deep Thoughts About Class Privilege” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed., Warren Blumenfeld, Carmelita Castaneda, Heather Hackman, Madeline Peters, Ximena Zuniga, and Maurianne Adams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 219-223.

¹¹ Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin, “Conceptual Foundations.”

¹² Matthew Ronfedt and Pam Grossman, “Becoming a Professional: Experimenting with Possible Selves in Professional Preparation,” *Teacher Education Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2008): 41-60.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Annie Schepens, Antonia Aelterman, and Peter Vlerick, “Student Teachers’ Professional Identity Formation: Between Being Born as a Teacher and Becoming One,” *Educational Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 361-378.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John McKay, "Un-apologizing for Context and Experience in Legal Education," *Creighton Law Review* 45 (2012): 853-867.

¹⁷ ICAGE, *Ignatian Pedagogy*.

¹⁸ Joellen Killion and Guy Todnem, "A Process for Personal Theory Building," *Educational Leadership* 48, no. 6 (1991): 14-16.

¹⁹ Kirsten Lupinski, Patricia Jenkins, Audrey Beard, and LaTasha Jones, "Reflective Practice in Teacher Education Programs at a HBCU," *Educational Foundations* 26, no. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 2012).

²⁰ Rebecca Nowacek and Susan Mountin, "Reflection in Action: A Signature Ignatian Pedagogy for the 21st Century," in *Exploring More Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, ed. Aeron Haynie, Regan Gurung, and Nancy Chick (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012), 126-142.

²¹ Karen Pennington, Judy Crewell, Tracey Snedden, Margaret Mulhall, and Nicole Ellison, "Ignatian Pedagogy: Transforming Nursing Education," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 2, no. 1 (2013): 34-40.

²² ICAGE, *Ignatian Pedagogy*.

²³ Gonzaga University, "General Congregation 34, Decree 26."

²⁴ Josef Briffa, "Inclusive Education and Ignatian Pedagogy: MAPS: Making Action Plans." *Orbis* 5, no. 3 (2006): 9-11.

²⁵ John Dirkx, "The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 89 (2001): 63-72.

²⁶ ICAGE, *Ignatian Pedagogy*.

²⁷ Lupinski, Jenkins, Beard, and Jones, "Reflective Practice."

Appendix A

Reaction Journal Assignment & Rubric (10 possible points)

<p>Task Description: Learners will complete weekly reaction journals over the course of the term (1 to 2 pages each). Journal entries should include discussion of course readings, activities, and discussions as well as how you felt and thought about the material. Journals should consist of a critical reflection of experiences rather than simply stating readings/activities were enjoyed or not enjoyed or simply summarized. Feedback will be provided using a rubric provided by the instructor. This is a private space between you and the instructor in order to encourage reflection-for-action and growth. See rubric below.</p> <p>This is a “reflection for action” reaction journal entry. It will provide evidence for the Jesuit value “Contemplatives in Action” (CIA) and access the Ignatian Pedagogical principles (IPP) of <i>context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation</i>. The journal entries in this class meet some course outcomes and all weekly course outcomes. Please be thoughtful when responding to a topic.</p>		
Component	Description	Points Possible
Discusses what was learned (C, EX)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a clear discussion on what was learned from the course material by comparing current learning experience to prior learning and offers concrete examples Connects what was learned to the course materials (e.g., readings, websites, etc.) and activities including field hour experiences to a larger societal-cultural context 	2
Demonstrates a thorough reading of all course material (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of course material indicates a complete and thorough reading of assigned material by referencing at least 2 of the course materials from the week Addresses the implication of the learning experience by providing personal insights and examining own underlying reasons and assumptions for reactions to the learning experience 	2
Demonstrates critical thinking about course material (EV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes a position on the course material and provides reasons related to the course for agreement or disagreement Overall discussion is clear and reflects higher-level thinking skills (e.g., synthesis, evaluation) 	2
Discusses how information will be used in professional practice (A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a clear discussion of how information learned will be used in current/future professional practice to include how it applies to field hour experiences Discussion is specific and concrete in nature with specific examples 	2
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is clear, concise, logically ordered, and free of grammatical errors Uses vivid descriptors to help the reader “see” the events Formatted using proper APA 6th edition style Product appropriate for a graduate course 	2
Total		10

C=context; EX=experience; R=reflection; A=action; EV=evaluation

Appendix B

Sample Reaction Journal

Chapters 2 and 15 in this week's reading were filled with valuable information about RtI and differentiated instruction. I am just now delving into the amazing world of middle school and the students who reside there. The information in these two chapters is a perfect fit to designing their instruction, offering it in a way they can all digest that instruction, and encouraging individuality in the way the students offer back what they have learned. Chapter 2 is running over with details and ideas about how I can best apply RtI to my student's academic concerns and Chapter 15 offers ways for me to present important information at student's instructional levels. As I observe my middle school student in her environment, I see the teacher offering Tier 3 instruction. There are two ability grouped sets of students. Their reading intervention is 30 minutes daily, five days a week as suggested in Chapter 2. The teacher utilizes Corrective Reading as his evidence based intervention and progress monitors them after 10 lessons with an assessment that connects with what they have been reading. At the elementary school I observe at, I was able to sit down with the RtI specialist for a well-detailed overview of how the RtI process works. As I read Chapter 2, I was making connections from what the specialist told me and the information in the text. She and the text both highlighted for me the tiers of RtI, the importance of progress monitoring for planning, and RtI's vital components. The two sets of information together filled in any holes there may have been for me concerning the RtI process and clarified it significantly for me. I am excited and fortunate to have the two experiences to solidify my understanding of RtI and strengthen my confidence in utilizing it. I believe in the RTI process and its benefits to special needs students. This process helps teachers to recognize student's needs sooner and meets those students at their instructional level. The most important piece of information for me from Chapter 2 is the four components of RtI. They helped me to focus in on what is important. According to Vaughn the four most important components of RtI are; researched-based instruction contingent on individual needs, progress monitoring, stronger interventions as needed, and using student data to guide instruction (Vaughn, Bos and Schumm 2010).

The thoughts in Chapter 15 are a tool kit for me. I look forward to utilizing pre-learning activities, graphic organizers, and semantic maps with my current observation student as well as with my future students to bring learning to life for them. Chapter 15 is all about differentiated instruction. I see differentiated instruction at work with my middle school student. She is offered an instructional text in reading and language arts that is at her instructional level and has the opportunity to have oral presentation for tests. In writing, the teacher provides her with easy to remember acronyms for a variety of writing strategies. This same teacher offers graphic organizers in Language Arts to aid in the understanding of the different pieces of literature they read. Vaughn believes, "Differentiated instruction has been identified as one means to plan for individual student needs and for secondary teachers to bridge content and process" (Vaughn, Bos and Schumm 2010, 407). Tying together both Chapters 2 and 15 was a phrase from my class notes on September 24 that said to create interventions from the student's IEP goal. Creating valuable interventions would need the team of the four components of RtI and differentiated instruction. As a young student growing up in a rural Midwest school, everyone was taught the same information using the same strategies. I am so excited that I can offer my observation student and future students a way to learn that is the best fit for them. One size does not fit all and I want to provide them with the best path to their learning.