Final Reflection

All good things come to an end, they say. A new chapter is beginning and it is time to take a look back over the last four years of my college career and reflect. The question is always brought up, “what did you learn?” Well, after four years in college I would hope that I’ve learned a thing or two about how to be an effective teacher and person. Now that I’m at the end of my college career the age old question is being brought up again. Only this time it’s quite bit more in depth and covers a broad range of topics.

When I entered the education program, I was asked to come up with goals that I wanted to accomplish as a student teacher. The idea being that those goals would carry over into our professional career. For the most part the goals I created are good, but I have nothing in regards to improving myself. My first three goals will stay the same for as long as I’m a teacher. The second goal of when having to lecture, make it as interesting as possible, and the third goal of being enthusiastic about the subject will stay the same. I want to add to my first goal, get students involved, along with creating a stimulating classroom environment by presenting information from different angles so each learning type is able to grasp the information. My fourth goal has changed to one that is more centered on me as the teacher. I want to continually seek new ways to improve myself as a professional teacher in the areas of classroom management and presenting my subject material. My fifth goal I want to change to creating a respectful classroom environment where all my students feel safe participate and express their opinions. If I could add a sixth goal to my list, then I would have to add making the material relevant to the students. The more that my students can see that history has an effect on them
today, the more I feel they will get out of the material. I’ve learned that I need variety when presenting the information to my students. I don’t like just standing and giving lectures, I want my students to be involved somehow in the conversation with me and involved with the material we are studying in class. When I first came in I thought that being engaging was giving a good lecture. Now that I’m finishing up my student teaching and getting ready to begin a career, I see that being engaging comes in better forms, and I really want to utilize those different avenues. I’ve found that I really like to have control of the class, but I like giving the students the freedom to learn collectively and independently, all while being a “facilitator” and “resource” for them.

A lot of the things I have just highlighted all came from the fact that I was put with students right away in my college career. Teaching is a lot of on the job training, and the more training you can get the better. I’ve had the chance to work with students of all age groups while at Manchester. This had made me appreciate my secondary age group, as well as, the elementary age groups and those that work with those students. The other experience that sticks out in my mind is student teaching. I thought that I had an idea of how to work with students, and to some extent I did, but being up in front of a class all day, every day, really opens your eyes to what the profession is really like. Not only that but I had the chance to work with two really great teachers and both have given me advice and resources that I will utilize when I get my own classroom. Learning from their years of experience was one of the most valuable things I could have received as I began my own teaching experience. Other important experiences came when I took other classes that happened to be outside of my major. The two that come to mind are my rhetoric of war and cross-cultural psychology classes. The rhetoric class challenged me to think more in depth when it came to different topics we studied. The class really forced me to ask a lot of “why” questions which would spur completely new ways of looking at our topics. Suddenly,
by asking those questions something that seemed foreign now seemed normal and made much more sense to me. The cross-cultural psychology class gave me a deeper appreciation for those that are different from me. After taking that course I realized that no matter where someone comes from or the history they have, they still have something valuable to offer. I’m now able to see that value in everyone and seek out ways to draw it out and utilize what they bring to the table.

Not only did the courses I took at Manchester teach me how to interact with students and learn to appreciate differences. They were able to affect me on a personal level in the areas of faith, learning, and service. I can honestly say that my courses were not faith centered on any particular religion. What the courses did do, however, was they challenged my faith. Not everything that was said in the classes was something that I would agree with being a Christian. I just never saw, until I got to my senior year, how much those classes affected my faith and caused it to grow rather than to wane. In the realm of learning, Manchester makes their students take a lot of general education courses. Those courses actually helped me in regards to wanting to learn new information and grow in my overall knowledge. Courses like experiencing the arts, African history, and psychology. When I first came to college if I knew little about a topic it was no big deal. Now that I’m older, I want to know more about those topics I don’t know much about, and I credit Manchester for that drive to learn. The college itself is based on serving those around us and the community. I’ve had numerous education courses, education psychology being the one that sticks out in my mind that had me go out and serve those around me. That came when I was asked to be a reading tutor with Indiana Reading Corps and a tutor at a local elementary. This later led me to volunteer with helping at our local intermediate school to tutor students after school in various subjects. Now that I’m getting ready to leave Manchester I
appreciate the value that they placed on service because experiences in service can strengthen both a person’s faith and their willingness to want to learn, if they let it. I can say that Manchester has easily contributed to all three of those areas growing for me in the time I have spent here.

Even with all the benefits Manchester has offered and taught me, there are still some things that could be worked on. The education department has 24 goals and objectives that fall under the C.A.R.E. model. What that model outlines is C-Curriculum, A-Assessment, R-Relationships, and E-Environment. What the goal states for curriculum is that the teacher candidate is able to construct and deliver appropriate curriculum for students. To summarize the six objectives we are taught to plan appropriate lessons that teach the subject matter accurately, and from various points of view using effective higher level thinking questions to meet the academic standards and work with other teachers. The assessment goal states that we assess students’ learning and development with a variety of measurements. Basically what the four objectives of assessment state is that we are able to use not just tests but authentic tools to drive further assessment. For relationships the goal states that we establish professional and reciprocal relationships, with others invested in students’ learning. The seven objectives focus on how we as the teacher can motivate students to learn in different ways while wanting to continue to learn new information ourselves, that we have a sensitivity for diversity with everyone we come in contact with while making sure that we know our legal and ethical responsibilities, and are able to communicate both orally and through writing. The final goal of environment states that we create positive and caring environments for student development and learning. The seven objectives say that we are able to make appropriate modifications for students while using a variety of methods to teach and reflecting on those strategies we use, and making sure we
monitor students’ progress, their behavior and how we resolve conflict if it happens. All of these are important if we want to be great and effective teachers when we get out in the profession. I tend to be a people oriented person and can take criticism well and I’m open to suggestions. So in the final two goals, relationships and environment, along with their objectives of the model I feel very strong and confident in my abilities. The first two goals and objectives I still feel that I need some work. In the curriculum part I feel that I need to find more ways to teach my subject matter from various points of view and find ways to incorporate other disciplines into my subject. I have learned how to use interdisciplinary activities, but still feel that I need some extra practice with that objective. I need to find more activities, other than lecture, that I can use to get the goal of the material across to my students. Granted, most of this will come with being a teacher and learning the ropes from firsthand experiences. The areas I need to work at in the assessment part of the model is using appropriate tools to drive future instruction and using varieties of authentic assessment tools. Sometimes when teaching I felt that I couldn’t really bring the material to mean something for the students, I wasn’t able to connect it to something they know about today. This caused me to feel like I couldn’t use the material effectively enough to drive future instruction. I figure that with practice I will find ways to do this, but for now I still struggle and am looking to improve. The other objective I have trouble with is making sure that I use the assessment to drive the future instruction. If there is one place I slip up the most, it’s this objective because a lot of times I don’t connect the material. I’m getting better at it, but I still need to make a conscious effect, rather than it just coming naturally.

For our student teaching experience we were given a set of expectations that we had to meet both during and before we took over our classrooms. The most important dealt with the classroom. We were expected to create detailed lessons, gain control and respect from the class,
and devote all of our time and energy into this experience to gain as much full-time teaching experience as we could. At the start of this experience I did create the very detailed lessons that Manchester required from all of the teachers. As time has gone on I have learned how to condense the lessons, but still make them detailed enough that someone (aka a substitute) could come in and follow my lesson without fear of not knowing what to do. If you can create good, engaging lessons, then classroom management becomes a piece of cake. As I have gone along in this process my supervising teacher has seen remarkable improvement in how I manage my classroom. She has said numerous times that I have a really good relationships with my classes and it shows, both in how the students interact with me, but also in how much control I have over the class. This experience has been one of the most demanding that I have had in my college career. Aside from having to play baseball, this experience has taken up all my extra time. Which is good, I’m getting a crash course in what is it like to be a full-time teacher, and if I want to be a coach someday, playing baseball combined with this teaching has added extra value to the whole experience. I’ve learned how to prioritize my activities outside of teaching and baseball and just the fact that I’ve learned how to do that will greatly benefit me as a teacher in the real world. As the teacher we are also required to uphold anything and everything that our school has in place when we get there. This only adds to the whole experience because we get to see from a different angle how the school is run and what is required of us as professionals. We had to make sure that we made up days we missed, contacted both our supervising and cooperating teacher in case of an absence and worked closely with our cooperating teacher to make sure that the lessons we created were good and well thought out. The teacher would then offer suggestions, if needed. At my placements both my teachers and I worked very well together and they offered great suggestions for my lessons that needed that little something extra.
Other times they really liked what I had created and even stole a few ideas to use later. Both teachers were understanding of my situation with baseball and allowed me to make up early and later in the year the days that I had missed because of the baseball travel schedule.

Now that my student teaching is coming to a close I have three new educational goals that I would like to pursue and improve. The first would be to continue learning, all the time, the more information I have in my head the more interesting and relevant I can make my subject area. The second involves gaining a new certification in the areas of psychology and geography. The third goal I would like to accomplish would be, one day, to earn a master’s degree in my area of certification. I feel that if I can accomplish those three goals that I will be a much more effective and knowledgeable teacher to whatever school or corporation makes me apart of their staff.

So what have I learned in four years at Manchester College? I have learned how to be an effective teacher that can adapt to the personalities in my classroom and teach the subject matter from various points of view while making the information real to the students. The classes at Manchester have given me an appreciation for things that are outside of my field of study that I will look to pass on to my students. Finally, I’ve learned a few things about myself and how I want to be as a teacher when I do get a teaching position through taking many different education courses and from my experiences with my student teaching. The overall experience of Manchester has given me a great base to work from along with the memories, from all of my classes and extracurricular activities, the school offered will stay with me for the rest of my life.