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Schools in American Cities

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5/14/15

Self Evaluation and Reflection

Through taking this course, my understanding of urban education has been complexified and challenged. I grew up in the suburbs and had few preconceived notions of what urban education is and looks like coming into the class, other than a general assumption that urban schools are in some way worse or more difficult to teach in than suburban schools for various reasons. At the same time, I viewed urban education as essentially the same as education in any other setting, but with rougher kids or inadequate facilities or staff. In this class I have learned about many subtle factors that impact the quality of urban education from laws about public education funding and school diversity at the macro level to culturally relevant curriculum and warm-demanding teachers at the classroom level. While all education results from some pattern of these influences, urban education is heavily influenced by the vast societal issues of poverty and racial inequality, which impact education at every level.

My participation in group discussions has not been what I would have liked for this class. Due to difficult circumstances, I had trouble completing the readings and writing blog posts during the second half of the semester. This made it difficult to actively participate and be engaged in class discussions. In lieu of speaking during discussions, I participated by being an active listener. I recognize that I am more comfortable as a listener in the class, and I think I listened well and benefitted from the comments and questions raised by my classmates. Speaking up in whole- class discussions is at the edge of my comfort zone, and I wish I’d done it more in this class because the “brave space” and community we established made it feel easier to do so. I frequently processed the things I absorbed in class with friend following class time, which I found to be helpful in developing my own understanding of the topics and points of discussion and interesting to hear the thoughts of people who haven’t taken education classes. Although I did often speak in our large group discussions, I felt that, at least in the first part of the semester, my contribution in small group discussions was significant and positive. I really enjoyed hearing what other students had to say about the readings because I found that in doing so, my understanding of the reading was always deepened. The discussions were especially engaging and fruitful when we disagreed or when we connected experiences from our placement or personal experiences to the topic at hand. Although my one-on-one and small group discussions sometimes drifted from the intended subject, I always felt that those tangents were interesting and beneficial to my learning.

I feel that others in the class contributed more to my learning than I did to theirs because I don’t participate much in large group discussions. However, I hope that through one-on-one and small group discussion I helped others learn. For instance, during mine and Sherilyn’s discussion of *Waiting for “Superman”*, we disagreed in our critique of the film and had a chance to discuss why we disagreed. This was good because it meant that I had to be able to explain and defend my which increased my level of critical thinking. I felt like I gained perspective by hearing what she had to say and I hope that she also benefitted from our discussion.