

The Experience and Views on American Education with Sarah Samples

1. November 24th, 2016. 10:01 AM in the Maher Center at the University of Dallas in Irving, TX (Over the phone)
2. Interviewee: Sarah Samples (SS); Interviewer: Lorenzo Gonzalez
3. Guiding Questions:
 - What is your educational background?
 - What made you want to become a teacher?
 - What makes a person an effective teacher?
 - What is your occupation today?
 - Can you give me a description of the students in your class? (Engaging, academically, and socially)
 - Do you think schools do a good job of helping teachers discipline the students?
 - How has parental involvement shifted throughout the years?
 - How do you think our educational system has changed during your lifetime?
 - What makes you want to continue teaching?
 - What are your predictions for education in the future?
 - Anything else you would like to add about education?

Summary of the Interview (Written Portion)

In the beginning of the interview, I greeted Mrs. Samples over the phone. I got her permission to conduct the interview and she allowed me to conduct the interview. She also gave me permission to submit the interview recording to The University of Dallas Oral History Repository. After I got her permission for these items, I continued to ask her the guided

questions listed above. Her responses to some of the questions made me discover connections within our class this semester.

After she answered the first guided question, I provided her with the second guided question, “What made you want to become a teacher?” (Sarah Samples, personal communication 13, November 24, 2016). She responded saying that she has always enjoyed working with children ever since she got to high school and she desired to work with children even more so when she got to college (Sarah Samples, personal communication 14-15, November 24, 2016). Her response to this guided question portrays Mrs. Samples as if she is a very caring type of teacher; responding with “I have always enjoyed working with children” (Sarah Samples, personal communication 14-15, November 24, 2016), has a direct relation to the ideas of Marietta Johnson on the requirements of being a teacher. Johnson “believed that teachers needed to be compassionate and caring people who respect children as individuals” (Gutek, 1970). Mrs. Samples reasoning for wanting to teach fits the requirements of Marietta Johnson’s ideas.

After she finished answering that question, I asked her the next question on the list, which was “What makes a person an effective teacher?” (Sarah Samples, personal communication 16, November 24, 2016). Her response was a brilliant one. She said to be an effective teacher you need “to understand the diversity of learning” because “not all children learn the same way” (Sarah Samples, personal communication 17-18, November 24, 2016). She also says that teachers have to know their students. Her response of what an effective teacher should be able to do reminded me of something that we did not talk about in class, but I read about it in our *Lessons of the Century* textbook. It was a small article on a teacher named Opal McAlister. She talks about how a teacher should be and what a good teacher should be able to do. She states, “If I can’t be ahead of a kid, I had no business being a teacher.” (*Lessons of the*

Century, 2000). This statement fits well with Mrs. Samples definition of what makes a person an effective teacher because if the teacher cannot even be ahead of the students to understand the student individually then it will be impossible for the teacher to be an effective educator.

After the guided question about effective teachers, I created a follow up question, "...a new teacher, how are some ways they can get more experience in being an effective teacher?" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 22-23, November 24, 2016). Her response was not one that I expected. Mrs. Samples said that teachers need "to be willing to ask" (personal communication 26-27, November 24, 2016). She discusses that they need to be willing to ask other experienced teachers if they do not know how to do something or what to do. She also states that new teachers need to be willing to do "research" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 25, November 24, 2016) in order to become an effective teacher. Mrs. Samples says the same thing is necessary for classroom management. Her answer for how teachers can gain experience is that they need to ask more experienced teachers, so these new teachers can learn themselves. After she answered my follow up question, I became curious, so I created another follow up question, which was "...do you think the education programs are teaching teachers how to be effective teachers or do you think they kind of guide them through college?" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 32-33, November 24, 2016). I wanted to discover whether or not she thought the education programs just teach college students enough to get certified without teaching them how to actually teach. The answer I got was the one I expected. The first part of her response was, "I think that not until you get in the classroom, do you really know" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 34, November 24, 2016). She started to explain that the student teaching portion of the education programs was the most important part for future teachers to learn how to teach effectively. She explains that having a good teacher in your

student teaching segment of the program can also impact the views of how a teacher should teach; she states, "...so when you student teach that is when you really understand. And if you have a good lead teacher when you student teach, I think that makes a huge difference too" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 36-37, November 24, 2016). As we got to the end of these two follow up questions, I realized that all her answers fit the ideas of a philosopher named John Dewey. The section where she spoke about having classroom management in order to be able to teach them efficiently is one of Dewey's theories. Dewey believed that students should be put in an environment that they would be able to learn in, with the teacher as the guidance for the students. If you cannot control your class, as Mrs. Samples states, then you cannot provide the educational guidance the students need. Mrs. Samples's answers to the questions of how teachers can become more effective and whether or not educational programs are creating effective teachers fits perfectly into Dewey's ideas. Dewey believed in engaging in experiential learning will benefit the student in learning rather than other methods. One of the steps in his method was, "reflecting on past experience and researching the problem to find information that could be used to solve it" (Gutek, 1970). This method of Dewey was more for the students to learn, but before teachers become teachers they are students of the educational field, so Dewey's ideas fits into Mrs. Samples's answers of teachers needing to be able to "research" what they do not know and to learn from the student teaching experience to gain intelligence of how to become an effective teacher.

After her responses, I asked Mrs. Samples about her occupation. She mentioned that she worked at a Catholic school, so I asked her why she specifically chose a Catholic school (Sarah Samples, personal communication 50, November 24, 2016). She stated that she was raised Catholic and that she had always been in the Catholic educational system, so it was where she

felt comfortable. She also talked about her children and what she wants for her children. She states, "...so I thought the Catholic education is something I want for my children and I think it is important in their life" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 52-54, November 24, 2016). Her freedom of choice is what allows her to teach wherever she wants or even choose where and what type of education she wants her kids to receive. Her freedom of choice comes from the act drafted by Thomas Jefferson, which is called *The Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom*. Jefferson's act affected the school system, especially the public schools because it "meant that public schools should not instill the beliefs and doctrines or religious denominations." (Gutek, 1970). Mrs. Samples did not mention this act, but I was sparked by her response of how she grew up Catholic and wanted to raise her own kids Catholic because this act of Jefferson is the reason why she has this choice of freedom today.

Towards the end of the interview, I asked Mrs. Samples, "...how do you think are education system has changed during your lifetime? (Sarah Samples, personal communication 156-157, November 24, 2016). Her response was that technology was the main difference in the classroom and later on she stated, "...I think that technology is going to be more and more in the classroom." (Sarah Samples, personal communication 186-187, November 24, 2016). Her bringing up the topic of technology in the classroom connected me to a section that we learned about teacher education programs. As technology grew in our world, "State programs of teacher certification...intended to ensure that prospective teachers were competent in using educational technology." (Gutek, 1970). Mrs. Samples's answer was one that is still continuing to grow in the educational field. The increase in technology is forcing the education programs to implement a technology course in order to ensure the teachers are technology savvy.

Reflection Portion

This interviewing experience was a new one for me. I have never interviewed anyone in my entire life, so doing this was awkward. I had to do it over the phone because Mrs. Samples was out of time for a long period of time and I really wanted to interview her because she was unique. During this interview, I discovered many different connections of our class this semester when listening to her responses to my guided questions.

One connection was at the beginning of the interview when I asked her about why she wanted to teach. She had told me that she had always wanted to work with kids and that she enjoyed working with kids (Sarah Samples, personal communication 14-15, November 24, 2016). After she told me this I could not help, but think of an article we read in class written by Nel Noddings. Noddings stated, “When we care, we want to do our very best for the objects of our care” (Noddings, 1995). Mrs. Samples response made me realize that she is a very caring teacher because she genuinely wants to help the kids because she did not just join the teaching field for a job, but rather she wanted to work with the kids to help them succeed in their future. Another glimpse of Noddings’ ideas were later on in the interview when I asked her about how a teacher could make the students more social. (Sarah Samples, personal communication 81-84, November 24, 2016). She couldn’t give me a straight answer, but she did give me a specific example of how she asks the other kids in her class to include this little girl who is shy and quiet (Sarah Samples, personal communication 85-100, November 24, 2016). This inclusion of this little girl would definitely be in the spectrum of Nel Noddings curriculum of care. Noddings states, “...organize the curriculum around themes of care- caring for self, for intimate others, for strangers...” (Noddings, 1995). Even though Mrs. Samples is not directly telling the kids that

they need to care for other people, she is teaching the kids a moral lesson by asking them to include the little shy girl into their groups. Therefore, the next time the kids see someone new or shy they will try to include that individual without Mrs. Samples having to ask and that is one of the aspects of Nel Noddings, which was to care for others and strangers. I completely agree with Mrs. Samples and Nel Noddings of implementing care into the curriculum because we need more people to care about each other, not only themselves. Our world will fall apart if people only care for themselves, so we need to implement this theme of care within the students at a very young age.

Another connection I discovered when interviewing Mrs. Samples was related to the two theorists Howard Gardner and Benjamin Bloom. My question to her was, “what makes a person an effective teacher?” (Sarah Samples, personal communication 16, November 24, 2016). Her reply was that a teacher who understands the diversity of learning and that not all students learn the same (Sarah Samples, personal communication 17-19, November 24, 2016). Her response is related to Gardner’s *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* because he believed that there existed many different intelligences in which students learned more efficiently depending on the type of intelligence they were strong out. Since Mrs. Samples does not directly say she believes there exist multiple intelligences, then I would have to say that her response to this question is more related to the ideas of Benjamin Bloom. In one of his articles discussing learning strategies, Bloom states, “Each strategy must find some way of dealing with individual differences in learners...” (Bloom, 1968). Mrs. Samples has similar ideas to Bloom’s in that students do learn differently, and she believes that we as teachers need to be able to discover these learning differences to become the most effective at what we do. After her response, she added in that classroom management is very crucial in being an effective teacher because “If they can’t control

their class, then they aren't going to be able to reach them to be able to teach them" (Sarah Samples, personal communication 20-21, November 24, 2016). I couldn't agree more with Mrs. Samples on her definition of what an effective teacher is. I do believe for teachers to be "effective" they need to be able to understand each and every one of their students in order to help their students learn efficiently. Although I cannot directly cite this, I would still like to add in this opinion of mine. Since I do agree with Mrs. Samples on the definition of an effective teacher, I find it hard to believe that in the period where the school systems were more worried about quantity instead of quality, that there existed an effective teacher. The classroom sizes were way too big for a teacher to get to know every single one of their students which will result in the teacher not being able to teach efficiently.

In the middle of our interview, I asked Mrs. Samples about how her students were doing academically and she responded that some of her students were more academically inclined than others; so I asked her what was the difference between the more inclined students. She responded that "we have some that have (unintelligible) learning differences, so that makes a big difference." (Sarah Samples, personal communication 64-73, November 24, 2016). This response by Mrs. Samples is more related to Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. The only difference was that she did not admit to believing in different intelligences, but she does have the idea that students have their own strengths and weaknesses. In an article, *A Passion for Learning*, Natalie Lorenzi writes to the parents of children in school explaining how the children have these learning differences and goes further into depth to explain that the learning differences fall into the categories with Gardner's intelligences listed as the title of each category. Lorenzi states, "Schools often use the theory of multiple intelligences... to describe the different ways in which children process information" (Lorenzi, 2011). This statement is very

similar to the way Mrs. Samples views the learning of her students. Although she might not have gotten these ideas directly from studying Howard Gardner, his impact on the educational field has been reached out to Mrs. Samples own beliefs. I agree with Mrs. Samples that the students do learn differently. As educators it is not enough to teach the kids the way you feel comfortable teaching. Sometimes, you have to make yourself uncomfortable to ensure the success of your students academically. We also need to find ways to not teach to the lowest academic students because if this is the case we will not be challenging the higher academic students. We need to understand our children and figure out the best way to reach them to be able to teach them (Sarah Samples, personal communication 20-21, November 24, 2016).

Interviewing Mrs. Samples has really opened up my eyes on different views within the school system today. Interviewing a teacher from a Catholic school definitely had an impact on the answers to my guided questions because the rules of discipline might be different or other implications between the different types of schools may have altered her answer, but it was still interesting to get the answers from someone with much more experience than me. Regarding our class, as I was interviewing her the connections were very clear to me which surprised me because I was worried she was going to give me short answers, which she did on some, but her short answers sparked the curiosity in me to ask more in depth questions. I really did enjoy this interviewing process and I would gladly love to do it again. If I were to do it again, this time I could get someone with even more experience, so I could have more in depth answers, but I was pleased with how everything worked out. The most important thing I learned from this interview project is that our educational system is always going to be evolving from technology to success in the classroom to new topics to learn in the education programs. The crazy thing is, while

things are changing we are still receiving the same outcomes, which is not right and we need to fix it, but as Dr. Newstreet says, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Bibliography

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