Field Experience 1 Reflection Paper

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Part: 1 Demographic Analysis of the Class

Ms. Case’s third grade class at Je-Nier Elementary School has 21 students. Nine of her students are female and twelve are male. Four students are African American, Six students are Hispanic and 11 are White Caucasian. The classroom’s ethnic background, which consists of approximately 48% minorities compares closely to the ethnic background of Je-Nier as a whole, which, according to the ISRC report, has approximately 46% minority students in attendance, about 157-students of its 342-student population. Of the 21 students in Ms. Case’s classroom 1 student had a pending IEP which has been scheduled to be put in place, but has as of yet not been made official. Academically, nine students in Ms. Cases class are at grade level in reading, one student is above grade level in reading, and the remaining eleven are below grade level in reading. SRI testing regularly assesses students in reading. The test measures reading aptitude and is used to help students find reading material that matches their ability. This computerized test makes test results available instantaneously. In addition to this test the school DIBBLES and DRA their students at the beginning, middle and end of the year. In general the students are below grade level in mathematics, but due to the presence of a math lab, which is in place in addition to the students normal math lesson the school has experienced dramatic improvements in their math scores by the time the students begin I-SAT testing. On an individual basis, the students spread across the full range of academic aptitude. Of the eleven students in Ms. Case’s classroom who are below grade level, six were female, one student was African American, five students were Hispanic, and five were White Caucasian. As compared to the rest of the class, one African American student in four was below grade level, five Hispanic students out of six were below grade level, and five out of ten White Caucasian Students were below grade level. Six out of nine girls were below grade level, and five out of twelve boys were below grade level. There were no teachers’ aides in the classroom, however the
school has ten aides that take students out with them to give extra help and individualized instruction.

Overall, my impression of the impact of the demographic makeup on the manner in which the school conducts its curriculum, teaching strategies and classroom management is a positive one. Students are all equally pushed to excel and achieve. Teaching strategies are consistent between all sexes and ethnicities. The approach in classroom management was also consistent for all students. No favoritism or bias seemed present in any form. The students all seemed to respect one another and get along. The general atmosphere of the room was pleasant and productive. The students were all pushed to rise to the challenge of being young third graders. In analysis of the data that I have collected, I believe that the larger number of female Hispanics who are below grade level is a result of the fact that many of these students are from homes in which English is a second language.

Part 2: Curriculum Reflection and Analysis

The curriculum in Ms. Case’s classroom was geared mainly to reading, mathematics and language arts. I observed little deviation from the basics. Thus, it was not particularly possible to analyze the social studies or science curriculum. However, I do not find that the emphasis on the basic core curriculum neglects the social or scientific aspects of education entirely. In Reading and in Math the students performed activities that integrated social elements into their curriculum. For example, in Math the students performed word problems and the characters had ethnically diverse names. The word problems were homogenous to most student experiences and portrayed no stereotypical situations. In Reading, the literature portrayed people of different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds without portraying anyone in a stereotypical manner. One of the reading stories was about a girl who wanted to play pro basketball. She overcame the stereotype that girls could never play basketball and taught the children that they were capable of doing whatever they were willing
to work hard enough to do. She was African-American, and her father was portrayed as a positive and nurturing force in her life. Other minorities were portrayed as storeowners and policemen who all helped her to believe that in spite of what her friends said, she could do great things.

Many great practices were put in place for students at Je-Nier in the area of Mathematics. The school has a new math series that is geared specifically toward the ISAT test. There are 18 units divided into 18 small teacher’s editions. Each lesson has activities geared toward learners at different levels of understanding. The first unit is about adding whole numbers. The activities contain story problems that require extended responses and critical thinking. Units progress through levels of difficulty as far as the division of one digit numbers. Activities frequently use maps, graphs and charts to integrate other types of social science and scientific subject matter. Each day the teacher starts the students out with a journal question. After the journal question the teacher gives the students a Math problem of the day sheet. Often this sheet is more than one problem and requires deductive reasoning to complete. Students get stars if they finish the problem correctly in an extended and well-labeled response. After lunch students return for their math lesson in the given subject area and then are put into centers with people who are of mixed ethnicity and varying capability. Groups divide into mixed levels of student capability. This allows peer tutoring to take place. Twice a week the students go to the Math lab. This is in addition to and not in place of their daily math activities. Here the student’s reinforce their math skills through activities and games that illustrate concepts in tactile ways. Many of the games do not rely on skill level to produce a winner or a loser. Skills are learned and practiced, while the winner is determined by chance or luck. The losing team does not feel like they are stupid for losing. They see that they only that they had an unlucky roll of the dice. It reinforces without
depleting confidence or delineating one student as more intelligent than his or her fellow student.

Part 3: The interview

In my interview with Ms. Case, I was able to gain insight into many of the problems and rewards that teachers face from day to day throughout their careers. I found Michelle to be a very consistent and thoughtful individual. She pushed her students hard, but maintained the persona of one who cares immensely about the success of her students. Ms. Case when asked about how she got her start in education helped me realize how she developed a good rapport with her students while maintaining a high level of accountability. Michelle actually started out as a business major in college. It was here that she developed her strong people skills and organizational abilities. She, like any businessperson, always attempts to be professional and courteous, while at the same time remaining focused on the dealings of her classroom. The line between business and personal feeling is never breeched. She said that if there is one thing that she would have any incoming teacher remember is that we are not here to be friends with our students. “We are here to be their advocates, but not their friends.” In this way, a child never feels that you are either playing favorites, or making enemies. You are simply conducting a business in which expectations are high, and which requires the accountability of both she and her students.

Michelle began her career as a fifth grade sexual education teacher, but later moved to the third grade when the schools scores went down. She has been in third grade ever since. She says that after 10 years teaching third grade she feels pretty at home with it. While the students are a bit needy at times, they are quickly entering a period in which they are turning into semi self-reliant people. She likes to be able to see the formation of independence.
She began teaching because she liked working with children. Michelle finds teaching to be rewarding because she is able to imagine a time when one day her students will be successful adults. “Indirectly, who knows how many peoples lives can a teacher influence? How many lives will be saved by the doctors that I taught to read and write? The potential is unlimited. I love teaching because of the importance it bears on the future.” she said.

When discussing how she accommodates for her students with lower ranges of ability she said that she simply has to make decisions for her students as individuals whether or not they have an IEP. Since none of her students currently have an IEP, but still have academic problems; she is forced to meet each student where they are at in order to build solid foundations.

When discussing her frustrations as a teacher she mentioned that parents are among her most difficult problems. “Sometimes, even when you are trying to help a student out, and give them a chance, a parent will misinterpret things and find you at fault for their child’s mistakes. I have been told that I have been prejudiced for asking that a student turn in their assignments on time.” she said. “One parent accused me of picking on her child when I let him call home to see if his mother could bring his assignment in from home even though it was late.”

In my observation of Ms. Case, she made every effort to give students chances to complete make up work and late work. She was firm but fair. Her strategies were consistent with her beliefs about herself. She believed that in order to make people feel comfortable you must treat them as the individuals that they are. “We may be members of different races of people, from different cultures and backgrounds, but we are all people. “ She never let situations escalate into major problems. She had nothing but high expectations for all of her students. She never relents in her pursuit to make her students see their potential and live up to it. She is a teacher that I would thoroughly enjoy working with again. I feel that I could
learn a great deal from her. Her attitude is always positive and she is always looking at herself reflectively in an attempt to assess situations.