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Summative Field Reflection

 One of the requirements for Education 261 is thirty observation hours in the classroom. For my observation, I was placed in a first grade classroom in Lunenburg. Though my thirty hours felt like a short time in the classroom, I was able to learn more about myself, my students, and the profession as a whole.

 From my time in the field, I was able to learn more about my identities, strengths, and weaknesses. During the first few classes, we talked about our own identities and what those would mean for us in the classroom. Some of our identities may allow us to more easily connect with some students because of the similarities, while others may be more difficult to form connections with. I am a white female in the middle class, and I went into the classroom knowing that these areas might be just some of the areas where my identities differed from my students. Regardless of these identities, I learned that one of my strengths is the ability to look on the positive side. My first interactions with the students were mostly positive ones where I was encouraging or stating what I like about students. I believe that encouragement can be used to help motivate students. The textbook states that in a learner-centered classroom, teachers attempt to create a “climate of warmth and mutual respect” (Johnson, Musial, Hall, & Gollnick, 2018, p. 130). With an inviting and supportive atmosphere, along with encouragement and using an asset-based approach, the students will be more motivated to continue learning and exploring their interests. On my first day, I was sitting with a student on the carpet helping him put astronaut figures in a line. While we were on the carpet, the student would ask me questions like “what snacks do you like?” or “what is your favorite color?” and was excited when we had similar answers. After we finished the line, he said that I was very nice because I helped him make the entire line and when I told him that he was also very nice, his face lit up and he said that no one has ever told him that before. This one interaction started to show me how vital the asset-based approach is. In class, we discussed the difference between the deficit and asset-based approaches. With the deficit-based approach, teachers point out all of the negatives, for example, if a child is talkative, the teacher may make comments that they never pay attention or that they are always disruptive. However, a teacher coming from the asset-based approach may comment on how the student is always participating in class or contributes a lot to discussions (C.D.). From my time in the field, I found that one of my biggest areas of improvement is being more firm with the students at certain times. I tend to be quieter and speak up only when I need to. In the classroom when I worked with groups or sat with the students at lunch, I only asked the students to quiet down when they got too loud. Other than that, I did not ask the students to stop talking or discipline the students for talking. From the time in the classroom, I witnessed the importance of the asset-based approach and learned that this is already one of my strengths, however, I also realized that I need to work on classroom discipline.

 During my observation hours, I learned more about the students in my class, especially about ACES and relationships. An ACE, or adverse childhood experience, is a traumatic event that may have negative effects on students. Examples of ACES include divorce, substance abuse, death of a loved one, natural disaster, and many others (C.D.). The most common ACE that I saw in the classroom was divorce. Many of the students would mention being excited to spend the weekend with one of their parents or wishing that they could see one of their parents more. I found that this was one of the more awkward or hard things to talk about with the students because it is something that I have not directly dealt with. While my mom’s parents are divorced, my parents are not so I am not able to fully understand what the students are going through. So far when students talk about their parents, it is about being excited to see them, in which case it is easy to talk about and ask questions pertaining to their excitement. However, I need to work on being better at having more difficult conversations with the students. Throughout my time in the field, I saw how important it is to build relationships with the students. In class with Dr. Hastings, we talked about how forming relationships is one of the most important roles of a teacher (C.D.). We not only talked about this, but meaningful relationships were illustrated every day in class. My first few days in the field, I did not really feel like I was making strong connections with the students. After these first few days, I started to see the connections we were forming and the impact these had on the students. Even when the students did not remember or could not say my name correctly, they still got excited and tried to say it when they saw me in the hallway in the morning and walked me to their classroom. Throughout the day or during centers, many students would come up to me to either show me their work or to just have conversations, which sometimes got them in some trouble by my CT. During lunch, I tried to rotate who I sat with but some of the students moved to be next to me and during my last day, I was having conversations with a few of the students at lunch. This was one of my favorite moments because it was the first time that I really had the opportunity to have genuine conversations with the students and saw their faces light up when they were able to tell me things about themselves and have a full conversation with me. This same day at recess, another student in my class stayed and talked with me while we are outside, again demonstrating the connections I was forming and how important these are for the students. These moments were one of the first times that I truly saw the students get excited and able to actually talk and be themselves, which they do not get many chances to during the day in the class.

 In the classroom, I not only learned about myself and the students, but also about teachers and the profession. I saw the use of power as well as issues with professionalism in the classroom. Throughout our course, we talked about teachers having power over or sharing power with their students. When teachers have power over students, they are controlling of small details and need everything done a certain way; however, when they have power with the students, there is a more freedom and trust (C.D.). For example, students may be allowed to stand while working or work in a different area rather than having to sit at their desk all day. Throughout my observations, I saw my CT have power over the students. They are all in their desks for the majority of the day and have to sit with their legs crossed on the carpet. One of the main ways my CT held power over the students was not giving them many opportunities to talk. The students are seated at tables and work in groups, but the room is mostly silent. One day I was leading a center where the students were just coloring. I was not bothered by the students talking to each other and I did not think they were too loud; however, my CT told this and the other center that she should only be hearing the voice of the teacher or leader of the group. During lunches, the students were often told to stop talking because they had to eat all of their food before they could have ice cream, so they did not have any time to talk. One of the biggest issues with professionalism I saw was with teachers talking about other teachers or students in front of them. In the classroom I was observing there is my CT and then the aid for one of the students. On my first day in the classroom, the aid was asking me if I could go around and observe other classrooms or if I had to stay in my assigned class. She kept praising a kindergarten teacher for the practices she uses in the classroom. Similar to the video we watched in class, this teacher had a very calm classroom environment with dimmed lights, an essential oil diffuser, and soft and soothing music playing in the background (C.D.). The aid was telling me how she is one of the best teachers in the school and how the school needs more teachers like her who know and use these newer and best practices. Later this day while a few classes were at recess, the aid leaned over to the gym teacher and commented that she thought one student, either in first or second grade, was going to go into porn because of how she is always dancing. After hearing this comment, I immediately saw how contradictory teachers can be. I initially thought that my experience in the classroom would be great based on what I was hearing about how this teacher wished there were more using best practice, however, then make an extremely inappropriate comment about a student in front of other teachers, students, and observation students. The aid also talked about my CT in the class with her. She mainly talked about how she required all of the students to sit at their desk while working rather than allowing them to stand while working like the other teacher she was praising. I was amazed at the things teachers were saying about each other and their students, especially in front of other teachers and students.

 With my thirty observation hours I was able to learn more about and see the topics we discussed in class. I was able to learn more about myself and the students, as well as teachers and the profession. While many of the things I observed in the classroom were not best practice or went against what we learned, I am glad I was able to identify these areas and know what best practice is even if that is not what is being used. Regardless of the practices that I saw that I disagreed with, one of the biggest things I will take away from this placement is how important connections and relationships are for students. I began to form and see some of the impacts of these connections through my short thirty hours and am excited to have more time in future placements to work on this, along with many other areas. Even with the ups and downs from this experience, I still want to be a teacher and am now more excited than ever to become a teacher in order to not only incorporate best practices, but also to be an advocate and trusted resource for all of my students.

References

Education 261 classroom discussions.

Johnson, J. A., Musial, D., Hall, G. E., & Gollnick, D. M. (2018). *Foundation of American education: becoming effective teachers in challenging times* (17th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.