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INTERVIEW RESPONDENT NUMBER: T015

GRADE TEACHING: Kindergarten

SCHOOL CI SCORE: 0.65

% STUDENT ON F/R LUNCH: 18%

TRANSCRIBER'S LAST NAME: Stoddard

Transcript

Informed consentment read and agreed to before hitting record

Me:

Okay, we are now recording.

Brief pause

Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. As I explained before the students in the Honors Sociology of Education class I'm taking at Longwood University are interested in learning about how the ways the COVID-19 pandemic has affected teaching and learning in elementary schools. We'll start the interview with a few background questions so I can get to know you a little bit and then I'd like us to explore your teaching experiences prior to the pandemic, the sudden switch to virtual learning last spring, your experiences this school year, and your thoughts about education post-pandemic.

Teacher Informant (TI):

Okay, sounds good!

Me:

So, Why did you decide to become a teacher?

TI:

I've always enjoyed working with little kids and

brief pause

I wanted to do something to make a difference in the world at the very first level of education.

Me:

That's so cool! Have you always taught at a singular school and um- if not how off- no wait how long have you been teaching at the school you currently work for?

TI:

I started substitute teaching and then I-

TI shakes head

in many different schools and then I had several long-term subbing positions at my current school and now I've been teaching my own classes for four years.

Me:

Cool. Thank you.

Um-

brief pause

Have you always taught this grade? And if not- what other grades have you taught?

TI:

No- I've taught

brief pause

First grade, Fourth grade- for my two long-term subbing positions - and am currently teaching kindergarten.

Me:

Which grade did you enjoy teaching best?

TI:

Probably first grade because they're just starting to learn how to read and you can see the light in their eyes when they learn something new and they're so proud of themselves for learning it.

Me:

I visibly perked up and got excited as this is the exact reason I want to be a teacher

That's actually so cool! That's the exact reason I want to be an elementary school teacher as well!

brief pause

Um- besides that... What do you enjoy most about teaching? And specifically what do you enjoy about teaching in a kindergarten classroom.

TI:

I enjoy that the kids are still so excited about learning and that pre-pandemic they still like to give hugs. And I really enjoy that you're- I'm instilling a love of learning in them. You know? This is the start for them and I enjoy being at that stage in their lives, to be able to create a love of learning, a love of education, a love of reading in them.

Me:

That's very sweet. So-like-uh could you tell me about your experience teaching this academic year? Like could you describe to me the method you've been using to teach such as in-person or virtually online or a hybrid of the two?

TI:

It started fully online and we've morphed into a hybrid structure of learning over the last couple of weeks.

Me:

Could you describe the hybrid structure in more detail?

TI:

Yes of course. Half of the students come in person on Monday and Tuesday while the other half is online and then Wednesday is asynchronous while cleaning occurs and Thursday and Friday the two halves switch and the students in person on Monday and Tuesday are online and half online come in person on Thursday and Friday.

Me:

Oh okay. And when did you switch over to hybrid learning?

TI:

The first week of March we started having students come in.

Me:

When you are teaching online are you required to come into the school or do you teach at home?

TI:

Um- we can choose to teach either at school or at home. I prefer to teach from school.

Me:

That makes sense.

Brief pause

Okay. Now we are moving into the more instruction-based questions...

Um- How have you had to modify your curriculum and lessons to adapt to the instructional delivery at your school this year?

TI:

Uh- I think they've had to be completely overhauled because Kindergarten is a time where they're developing a lot of motor skills and we usually do a lot of hands-on activities. And usually there's a lot of -um, you know- one on one learning, but yet you're really working closely with kids. They're learning to use scissors to cut, and they're learning how to use school tools like pencils, crayons, glue and now they're not getting that same kind of learning this year because now instead of having a penicillin their hand, they have to know how to use a computer mouse or a track-pad. And some kids have adapted to that very well, while others are showing deficits in their coloring and drawing and their ability to write and learn letters and numbers. They are not getting as much fine motor skill practice as they would have for in-person learning.

Me:

That makes sense. When you are online teaching how do you keep your student engaged and paying attention?

TI:

So, for online learning I figured out very quickly that you can only talk about a single subject or give instructions for very short periods of time, even more short than in person, because they lose focus a lot faster when they're not in a classroom. I also have incorporated activities like during our morning welcome sometimes I'll have them go on a sort of treasure hunt around their house like I'll tell them they have to go find something orange or they have to go find something that starts with the letter "B" in 60

seconds and then come back. Then I let a few people share their items and while their classmates are showing their items the other students are allowed to react with emojis in the chat if they want to and they all really enjoy that. I also make sure that I try to change up who I call on. I also try to bring in characters from shows and movies I know they like, like Paw Patrol or anything like that and have those things be part of the lesson. I also use their names in lessons a lot to try and personalize the lessons a little bit more and then I also try to give them brain breaks and keep them engaged that way.

Me:

When you say you use their names in lessons do you mean for, like, math problems?

TI:

Yeah. For math problems, definitely. And of course at their level they're learning letter recognition, they're starting to spell simple words, so we'll have simple stories and I'll include some of their names if I'm making the story up. Things like that; anything that will mean something to them, and their names mean a lot to them so I include their names a lot.

Me:

That's really cool! Thank you for sharing that with me. Uh- What is the biggest success you've had teaching during the pandemic?

TI:

Uh- heh- well, let me think- I guess it's been the transition to the hybrid model. Um- I feel like some kids that got lost along the wayside, from online learning, are now back learning again and they're much more engaged, and even though I only see them two days a week, I can engage them enough that they seem to be participating more when we

have online classes as well. And it makes me really happy that I've been able to draw them back in and now they're learning most days of the week rather than here-and-there.

So- I guess we're starting on the up-slope to getting the kids back engaged.

Me:

That's good! On the other hand- What are some problems you have seen the children experience during the pandemic; Academically, mentally, and socially?

TI:

Um- lack of energy or excitement about things. You know- they're becoming a little apathetic, you-know usually kindergarteners are so excited to learn and everything's a lot of fun to learn and I think just because they're not getting as personal of an approach online they're not as excited as I've seen them in the classroom, but now being able to get them in back in the classroom for a couple days, I think we're starting to develop that relationship that we didn't get to develop at the beginning of the year.

Me:

That's good! I'm glad things are looking up. Do you think not being able to develop that relationship over remote teaching has been your biggest challenge during the pandemic?

TI:

Um- not necessarily. Probably the biggest challenge would be learning how to translate what we usually teach to an online format; Because, like I said earlier, Kindergarten is a lot of hands on, fine motor skills, and a lot of letter recognition, and learning- learning to use numbers, numeric systems, and- and a kid seeing it on a screen is different than them physically having the tools to use. So, being able to create ways for them to learn the

same lesson without physically having the tools has been really difficult to come up with creative ways to do that.

Me:

That makes sense. I have a follow-up question to that... Have you been able to adapt instruction to accommodate students who may need extra assistance or have an IEP or something like that?

TI:

The way we, as a grade, have been doing that is we've been doing a lot of small group breakout room sessions. So, you know- I will give the whole class a lesson to work on independently or give them time to play different preapproved math games and language arts games to practice the skills we've been working on, and most of the class will go do that and I'll pick some kids to do a small group instruction in a breakout room. And then we get a little bit more personal time and I get to hear from those who may not necessarily speak up when the whole class is online.

Me:

That's really cool that you found a way to still get more personal with them even when they're remote learning. Is there another teacher with the students not in the breakout room? Or are they just by themselves?

TI:

They're just by themselves. It's an independent learning thing where I send them a link to the games they're allowed to play and they let me know in the chat if they're working on letters or numbers and then I send the link and it starts them at the same level they left off last time and they work on that. I always have a timer for them in the corner of the screen

and they can see it count down and then they'll hear the alarm when they need to come back to the Zoom. So they'll go off to their activity and then I'll be in the breakout room with the particular students I want to see or work with.

Me:

That makes sense.

Brief pause

Shifting topics, If you don't mind answering; how has the demands of teaching during the pandemic affected your work and family balance? Has it made it more difficult?

TI:

It hasn't affected me too much because I've been able to separate work and family pretty easily by teaching from school even when we had exclusively remote teaching. I also don't have any little ones at home which makes it a lot easier. I've been able to go off to work and then come home and be able to take care of my family at home.

Me:

So would you say you compartmentalize those two parts of your life easily?

TI:

Yep! And I think that that's been helpful to create the boundaries so that I'm not just constantly working or thinking about work.

Me:

That's good! Last spring when the pandemic began and schools had to switch to remote teaching very rapidly, Could you describe to me what that initial transition was like for you?

TI:

Yeah. It kind of hit us like a ton of bricks. Um- we got a lot of information very rapidly and uh- and being able to ... process it and ... translate it to curriculum was a lot. I think our main objective at first was just to keep the kids engaged and keep them learning; and then as we went on we found different resources and different creative ways to work the lessons. But immediately after we transferred to online we really just wanted to do things that would keep the kids engaged and keep them in a learning routine and not let them just fall between the cracks. So, I would say it was not as focused on the standards we have to teach per the curriculum but things that would keep them interested and connected.

Me:

When you say “it hit you like a ton of bricks” could you expand on that a little bit?

TI:

I mostly say that because with Kindergartners we don't do a lot of computer learning in the first place. They're introduced to computers and using a mouse a little bit but the students don't use computers a lot because we're trying to get them used to writing with a pencil and recognizing letters and numbers still so it wouldn't be beneficial for them to do a whole lot of computer work. So to develop a computer based curriculum for them, when a lot of them may have not been on a computer before or haven't used one a whole lot, was really just overhauling and redesigning our whole curriculum.

Me:

That makes sense. How did your school's administration assist with the transition to virtual learning? Or did they assist you at all?

TI:

Yeah, They did! They were wonderful. They provided us with all the resources they could provide us with, and they were able to get computers in the hands of all of the kids pretty quickly. Um- they have really good I.T. help for the kids. So, you know- they've done everything they can to support us. Us teachers just had to go through all of the curriculum and find out what would work for our individual classes.

Me:

That's good that they were so supportive. Um- How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic will change education in the future?

TI:

Um- I can see... that computers will be used a little bit more in Kindergarten classrooms than we've used them in the past. It's been interesting to see how capable they are with the computers. Um- and I think it will be beneficial to kids may not be able to attend in school, they'll have the resources to be able to keep up with their class. So, uh- I definitely think it will have an effect and the curriculum will look different than it used to even when we're all back in-person full time. But I really think that can only be positive; Computers are a part of our world and a part of learning, and it's really forced us to look at innovative ways of teaching material.

Me:

Yeah... Do you have any concerns about going back to face-to-face learning?

TI:

Probably, as far as what I feel like will affect the kids the most is the social element of school. You know- Kindergarteners in particular are pretty adaptable and pretty quick learners but they didn't get that typical initial- initiation into school that most kids get.

They didn't get to meet us, or any of their classmates, in-person until March. So, we didn't get that same personal connection with them and a personal connection is a big thing with learning. It definitely makes kids- little kids so much more willing, and happy, and excited about learning to have a personal connection with their teacher, and to have classmates around them that are experiencing the same things. So I think coming back to school- I'm very happy they were able to come back toward the end of this year- and start making those connections and see how a typical day of school in a formal education setting will run. So, really I don't have any concerns with their level of academic education; I don't have any concerns about COVID affecting us for too much longer. I think hopefully we're on the up-swing, but socially it's going to take them a while to be able to get the swing of school in a formal setting and rules and classmates and working all those different social dynamics that they've just been devoid of for over a year.

Me:

That makes sense.

Brief pause

So that is the end of our questions. Is there anything that you'd like to mention that we haven't discussed? Or is there anything you want to expand on?

TI:

Not that I can think of.

Me:

Okay! Well thank you so much for allowing me to interview you today.

TI:

You're welcome!

Me:

I hope you have a lovely rest of your day.

TI:

You too! Bye!

Me:

Bye!