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Field Experience

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EDCC 541: Foundations of Education

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Observation #1

Summary

My first field experience took place at Chelsea School in Silver Spring, Maryland. Chelsea is a self-contained non-public middle and high school for average to above average students with learning disabilities. The teacher I observed was Mr. Jeremiah Demster. The class was a middle school math class, with 4 students: three African American and one white; one female, the rest males. The students were of various middle school grade levels, as Chelsea groups classes together by reading level.

Mr. Demster had a comfortable, cozy room. Posters, charts, and banners relating to math and science displayed his subject matter well. The students appeared very much at ease with one another, and with Mr. Demster. The general classroom climate was relaxed and playful. Mr. Demster was humorous in his teachings and joked with the students. This was especially useful in keeping his students interested in their mathematical subject matter. Mr. Demster's room was also well structured in that the students knew where they should sit, where the agenda was on the board, where the homework was listed, and where useful items were, like the pencil sharpener.

The lesson I observed was dubbed the "Gold Star" lesson in that it entailed students teaching the rest of the class the multiplication math problem that they were assigned, and if they showed their steps correctly, they received a gold star on the board. A gold star from each class member meant no homework for the evening. And while the students were at the front teaching, they could in essence "become the teacher" by wearing Mr. Demster's tie. This definitely showed the positive relationship Mr. Demster had with his students and how he attempted to make math fun. This was certainly a

thinking curriculum and direct instruction lesson in that math itself revolves around, as Borich (2007) tells us, facts and rules, and that the students were expected to do more than just regurgitate their answers: they were expected to explain why and how they came to their conclusions.

During his interview, Mr. Demster stated that his general philosophy of teaching was that students generally do not learn by the “importing of knowledge” where the teacher simply conveys their knowledge to their students. Mr. Demster would rather have his students learn via personal challenge, where they must take an active role in learning instead of a passive one. This philosophy definitely showed in his lesson because he did not only simply tell his students how to do their math problems, he challenged them to prove to the class how they came about solving their problem so that they better understood themselves.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In terms of diversity and learning styles, this lesson and Mr. Demster’s theoretical educational philosophies definitely spoke to having both an ethnically, gender, and learning differenced classroom. First of all, the gold star method had only to do with successfully completing the class work, no matter the student’s race, gender, culture, or socio-economic status. Mr. Demster obviously had the same high expectations for all. As for the learning differences in a classroom where all students are learning disabled, Mr. Demster’s lesson definitely took advantage of the multiple intelligence theory. Math lessons are obviously Logical-Mathematical, but Mr. Demster also made the lesson Interpersonal and Linguistic by having the students interact with their class by taking his role as teacher.

The point stated above is where the theory and idea of the lesson met its practical complications. First of all, in terms of classroom management, the students quickly became more interested in wearing Mr. Demster's tie and benignly mocking Mr. Demster's idiosyncrasies than "teaching" the rest of the class as they were supposed to. Also, while one student was at the board going through their math problem, the other students would lose attention and have to be constantly reminded to pay attention. Perhaps if Mr. Demster had had the students who were not "teaching" at the moment do one another's problems while the student at the board taught their problem solely to Mr. Demster, the whole room may have remained busy and involved. This would also have utilized the Intrapersonal multi-intelligence theory.

In terms of Bloom's Taxonomy, this lesson did reach the Analysis stage, though, perhaps with more time, it could have reached the Synthesis stage if the students created their own problem to break down for the class once they successfully showed they could complete the given problem.

This brings up another point that relates to classroom management: time. The class was only 45 minutes long and much time was unfortunately wasted in management where Mr. Demster had to struggle to keep the students on task and to take the lesson seriously. I found that it is indeed a fine balance between having fun and not learning. I most certainly believe and put into practice that learning can, should be, and is fun, but if the students are under the impression that they are there to simply play around and pretend to be the teacher, then the information of the lesson can quickly be forgotten.

In general, I found that experimenting with a lesson like this for this subject matter is useful and can be successful, but it requires a bit more planning.

Observation #2

Summary

The second lesson I observed was also at Chelsea School in Silver Spring, MD, however, this was an observation of a high school English class, namely English 11. The teacher was Mr. Richard Goldman. The class consisted of six students, 2 female, the rest male, and all were African American. Unlike the middle school class that had different grade levels, this class was all eleventh graders.

Mr. Goldman's class climate was much more serious and sober than Mr. Demster's. Mr. Goldman spoke gravely and seriously, though never harshly or unkindly. Respect was a big part of his climate – a mutual respect between the teacher and the students, and between the students themselves. As for the room, it was nicely decorated with posters, photos, and displays that related to both of Mr. Goldman's content areas: English and Technology. There were also bookshelves abundant with relevant and useful books, several computer workstations, and an LCD projector that was well utilized during the lesson. These aspects gave an air of sincere professionalism that Mr. Goldman likewise carried with him while he taught.

Mr. Goldman's lesson was an introduction to a unit on British Literature. I found it to be a lesson that I would have loved to have had in English 11. As this was the first day on this subject and since it was an introduction, Mr. Goldman appropriately introduced the pieces of literature and the textbook the students would be utilizing. However, Mr. Goldman did so much more. Not only did he present what was to come, he presented why. He spent the class time making sure the students understood exactly why they were about to embark on a unit of British literature. Also, Mr. Goldman made sure

that the students understood what the idea of literature was and who says so. For instance, he had the students open their textbooks, not to a chapter or the index, but to the editor page where the students could see who exactly decided what was considered “literature” and who decided what “literature” was acceptable for their precious textbook.

Mr. Goldman seized this ideal opportunity to deal with the idea of diversity and multiculturalism in his class in that he related this to a hip-hop artist/writer that the class unanimously looked favorably upon, Tupac Shakur. A student had asked why Tupac wasn’t considered literature and Mr. Goldman had the kids look at the editor list in their literature textbook, responding that Tupac was considered this way only because a group of rich white men decided so.

This was a perfect example of Mr. Goldman’s educational philosophy, which we discussed during our interview, in that he knows he isn’t always “politically correct,” but he views diversity as something that must be addressed so his students, no matter their ethnicity or background, can challenge their assumptions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Mr. Goldman was excellent at transitions in that even when he transitioned from one agenda item to the next, his lesson remained very structured and relative to how it began. He began the class with a few English vocabulary words and definitions, such as “literature” and constantly related the lesson back to the words. He challenged the students to see if the standard definitions of these words still held up with the new information they were given. This was truly eye opening and useful for me.

Mr. Goldman supported his diverse learning styled classroom by utilizing several different means of presenting the information and how the students could ascertain it. He

lectured, but also used a Power Point presentation to accompany his words. The presentation itself consisted of more than just notes to copy down, it had visual representations of the ideas he brought up, such as maps to illustrate how much of the world the British Empire had expanded across. These strategies helped both the Verbal and the Visual learners of the class.

Mr. Goldman honestly did not have any noticeable problem with classroom management. In his interview, he told me simply that his management style was that of mutual respect, which relates to the classroom management tradition that Borich (2007) discusses. Respect, at least in Mr. Goldman's room, did more than the idea of the humanist tradition or applied behavior analysis as Borich discusses because mutual respect seemed to prevent any management issues. The students seemed to take Mr. Goldman seriously, they gave him their attention, answered questions even when not addressed specifically, and took notes as asked. They did talk to one other out of turn, groan at the note taking, or otherwise disrupt the class. One specific way that Mr. Goldman conveyed his respect right off the bat was when he said that a high school class would simply read what they were told without question, but a college class would ask why they are reading such works and why that is important. The students were obviously both flattered and challenged that they were being treated as and held to the expectations of college students.

Mr. Goldman appeared to cover all of Bloom's Taxonomy levels because, by the end of class, the students were able to make valid judgments of the unit they were about to begin based on the evidence they were presented with. I actually do not have any specific suggestions for Mr. Goldman. He was an inspirational teacher to observe.

References

Borich, G. D. (2007). *Effective Teaching Methods: Research-Based Practice*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Ltd.