Field Paper

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Abstract

The following essay will begin by describing the Kindergarten class that was observed to complete the field work assignment. A depiction of the classroom, students and the lesson taught will be provided at the beginning of this paper. Succeeding this depiction, a summary of the subsequent interview with the Kindergarten teacher, Ms.Fry, will be documented. This paper will conclude with lessons gleaned from the entire field observation and interview experience.

**Summary of Observation**

For the field observation assignment, I observed a kindergarten class at Bobier Elementary School in Vista, CA. This class, taught by Ms. Fry, was composed of about 25 students. These students represented the student body, in that there were about 90% Hispanic/Latino students, 5% African American students, 1% White students and 4% other ethnicities or mixed students, and about 65% English Language Learners in the class. Additionally, about 90% of these students are on free and reduced lunch plans.

Before a description of the lesson will be provided, a visual image will be offered in order to give clarity on the layout of the classroom and where students were situated during the observation. There were three clusters of student desks with the longest row of desks lining the back wall. The two other clusters were off to the right -hand side of the room with her desk in front. To the left side of the room was a colored square rug used for circle time and their library. Covering the walls were alphabet, color and number cards, a calendar with patterned numbers, class jobs, a word wall, a student work wall, and their ST Math/ Lexia sticker chart.

**Front of Class**

Teacher Desk

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Student Desk Cluster 1

Student Desk Cluster 2

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**Library**

Student Desk Cluster 3

I observed from around 10am-11am for four days, so largely saw the same part of their day every day I was there. This time was split between phonics and math instruction before they went to lunch. From about 10:00-10:30am, students were in three groups, arranged by level, to do work associated with letter recognition, phonics instruction and reading intervention. The lowest academic group, made up of about eight students, were sitting on the colored carpet with Ms. Fry. These students were engaged in cutting out pictures and gluing them by the letter they began with (ex- a picture of a pan next to letter p). During their cutting activity, Ms. Fry would call a student up one at a time and quiz them on their letter recognition/sounds by going through the letter flash cards. These cards represented the alphabetic principle as they had the letter and a picture of an object that started with the letter on the card. For example, the ‘A’ card had a picture of an apple with the letter Aa on top. She would hold up a card and ask for the letter name, sound and corresponding motion. If the student answered correctly, they kept the flash card. If they answered incorrectly, Ms. Fry kept the flash card and recorded which ones they still did not know. While this group was with Ms. Fry, two other groups were sitting in the back at desk cluster number 3. Half of these students were working independently on Lexia, a phonics program on iPads. The other half of these students were working with a reading intervention teacher. They began by being quizzed on site words, in a similar flash card method that Ms. Fry was using in the front of the room with her students. After they reviewed key site words and blended a few focus words, they were each handed the same decodable book, “Sam and Ann Ran.” She had them all place their finger on the first word and read out loud in a group read. After they group read, she had them reread the story by themselves as she listened in. She ended by having them summarize the beginning, middle and end of the story. When this group finished their book, she switched with the group doing Lexia.

When their phonics time came to an end, Ms. Fry called all of the students together for a circle time on number bonds, switching over to their math time. Before they began their lesson, she gave them a “brain break,” by playing a GoNoodle song. Once they were all settled on the color carpet, in seats of their choice, she introduced their new math topic, number bonds of ten. Throughout the week, she used a process called, I do, We do, You do, to demonstrate how to make a number bond. On day 1, she explained a number bond of ten with ten linking cubes on her projector. She pretended to be a ninja, chopping her number bond in two parts. One part had three cubes and the other part had the remaining seven cubes. She drew two circles on her paper and wrote number 3 in one circle and number 7 in the other. Then she put the three cubes in the circle with the number 3 and the seven cubes in the circle with the number 7. The following day during their math time, Ms. Fry implemented the “we do” portion of teaching number bonds. She had one student pretend to be the teacher and the other student pretend to be the ninja, using the projector like she had done the day prior. She prompted the “teacher” to draw a circle with a number 10 on the top of the page and then two smaller circles on the bottom of the page. She then prompted the ninja to chop the ten bond in two parts. The ninja chopped it in pieces of 4 and 6 cubes. The “teacher” wrote number 4 in one small circle and number 6 in the other, arranging the cubes in the corresponding circle. The following two days, she implemented the “you do” portion of this activity. She had every student find a partner, obtain their own paper and ten cubes, and create their own number bond as she went around and checked their work. When students were done, some volunteered to share their work with the class. When their math time was over, she dismissed them to line up for lunch according to what color of clothes they were wearing.

**Summary of Interview**

1. How long have you been teaching?
   1. “I have been teaching for seven years. I’ve been at Bobier for the past four years and this is my third -year teaching kindergarten.”
2. What does your daily schedule look like?
   1. “I try to build in playtime randomly when they need it or at the end of the day.” (Provides a daily schedule)
      1. Morning Jobs, Story Time, Circle Time, Alphabet Review, Recess, Story Time, Writing, Math, Lunch, Daily 5, Leapfrog/ Play, Go home.
3. Why did you want to teach Kindergarten?
   1. “I was actually assigned to teach kinder from second grade. When I came back from a leave of absence, they had dissolved my second- grade class and gave me an open position in kinder. But I enjoy Kinder because there is more freedom. Students have time to relax and play or watch leapfrog. They bounce back easier and are more innocent than in older grades where they are a bit more jaded.”
4. Did you always want to teach in a low- income school, considering you mentioned students here are jaded the older they get?
   1. “I actually grew up in a low income school in Fresno so I was used to this population. I don’t think I would want to ever teach in a school in the suburbs. I love how students and parents appreciate you in this neighborhood.”
5. What did you think your role as a teacher would be (or would encompass) when you first started teaching?
   1. “I honestly thought it was just to teach content and what they need to learn to progress to the next grade. I was very naïve.”
6. Over the years of teaching, how has your understanding of your role as a teacher changed?
   1. “It’s not just content. It’s life skills and how to be a friend. Content is next to last. Providing safety and comfort come first. If kids are hungry or crying you can’t teach them. So, part of your role is making sure they are ready to learn the content you want to teach first.”
7. What are some challenges you have faced when trying to help students invest academically/ behaviorally?
   1. “I expect that there will be students that need extra care before they can invest. I have snacks and feed them 3-4 times a day in the beginning of the year. I reach out to counselors. Behavior charts help. Parent correspondence and talks with previous teachers, like preschool, to get to know them more personally also helps me understand why they might be exhibiting challenging behaviors. This year I had a student who was constantly disrupting class, harming other students and not responding to any intervention I tried. It was challenging because I couldn’t reach him without a major intervention with the principle and his parents.”
8. What are some successes you have experienced when trying to help students invest academically/behaviorally?
   1. “It’s rewarding when an intervention actually works. When we get students in counseling or pulled out for extra support, that’s a success. I used to do behavior chart and went away from that this year. I do a class point system and when they earn 20 points they get a party or extra recess. I use a lot of positive praise and that has seemed to help as well.”
9. What are some challenges you have faced when working with parents?
   1. “One mom didn’t respond to calls with a behavior problem. It’s hard when you don’t have parents on your team and you have to persuade them to get services. I eventually had to send the student home to make it stick and the mom finally agreed to a counseling group for her son.”
10. What are some successes you have experienced when working with parents?
    1. “I love when parents volunteer. Having them help their children with learning to read is great to see.”
11. What are some successes you have experienced when working collaboratively with other teachers?
    1. “I meet 2 times a week with the other kinder teachers. We have reading intervention and behavior specialist teachers. I couldn’t do it without them. Everyone of us is needed to teach these students. This year we have included deaf and hard of hearing aids for students and navigating that relationship has provided a lot of help.”
12. What keeps you motivated and inspired?
    1. “Making a difference with students. I can see kids getting better every day and I love seeing kids learn to read. To know that I was a part of that, is motivating on the hard days.”

**Lessons Learned**

Considering what was observed and what was gleaned from the interview portion of the field experience, I came away with two overarching lessons. First and foremost, it confirmed that a teacher’s role is much more than just a content provider. Secondly, it impressed upon me the need for constant professional growth and personal reflection, no matter how long one has been teaching.

Primarily, it was reaffirmed that a teacher’s role is more than merely teaching students their ABCs, in this case. In her interview, she mentioned that she was “naïve” to think that her only job would be teaching the content that students need to know in order to progress to the next grade. She articulated that what comes first is providing an environment where students’ basic needs of safety and comfort are met, and that what follows is teaching them life lessons such as “how to be a good friend.” Realizing that a child’s brain cannot process content if other needs are not met first is important for me to take into account when working with my own class. When I become frustrated that certain students don’t seem to be grasping the concepts, my first step should be to make sure that their basic needs, like nutritional food, adequate sleep and a nurturing environment, are being met. When these needs are not met, my role extends to meeting these needs as best as possible while they are in my classroom, and working to help their parents/guardians meet these needs at home through parent education. Especially serving in a high- needs, low-income neighborhood, these needs and meeting them takes more of a priority in the day to day in order to assist students in coming to class ready to learn.

The second lesson that was reiterated for me during the observation time was the need for constant personal reflection and corresponding professional growth. During the math portion of my observation, when she had students break in to pairs and do the number bond activity themselves, she reflected on how she could have done a better job at explaining the directions. There was butcher paper covering their desks and each student with their partner was to find a seat after getting ten cubes, and begin drawing their number bond on the table. However, when she dismissed them to tables, students began murmuring, “wait, do we have to go back to our own seats?” “Can we actually draw on the tables?” “How many number bonds does she want us to make?” She had to pause the class when she realized that there was confusion over her instructions and clarify the assignment. When they were all settled again, she came over to me and said, “I could have given instructions better. I should have done a check for understanding to make sure that they knew what they were doing before I sent them off. It’s kind of cool to have you here because I am more metacognitive about what I am doing.” In other words, she took time to reflect on what went well during her lesson and what needed improvement, and then made a point of change for next time. While she has been teaching for seven years, there are still aspects of teaching that she can improve upon. Being humble, as she was, and admitting when things don’t always go as planned, is key to bettering yourself as an educator. It is important to strive for personal and professional growth, asking for help from fellow teachers/staff when needed.

In final thought, the field experience was a much-appreciated process. I enjoyed seeing where my preschool students are going to be next year, and seeing some of my last year’s students in action in their Kinder class. It inspired me personally, seeing a possible grade that I could be teaching after obtaining my credential and observing a teacher I admire at my school. Lastly, it reaffirmed lessons that I have been learning since starting the credential process, including that a teacher’s role extends beyond merely transmitting content and that a teacher is responsible for growing professionally in order to better teach their students.