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Field Reflection Essay: Section II: Classroom Issues & Overall Reflection

As I observed Lakeside Middle School located in Millville, NJ, I noticed many things that took place in my eighth grade classroom. Not only were the students I observed engaged in reading from the textbook but they also had a chance to write their own style of poetry. I observed both accelerated and regular language arts classes who seemed very involved and participated as much as they could. I also noticed how the eighth grade class was very diverse. I noticed the ethnicity was extremely different as there contained African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Indian children. As there were many different cultures, there did not appear to be any students having trouble with English nor had an accent indicating they were from another area.

I observed a support staff present in case of any behavioral issues was to arise within the classroom. A man would walk into the room occasionally to check on the status of the students. This man was Mr. Grecco who is the vice principal of eighth grade and if any students would act out in class they would go see him in his office. I did not witness a behavior issue that needed Mr. Grecco to be present, but he was definitely a part of the support staff monitoring and checking up on the eighth graders.

The classroom environment was very conducive to learning. I noticed there were many motivational posters including: Bloom's Taxonomy, proofreader's marks, study skills, writing checklist, test-taking tips, and a word wall developed by the eighth grade students and the teacher. There were also computers present with lots of group work that allowed the students to get a chance to work on the computers. The students' projects

and class work almost covered the walls. The classroom was very welcoming and displayed a caring and comfortable environment for the students as well as the teacher, which is ideal for a learning community.

There were management strategies and materials the teacher used in the classroom. Management strategies included a list of rules that the students must follow like raising their hand and not speaking when others are speaking that each student was suppose to follow at all time within the classroom. The teacher did not mention these rules, but it appeared that the rules were in place at all times especially in the group work assignments. The materials the teacher used including a television for morning announcements, overhead projector, computers for research, textbooks and other reading books, and worksheets/handouts. The teacher also used CD's that contained music the class brought it that the students believed would be the soundtracks for the book they were reading. The teacher's use of television, computers, overhead projector, and CD's were all forms of technology she would use in her daily lessons.

The activities and materials were organized to fit the needs of the teacher and the students. She also puts the activities the class will be doing on the board for the students to view before class begins. It appears that the teacher follows the lesson plan, but she might jump around and start with a different activity. Normally the class starts with collecting homework and doing a grammar warm-up exercise that is always the start of the class. The teacher wanted to get all the activities done for the day, but she didn't worry about the order. The students did not seem to mind if the activities were out of order, they still worked hard and managed to stay on task.

I could not identify any NJCCCS in the lessons she was teaching. I was not shown any standards from the teacher and there were not any NJCCCS present in the classroom or for the students to view. The objectives that were set in the classroom did not seem to follow the Rowan format that we were taught. There was usually one objective that was written on the board. The objective was usually “To learn something” and every time I observed, the same objective was displayed until the day I taught my lesson and the last day where the substitute had written an objective for every activity the students were doing.

The teacher engaged the students in their learning mostly by activating their background knowledge using the propensity “Reflecting on Past Actions.” Before each lesson took place, the teacher would sit on the desk and simply have an open conversation about what they remember from a particular topic. The teacher would then connect the topic to the lesson she would teach for the day. The students appeared to be very engaged in learning as they described previous activities and readings done in their earlier grades. The teacher did address vocabulary and other literacy issues. There was a word wall displayed on a black board that was not being used to write on. The students and the teacher would continue to add words to the wall as they came across them during their reading assignments. Also, everyday they would start the class by doing a grammar exercise that they would record in their journals.

I was able to observe both formal and informal assessments the students took during class time. As the students would read a few chapters in the book Tears of a Tiger, they would have a comprehension test that they would take individually at their desks. The students would also need to take a grammar test a few times in the marking

period. The informal assessments the students would do various worksheets that the students may have worked alone, in pairs, and in groups that were also graded.

The only interdisciplinary lesson I observed was the connection between the language arts lesson she was doing and discussing history with the class. As the class was reading a story from the textbook, the teacher also made clear where the story took place and had an open discussion about the town in which the story took place. The students also took place in reading about different Greek Gods that was connected to History as well. This lesson also is my only anticipatory set as the students researched Greek Mythology with group members and presented what they learned to the class. With the use of puppets, worksheets, and posters, the students were able to teach the class about Greek Mythology. This lesson seemed very fun and exciting to the students as they felt they were the teacher for a day!

I did not notice any specific learning needs of the students. Every student did not appear to need any help and continued to work well with others. I was surprised to hear from my teacher that there was one student in the class who was classified and needed extra help. The teacher is always walking around the room to help students so she can monitor the progress of all the students including the particular student with needs. The teacher also allows more time for the student on assignments like worksheets and tests if she needs it. She does not leave during class for the resource room and stays with the regular class during language arts. I would never have guessed the student would have any learning needs as the student is not pointed out in front of the class if she needs any special help.

From this field experience, I was able to view lots of characters of a learning community in both classes. The way the desks were set in groups of four where the students would rotate their seats from different group activities. Many of the assignments were done cooperatively in their groups and appeared to work well with each other acknowledging a propensity of “seeing peers as colleagues.” The teacher and the students gave positive feedback in every activity. I observed an excellent learning community lesson where the students had done a reflection question. After the students had finished answering the question they would pass their papers to their neighbor to grade on a rubric as they practiced the GEPA. After the students graded the reflection question by the rubric standard, they had given positive feedback as well as improvements for the writing. Along with the many lessons, group work, behavior management, and other guidelines followed in the classroom were ideal for a successful learning community.

I learned many things from observing at Lakeside Middle School. My cooperating teacher made me realize how the most valuable thing in teaching is how you have to always be prepared for almost anything and to always think on your feet. I learned that being a teacher requires lots of parents’ feedback and teachers must make sure there is no grammar errors on anything or parents will be calling! I also am now aware at the process of planning and creating lesson plans to fit the students’ needs in the classroom. Noticing all the students’ assignment around the room, I realize how it is very important for the learning community to display their work and share the work with the school.

This was the first time I ever step foot in a middle school, and I grew up going to a K-8 elementary school. As I noticed in the middle school setting, the students are very diverse learners and are very rambunctious students. I surprised at how many staff are present and all the security guards walking around the school. At first I was nervous wondering why there would need to be that much security and thinking that middle school must be dreadful to teach, but I really enjoyed observing this school. Even though I am an elementary education major, I now feel that teaching middle school is not as bad as people believe. I will take everything I have learned from Lakeside Middle School and implement the strategies in my teaching career.