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Capstone Paper

My name is Cooper Cox and I am a student at the University of Mary. For my Practicum: Diverse Learners Global, I had the privilege to go and observe at Bismarck High School. The two teachers that I advised for this practicum were Mr. Dale Colby, a physical education teacher and Mrs. Wendy Sanderson, an English Language Learners (ELL) teacher at Bismarck High. It was my privilege to advise under two people who displayed such a passion and love for what they do and for each and every child they teach. This practicum was a great experience for me moving forward in my own educational pursuit and I learned many different things from each of these teachers that will help me in the future.

Demographics will always vary in most every setting a person is in these days and this was definitely the case while observing both the Physical Education classes and the ELL classroom. The demographics of both of these different classes were such a neat experience to see and be a part of and will be helpful to me in the future. The age of the students both in the gym setting and in the classroom setting was varied anywhere from 15 to 21. The gender distribution between both educational settings was for the most part an even split of guys to gals. Ethnicity was present in both settings but even more so in Mrs. Sanderson’s class. In Mr. Colby’s gym class there was still a variety of ethnicities present, however, in Mrs. Sanderson’s class everyone was from a distinct ethnicity. Mrs. Sanderson’s classes alone consisted of students from the Congo, Ukraine, Russia, Guatemala, France, Chile, Thailand, and Mexico. As you can see there were a wide variety of ethnicities in Mrs. Sanderson’s ELL class. There weren’t any cognitive or physical limitations in Mrs. Sanderson’s class; however, there were a few students with limitations in the gym setting. There were students with intellectual disabilities and also one with Down syndrome. Mr. Colby made these students smile and interacted with them the whole time still and you could tell that they enjoyed the class.

There weren’t any environmental adaptations that enhanced the chance for student success in the gym setting, however, there was in Mrs. Sanderson’s ELL class. The main thing I noticed as soon as I walked into the classroom was classroom labels all around the room to help enhance the chance of success for her students. Almost everything in the room was labeled, for example desk, chair, window, door, clock, pencil sharpener, etc. The labels were big and bright and spelled out the word not only to help the students in the class understand what they were, but also to help the students see how they were spelled and to be able to try to sound them out individually. Another thing that that I saw that was available in the classroom was a large vowel chart that was put on the wall. Each class period had many kids who spoke little to no English so Mrs. Sanderson would go through the vowel names and the sounds of each individually and then also work with the students to sound out those same vowels in words.

The only instructional adaptation that enhanced the likelihood of student success in the gym setting that I noticed was when Mr. Colby would explain the instructions of a game or activity and would have to explain the game differently to certain kids that he knew needed further, more in-depth instructions. I think that instructional adaptation has a lot to do with a teacher knowing his or her students and understanding who may need further explanation or insight into what is being asked of them. Instructional adaptations that enhanced the likelihood of student success in Mrs. Sanderson’s classroom were a big thing. Most of the students in the class didn’t know how to pronounce certain words and also didn’t know what the words meant. So whether Mrs. Sanderson was teaching a lesson, the students were playing a word game, or doing a worksheet activity, both her and I would have to go around and help say the word correctly to the student so they could repeat it and also explain to them what some words meant. I think this area is one of the areas where Mrs. Sanderson has to work the hardest because many of her students haven’t heard a lot of the words we use in English before. Many of them thought it was so hard to learn English because in their languages they only have mainly one word for each thing and in English we have multiple words that can mean the same thing.

There weren’t many interventions beyond the parameters of the classroom that were used between these two classrooms. One that I can think of that was used in Mr. Colby’s gym class was when they were doing fitness week he challenged them to try and go for a walk every day and keep a log of it. Whether they did it or not was on them, but as a physical education educator, for out of school situations, you can only encourage physical activity to remain a part of their daily routine. There weren’t any interventions beyond the parameters of the classroom in Mrs. Sanderson’s class while I was there. I think that she would like to give take-home stuff and other assignments, but at the same time she wants to be able to help them with their spelling, grammar, and pronunciation. She realizes that it probably wouldn’t be beneficial to her students to send them work outside of the classroom when she can’t be there to explain things to them and help them out.

The main observation that I will carry to my future classroom is something that both Mr. Colby and Mrs. Sanderson displayed every single day that I was with them. They both displayed constant love and compassion not only for their job but also for each and every one of their students on a daily basis. They both put the students first in every situation and it was always on display. They both also showed respect to their students and gained the respect of their students in return, and it was apparent that the students really enjoyed them and looked up to them. I also learned that students may drive you insane but you just have to be patient with them. In the gym setting, I learned that students will enjoy gym class more if you do a variety of games and activities with them and don’t always do the same thing. I also learned the number of students that is too much for certain activities in a gym class and how to maximize participation in gym class.

Overall, this diverse practicum was a great experience and I am privileged to have had the opportunity to do it this semester and observe under two great teachers that I learned a lot of things from that I can use in the future. I thought it would be fun going into it, but didn’t think that it was going to be as good of an experience as I had. I not only learned many teaching strategies and lessons from these two teachers but also learned simple valuable life lessons from each of them that I will definitely be able to use in my future teaching career enabling me to be the best teacher that I can be.