

Diversity Practicum

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Over the past semester, I have spent time in a variety of different educational settings to observe and guide instruction. These sites include Avid classrooms at both Bismarck High School and Simle Middle School, a high school youth group at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, and a Head Start program in Havre, Montana. Over the course of several weeks, I gathered many observations and reflected upon them in order to best apply my findings in my future classroom. This paper will cover information about the demographics of the populations I spent time with, the adaptations used in various locations in order to enhance learning, and thoughts on successful interventions outside of the classroom I witnessed.

Demographics

My practicum experiences are spread over four different places with different demographics. At Bismarck High School, I tutored a class of sophomores and a class of juniors. Their gender distribution was relatively even, though there were a few more girls than boys in both classes. The ethnicity was slightly more diverse than what I am used to, with the classes including many students who were not Caucasian. I got to experience some of their socioeconomic backgrounds by observing what they talked about while with their friends. There were also moments when students shared their backgrounds with our tutoring group in order to better explain their points of confusion. One student talked about the alcoholism and poor mental health tendencies in her family and how that affected her in the past. The amazing part of this experience was that she was able to explain to us how she overcame those challenges. There were a few students who had cognitive limitations, which showed through in the point of confusion discussions, but all the students I encountered supported one another and were as helpful as they could be to each other. This has inspired me to create an atmosphere of supportive, cooperative learning in my classrooms.

At Simle Middle School, I worked with seventh graders. They were equally distributed gender-wise and there was a little variation in ethnic background. These students' socioeconomic backgrounds also showed through their stories and points of confusion, such as one student who had a rough home life. It was more difficult to convince him to care about the material. There were a few other students that acted in similar ways; they were very difficult to engage. Over the semester, I learned what topics the students cared about and, when the content became relevant to their lives, they were more willing to participate.

With Corpus Christi's high school youth group, the ages of the students ranged from eighth grade to seniors. The students came from all the different high schools in town, including public, private, and homeschooled. These different backgrounds were sometimes tricky to work with since there was a very wide range of knowledge concerning faith and religion. I learned that the best route was to let these teens teach one another from their personal levels of expertise. Since these students knew one another very well, they were also very willing to share about their different home lives. One memorable moment was when one of our attendees shared a Spanish prayer he said with his mother every morning. We had a few students show up occasionally with cognitive limitations, but they were always met by the other participants with an abundance of patience and love. We also dealt with plenty of temporary physical limitations since there was always at least one person with crutches or on scooters due to surgeries. This caused me to continuously rethink activities so that all students would be able to participate in some way.

Finally, in my visit to the Head Start program, I spent time with eighteen kids ages three and four. There seemed to be a relatively even numbers of boys and girls of many different ethnicities. They all came from low socioeconomic status, which showed through in their interactions with each other and with the adults in the room. For example, we worked on

teaching children when it was not appropriate to demand undivided attention and cling to adults. I did not notice any physical limitations or incredibly obvious cognitive limitations, though there were a couple kids on the low end of the autism spectrum. These children were treated the same as their peers by the head teacher, who intended to help them grow in maturity and independence before they entered the public school system.

Environmental Adaptations

In the Avid classrooms at both Bismarck High School and Simle Middle School, the walls were covered with resources. At the high school, the teacher posted envelopes of practice ACT packets, scholarship opportunities, college information, and dozens of other resources for her students. She also had a Keurig for students to use if they needed caffeine in order to operate in the classroom. The boards both had different agendas posted for every class that looked ahead for the entire week. These all helped students with college-ready skills, which is what Avid promotes.

In the youth group room, chairs and couches were arranged in a circle in the main area for comfortable large-group discussions. The other half of the room had high tables and chairs for students to gather around and eat snacks before we started. The mission statement of Corpus Christi Youth Ministry was painted on the wall for everyone to see, and a painting done by a past youth group member hung above the white board to show support for even past members. We also had access to a projector. All of these things came together to produce an optimal comfortable setting for a small youth group. (For visual representations of this space, see Appendix A.)

The Head Start classroom was full of toys and activities all sectioned off into their own spaces. Each shelf was labeled with pictures of which toys “lived” there so that the children

could learn to clean up after themselves. There were two separate tables so there could be two main activities going on (like painting and Legos) with two different supervisors. The room was very colorful and easy for the children to navigate.

Ideally, I want my classroom to mimic these spaces by providing relevant materials for students in obvious locations; promote a comfortable, welcoming environment to encourage students to feel safe when they share ideas; and be organized in a way that encourages students' independence.

Instructional Adaptations

Avid sets up its tutoring instruction by having two days a week where students come to class with a POC, or "Point of Confusion," to walk through with a small group of peers and a college tutor. This adaptation from a normal classroom style gives students the opportunity to lead a small group, ask for help, and assist their peers with their own strengths. This seemed to help many students understand the material far better than they knew it coming into the class. The teachers were also willing to adapt their agendas to cater to the students' needs, letting it be a very student-driven classroom. (To learn more about Avid and their curriculum, see Appendix B.)

In the Corpus Christi high school youth group, we did a variety of activities including games, discussions, and teachings. By transitioning relatively frequently and not letting two weeks be the same, students stayed engaged since it was not like their school classrooms. With the small group of students who attended, we were able to cater to their needs for what type of instruction was best for that week. We also used a variety of media including videos, power-points, and music to keep the students engaged and open them up to a new way of thinking about

concepts they may have already heard about. We also had different presenters come in with relevant topics like vocation. This kept the material relevant and authentic to their lives.

At Head Start, one of the first instructional adaptations I noticed was the teacher's utilization of the CD player for transitions. She had different songs for clean-up time, lunch time, and play time. The instruction that she used was learning by playing. The children worked on social skills like sharing, storytelling, and taking turns. Since they were all desperate for attention that most of them did not seem to get at home, she found ways to spend focused time with individual students while not letting any of the louder ones steal her attention away. She was very good with positive attention and affirmation with the children.

I would like to keep my information relevant to my students and provide relatively equal attention to all students so that none feel overlooked or forgotten. I also want my classroom to be student-driven in order to train them to take agency over their own learning.

Interventions Beyond the Classroom

The high school Avid program is very focused on college-readiness, especially for the students who are typically considered "average" or who would be the first member of their family to attend a university. In the Bismarck High School classroom, the teacher encouraged students who typically would not have the resources to learn about scholarships to apply early by giving them time in class. She also worked with them on establishing and maintaining a planner to track all aspects of their school and home life.

The youth group typically ended its teachings with practical ways to apply the information outside of the church setting. Some of this included evangelization strategies or simply methods to live a loving, Christian life in a secular world. However, the more practical interventions used by the youth group include the notification system. All permission and sign-

up sheets are sent via email and text to all the high schoolers and their families. This way, we could reach out to parents who may not feel like they were involved in their children's scheduling and we could get through to students through their parents. Finally, as a youth group, we reached out to the church community by running a fish fry every Friday during lent. This gave students the opportunity to do something good with the community as well as earn youth group funds for future retreats and trips.

One of the most interesting interventions I witnessed on my practicum sites was at the Head Start program where the teacher would safety pin notes for parents to the backs of the children's shirts. This way, the notes could not be overlooked or misplaced. She also got each of the children a pair of slippers for play time and boots for outdoor time since most of the parents did not provide their children with these things. Some students even showed me socks that she got them. Going above-and-beyond like this did give the teacher better connections with the families that were willing to have connections.

I look forward to establishing connections with my students' families so that I can better understand how to aid their learning. Though I want to encourage students to "take charge" of their own learning, I want them to see how their home lives play a role in their education. I also learned that parents often know their children better than I, so in the case that issues arise in the classroom, I want to know how to talk to parents in a productive way.

Standard Met

II. UNIT CAPACITY: Standard 4: Diversity: The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and experiences for candidates to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn. These experiences include working with diverse higher education and school faculty, diverse candidates, and diverse students in p-12 schools.

I looked deeply into the diverse educational systems for children from preschool to high school and observed the different strategies necessary to help all students learn. As my final artifact, I communicated with Joni, my supervisor with the Head Start program, and Jay, one of my two supervisors with the Corpus Christi youth group.

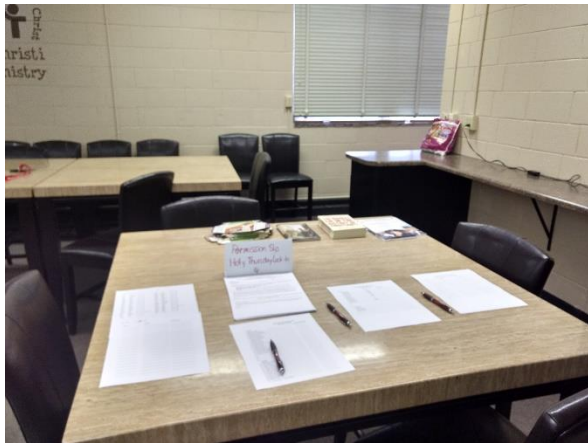
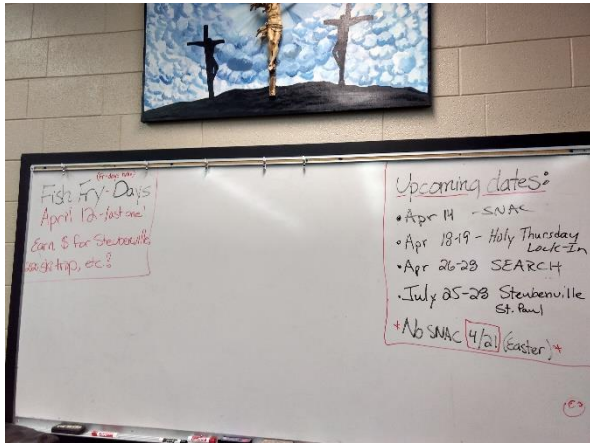
I learned from Joni that sometimes the kids are our only connection to the parents. Three of the parents of her students are not allowed near the school due to restraining orders, and most of the other families are just as messed up. She expects her three and four-year-old students to listen, obey, and be kind, more than she would ever expect that from their parents. When dealing with parents who seem impossible to communicate with, she communicates to her students and expects them to pass their safety-pin notes and use their voices to tell their guardians what is expected. I also learned from Joni that kids will do what is expected and allowed, and she believed in and supported her students so that they could all rise to her standards. From Jay, I learned to always have a backup plan and a thought for discussion about the day's readings. That way, when activities fall through, I can always have something to fall back on. He challenged me to always think deeply and to challenge the students to think deeply too.

Conclusion

Overall, my diversity practicum experience was far more diverse than I expected. I had incredible conversations with various supervisors about leading diverse groups of students of all different ages and realized that certain strategies reach across all age groups. I believe I will carry many of these experiences into my future classrooms because they showed me so much about loving diverse students of all kinds. I learned the importance of having backup plans and high expectations for all students. I saw so many amazing outcomes of excellent leadership, and I hope someday I will be able to handle my students as well as I witnessed my supervisors handling theirs.

Appendix

Appendix A



Appendix B

<https://www.avid.org/>

References

AVID / Closing the Achievement Gap in Education. (2002-2019). Retrieved from

<http://www.avid.org/>

Griffin, Jay. (2019). Personal interview.

Ketih, Joni. (2019). Personal interview.