Reflective Paper

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EDUC 111: Introduction to Teaching

Henry Moore, an English artist and sculptor, once said, “The observation of nature is part of an artist’s life, it enlarges his form [and] knowledge, keeps him fresh and from working only by formula, and feeds inspiration” (Moore). Observation is a major component of many vocations and hobbies. Athletes improve their game by watching other people play, artists examine objects to receive inspiration, and many students observe job sites to gain knowledge about potential careers. Just as the artist observes nature in order to create original pieces, so should impending teachers observe classrooms in order to get a real sense of the world of education. Through my field experiences, I learned that teaching involves much more than knowing the facts, or as Moore would say, “working […] by formula” (Moore).

My first observation took place in a fifth grade classroom at Laketon Intermediate School. I was, of course, nervous and unsure of what to expect. Would the teacher include me in the discussions? How would the students react to me being there? However, the atmosphere of the teacher’s classroom soon washed away any feelings of unease. The teacher herself was very warm and welcoming and eager to answer my questions. I felt comfortable in her classroom, and it did not take long to notice that her students were just as content. The most important experience I took from the observation was the way the teacher interacted with her students. She knew so much about every single pupil, and it was easy to see that her students trusted her and valued the relationships she so carefully built with them. As I observed the student-teacher interactions, I realized that because the students were so comfortable in the classroom and with their teacher, they were more prone to listen to what she was teaching.

My next field experience was at Manchester Middle School in a seventh grade art class. At that time I was considering switching my major so that I could teach middle school mathematics, thus this was a crucial observation for me. Before the class started, I talked with the teacher about the differences between elementary and middle school students. Hearing the teacher talk about her hormonal students and seeing her interact with them helped me realize that teaching in a middle school was not something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Although this is not the grade level I want to teach, I was fairly comfortable in the classroom. I enjoyed the way the teacher decorated her room with her students’ artwork. This is something I would like to be able to do someday.

After the middle school, I proceeded to observe at Manchester High School, where I attended an eleventh grade history class. To be honest, I was not looking forward to this experience because teaching at the high school level has never appealed to me. I was just in high school last year, and I am not quite ready to go back. As a result, it was an uncomfortable observation for me. The teacher did not seem to have time for any questions I may have had, and he failed to tell the class why I was there, so I constantly received curious stares. On the other hand, I liked the way the teacher interacted with his students. He frequently asked for their opinions and was accepting of the answers they gave, even if their responses were not completely correct. As a teacher, I think it is important to encourage students to voice their opinions sometimes too, instead of treating them as if they were a passive audience.

Following the high school, I observed a second grade class at Manchester Elementary School. Since I want to teach second or third grade, this was an amazing and valuable experience. Similar to the first teacher I observed, the second-grade teacher had strong relationships with her students. It was apparent that her pupils were comfortable talking to her about things going on in their lives, and she in return, was glad to listen. From the moment the students entered the classroom to the time I left, the students never stopped working. The teacher had jobs for the students to do and morning assignments that they should work on before the bell rang. At first, I thought that all the work was a little unnecessary; however, I soon realized that at that age, the students had to continuously have something to do otherwise they would quickly and easily get off track. This was a new concept to me, and it made me worry about having enough activities for my future students to do. I do not want to constantly assign busywork, yet I would like my students to be regularly engaged in some sort of work or activity. Hopefully, when I become a teacher, I will be able to find the right balance between work and play. Furthermore, the most beneficial part of the observation was the hands-on experience I received with the students. During the class period, I was able to help some students with their math homework, and it was a wonderful feeling. The time I got to spend working with the students enforced my passion to work at the elementary level.

My last field experience took place in a fifth grade classroom at Laketon Intermediate School. The teacher I was assigned to was absent due to back surgery, so I had the opportunity to observe the substitute who would be teaching the class for the next twenty days. Although this was the same grade level I observed during my first experience, the teacher had a completely different philosophy of teaching. The substitute was fairly strict and did not allow the students to talk without raising their hand, even during a class discussion. I was always taught to raise my hand to answer a question in school, and I want to teach my students the same; however, I do not think that complete restriction of talking out loud is justified because students often learn by contributing to discussions. Making students raise their hands detracts from classroom discussion because it only allows one or two pupils to answer a question instead of many. The substitute enforced her no-talking-out-loud rule by bribing her students with food. This particular observation allowed me to realize that I do not want to base my classroom rules on a reward and punishment scale. I would much rather encourage my students to follow the rules because it is the right thing to do, not because they will receive some sort of prize. I will let my students know the punishments for breaking the rules, but I will not use the rules to scare them into behaving.

Through all of my field experiences, I have learned that educators do much more than teach subject areas. They manage classrooms, set up lesson plans, build relationships with their students, and much more. The observations allowed me to see many different aspects of teaching, some enjoyable and others, such as enforcing rules, not so much. Additionally, and most importantly, certain characteristics I observed in each teacher allowed me to set professional goals for myself. Some teachers’ behaviors I will mimic and others I will use as a guide of things not to do as a teacher. Seeing all the different student-teacher interactions is the reason for my biggest goal as an educator: building strong relationships with my students.

Works Cited

Moore, H. (2003-2006). Retrieved November 23, 2008, from WorldofQuotes.com: http://www.worldofquotes.com/topic/Observation/1/index.html