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Field Experience Reflection

I spent my field experience tutoring for one hour twice a week at Akron Elementary School. Typically, I worked with a first-grade girl named Taylor who was very easy to manage: quiet, eager to learn, good at following directions. Each day, Taylor read two short books aloud, wrote out 12 spelling words, and completed a page of math homework. Once every two weeks or so, when a Manchester tutor was absent, another student joined us.

My tutoring experience revealed some of my strengths. I came in each day thinking of myself as a caring teacher, not just a buddy. Thanks to my previous knowledge about teaching phonics and phonological awareness, I was able to give appropriate hints without giving away answers. Also, I recognized that these students had already spent a full day in school and might not want to sit still for another hour. So, a few times I thought of ways to mix up our routine. For example, on days when I was assigned to two or more students, instead of the students reading their books aloud at the table, I asked them to “be the teacher” in the reading den of the library, while I and the others sat and listened. I used the same technique with spelling bingo. As for weaknesses, I think I showed my emotions too much. I shouldn’t necessarily show the students my silly surprise, disappointment, or annoyance all the time. Also, because my regularly-assigned student was so low-maintenance, sometimes I forgot (or was too lazy) to challenge her. I can address this weakness by sometimes thinking of lesson adaptations for quiet students. Regarding showing emotion, I can practice giving my son simple

positive feedback rather than doing cartwheels when he does something he knows he is already supposed to do. I can try to be more matter-of-fact in giving feedback.

The student I tutored read her books without too much trouble, and she asked and answered comprehension questions easily. She could do math facts accurately but slowly. Her spelling was good overall, although she had trouble with initial consonant blends. No matter what I did, I could not get her to spell and distinguish between words like 'slap' and 'sap.' She seemed disappointed when I showed my disappointment. According to Erickson, if I don't help her find some success, she risks developing feelings of inferiority regarding spelling. If I continued to work with her, I would need to build her sense of industry by helping her grasp initial blends, maybe using a phonics computer program that offers needed repetition and minimizes embarrassment at needing remedial help. Taylor also had trouble counting from 29-30-31, and from 39-40-41, etc. I think she would progress with some more practice and more training in noticing patterns. I expect that appealing to more of Gardner's intelligences would pay off, perhaps especially the musical/rhythmic intelligence (e.g., a catchy counting song for higher numbers). I might combine this idea with Piaget's emphasis on students learning from each other: I could partner Taylor with a student who counts well, and ask them to learn and present a counting song to the class.

For my teaching experience, I taught Taylor's first-grade class a 45-minute math lesson about breaking apart larger shapes into smaller shapes. I used some of the lesson plan and materials that the teacher herself would have used that day: math manipulatives, worksheet, matching game. For planning, I observed the teacher doing a math lesson a week earlier. I wrote out a detailed lesson plan and worked through the worksheet myself

using the manipulatives. I thought of a great hook: I gave them crackers to break into smaller shapes, which they had to identify and then eat. The lesson basically went over well. I felt gratified that some students seemed proud that they had figured out some of the questions on their own. However, I didn't anticipate that students would have so much trouble tracing small shapes (accurately enough to see their relationships to the larger shapes) inside the larger shapes, but now I can see that this would be difficult for little fingers. Also, I discovered that it's bit of a leap to go from tracing smaller shapes inside a larger shape, to drawing straight lines to divide that shape into smaller shapes (i.e., You can divide a hexagon into 6 triangles, but you can achieve the same divisions by drawing 3 long diagonal lines inside the hexagon). I don't know if this is a weakness of the instructional materials I was using, or whether I needed to spend even more time showing that drawing 3 lines inside a hexagon is the same as tracing 6 small triangles inside the hexagon. Next time, I would find out whether this lesson is the students' first exposure to these concepts, and I would find out the level at which the students are expected to master them. I felt like I needed to either take much more time teaching the concepts, or adjust my expectations and view this lesson as mainly a first exposure. In the area of classroom management, I relied too much on the classroom teacher and her assistant to help off-task and struggling students. The students needed so much help with the worksheet that I couldn't have managed alone. In preparing for future teaching, I will have to plan for students to help each other, or do shorter or easier worksheets, and assume I won't have help. I felt that the classroom teacher was unnecessarily strict until I tried keeping the students' attention. I have much to learn about managing a class of young students.