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Observation Reflection

As I walked into the classroom for my first day of observations, I was greeted with a warm “Hello!” In fact, each time that I entered a new classroom I was given the same greeting. All of the teachers were more than happy to be helping a future educator by letting me observe their teaching styles and learn new techniques to use. Through spending time in various classrooms, I have gained valuable information that I will take with me into student teaching and my future classroom.

Many of the things that we have talked about in class were illustrated for me in the classrooms that I visited. The most prominent of them was the use of word walls. Word walls are a list of words usually located on a large bulletin board on one wall of the classroom; they hold all of the words that the students should know how to read and spell at any given point of the year. In one of the last classrooms that I was in, the word wall contained not only the vocabulary words that they had learned so far, but also the word form of numbers and each of the student’s names. Word walls are very helpful for students. It is a great resource for them to use when they forget how to spell a word that they have already learned; all that they have to do is look at the wall. Word walls are used most often in the lower elementary grades when students are learning how to read and spell new words. I did not see them very often in the upper elementary grades.

Through all of the examples that I saw in different classrooms, I have learned that it is very important to make these boards visually pleasant, colorful, and easy to read. One teacher had all of the words already on the board and simply flipped each of them over as they learned them. I feel that this method can be daunting for students

because it could make the task of learning a seemingly massive amount of words appear impossible. In response, the students could get discouraged from even trying. Putting the words up as they learn them is a great way to show the students how much progress they are making. It can also be used as a “duty” that a certain student could be responsible for each week.

A couple of the classrooms that I visited were engaged in writing activities, and consequently I was able to see many of the things surrounding this topic that we discussed in class in action. One 4th grade classroom went through most of the steps of writing that we discussed early on in the semester. They brainstormed ideas of things that they could write about, wrote rough drafts, and shared them with partners as proofreading. I really enjoyed how this particular teacher gave the students examples that she had written to show them what they were going to be writing. She even had them proofread her story along with her and tell her how they would make it better. This experience showed me that it is important to take each step of the writing process one by one and provide examples. Students will then have the opportunity to ask questions about things that they are struggling with, and they will also have something to look at if they are unsure of what to do.

Another aspect of reading that was very prominent in the classrooms was independent writing. Whether it was writing stories, poems, or in journals, each lesson provided the students with an opportunity to get their thoughts down on paper. A 2nd grade classroom that I was in even had a lesson on writing with partners. I have never even considered doing an activity around partner writing, so it was really neat to watch how she developed and implemented this lesson. From what I saw walking around the classroom, the students really enjoyed being able to work together for this project. The biggest lesson that I learned from this, however, was to choose their

partners for them. This teacher allowed her students to pick their own partners which resulted in a couple of groups not getting anything done because they were too busy messing around.

The two types of reading that I saw used the most were reading aloud and buddy reading. For one reading aloud lesson, the teacher used the “popcorn reading” strategy. She did most of the reading, but every once in a while she picked one of the students to take over. I think that this was a great way to handle the book that they were reading because there was some difficult vocabulary in the section that they read that day. This style helped me to realize that even though they are in 4th grade, the students do not have to be responsible for all of the reading all of the time. It is a good thing to give them a break every so often and just let them enjoy the story through following along. However, I did like that she would stop about every other paragraph and ask questions about tough vocabulary and what was happening in the story. This is a great way to make sure that the students were really following along and not staring at the floor or off into space. She also was able to insert a minilesson review on using context clues to figure out the meaning of an unknown word. Since she knew which students would be comfortable reading the material in front of the whole class and which would not, the teacher was able to choose the confident readers to do the reading aloud and have the others answer the questions.

With buddy reading, I think that it is a great way for a strong reader to help a struggling reader. As a class read their material in pairs, I heard one little girl encourage her partner who was struggling with some of the words. She kept telling her, “Almost. You can do it!” Even though I know that not every group will be like that, this incident made me appreciate the power of buddy reading in letting a confident reader take over a teaching role with someone who is struggling. Buddy reading is also

a great way to build reading stamina because they are given more opportunities to read than reading in large groups.

Minilessons are something that the book talks about all of the time. I was able to see an impromptu minilesson first hand, and it helped me to understand what exactly a minilesson is all about. As she was teaching a follow-up lesson on the long o sound, one teacher saw that some of the words being written on the board could be “smushed” together to make a new word. So, she took the opportunity to revisit and refresh her students’ memories on compound words. First, she asked them if they remembered the meaning of a compound word. Then, she had them tell her the compound words that could be made from the words that they had listed on the board. This entire thing lasted maybe 5 minutes; I almost did not realize that she had sidetracked from the lesson. 😊 I realize now that these minilessons do not have to be elaborate or meticulously planned out. They are simply opportunities that come up in lessons to go back and brush up on old information or give them some new information. This teacher helped me to feel a little bit better about using minilessons in my classroom, and I will always remember her as a great example of how to use them.

Although I spent the majority of my observing time sitting in the back of each classroom watching the teachers, I learned a lot of important things. One thing that I am definitely going to use in my classroom is a word wall. I now know that I want it to be very colorful and pretty so that my students will enjoy looking at it. 😊 I also want to use the system of putting each word up as they are learned. To me, letting them add to the wall is a great way to get them involved and excited about learning new words. Another idea that I acquired through my observations was buddy writing. I have never seen this used before, but it is a great skill to be teaching kids. It makes

them work together to choose a topic, decide what to write about that topic, and create the final project. I think that many students do not like to write because they do not want to be responsible for every bit of information that gets put on the paper, do not know what to write about, or do not understand how to do the writing assignment. When you pair students up, it allows them to bounce ideas off of each other and provide assistance if one of them does not understand a part of the activity. Buddy as well as independent writing will be used often in my future classroom.

The episode that sticks out the most in my mind as something that I do not want to happen in my classroom came on my second day of observing. The teacher sat in a chair at the front of the classroom and created an outline on an overhead. He had the full attention of the students sitting around him, but those in the back of the classroom were playing with things under their desks or drawing. Even the one student in the back who wanted to participate was hardly ever given the chance because he did not notice her. I realized just how important it is to be up and moving around the classroom during any given lesson and want to do this in my classroom. It also showed me that I need to pay as much attention as possible to each and every student so that no matter where they are located in the classroom they are given an equal opportunity to participate. One thing that I thought of as I sat there watching the lesson was rearranging the desks every couple of weeks. This does take a little bit of time, but in the end it will be beneficial for both the students and the teacher.

As difficult as these observations were to schedule, they were very beneficial to me. I am glad I was able to have the opportunity to watch real elementary teachers in action. They gave me many great ideas and opened my eyes to a variety of ways to implement various activities. My classroom instruction and layout will be much

better because of what I have learned. Hopefully someday I will be able to show future generations of teachers what I have learned and greet them with the same warm

“Hello!”