Field Experience Reflection Paper
Kelly Harp
Professor Eastman
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Participating in the tutoring program at Laketon Elementary School was a very new and exciting experience for me. The after school tutoring program at Laketon Elementary is designed to assist fifth and sixth graders in their academic work. As a part of the Educational Psychology class at Manchester College I had the privilege to work closely with two great students. I was there to pull these students along academically, but I now realize the positive impact they also had on me.

One student I had was a fifth grade boy by the name of Trey. Unfortunately Trey and I only had about five sessions together before he stopped coming due to other obligations. However when I did work with him, I learned about some of the struggles created due to changing schools during the school year. I found that Trey had a great understanding of the majority of his schoolwork, but would randomly have no clue about other things. It was as if some information had been totally missed. For example he understood long division just fine, but did not know how to subtract time. When trying to teach him it was sometimes difficult for that reason because I did not know what he knew and did not know. I could see how that might be frustrating for the classroom teacher. Ultimately I am sure Trey felt frustrated at times as well. However, I was impressed by his stick-to-itiveness and ability to admit when he did not understand something and ask for help. Trey had a great deal of enthusiasm and as a result he reminded why I enjoy teaching. I love the joy and genuineness that children bring those around them and both of my students helped bring those characteristics to me.

Jordy was the fifth grade girl that I tutored. Jordy amazed me everyday. She was extremely intelligent and seemed more mature and confident for her age than most. I learned a great about Jordy’s past throughout our tutoring sessions together and I think that helped her become the strong girl she is. Jordy style of learning was probably what any teacher could ask
for. She rarely needed to ask for help but when she did she always knew exactly what she did not understand. Jordy would sometimes ask me for help on a problem, but would figure it out herself after she just took some time to really think about it. I can recall one time when she had confused herself on a division math problem and asked me if she had done the problem correct because it did not look right. I simply said, “Why don’t you take another look at that problem, what about it doesn’t look correct?” It only took her about twenty seconds before the light bulb went on for her and she solved the division problem with out any more hesitation. She almost always seemed to figure out her own questions. Because Jordy is such a great student and able to hold conversations naturally, I felt very comfortable and happy during every tutoring session.

At the beginning Trey, Jordy and I started out having our tutoring sessions in the band room. However it was the suggested place for us to be, I found that it was a little distracting for Trey and Jordy with all of the instruments around. I decided to move our sessions to the library where we had more space and a friendlier environment. I believe that students can do their best work where they feel most comfortable. Trey and Jordy really enjoyed being in the library and I noticed it did seem to help the effectiveness of their learning. Not only did the room have something to do with the supportive climate, but I tried to create that by our interactions and the way we talked and worked together. I always tried to be encouraging and positive. If they had the wrong answer, I always found a way to find something correct in their thinking and then move them to the proper answer. Those are just a few ways I tried to create a supportive climate because I believe that is one of the most important components to effective learning. There were also some theorists I related with when I was tutoring.

The first psychologist that influenced my tutoring sessions was Jean Piaget. Piaget dealt with organizing information in order to process it. The organized pattern is the schema and the
adaptation is accomplished by assimilation and accommodation. When Jordy was beginning the new concept of prism area, she struggled a little at first to grasp the concept. She was able to take the schema she already had in place about area and adapt it to finding the area of a prism. I noticed in everything we did were continually accommodating new information in order for it to stick and make more sense to Jordy.

The second psychologist I focused on incorporating into my lesson preparation was Bloom. Bloom has a taxonomy or hierarchal order of cognitive questions that help to differentiate the depth of the question. During a number of tutoring sessions, once Jordy had completed her homework she would spend some time reading. Whether she was reading a book or a magazine I would always make a point to ask her questions. Jordy is an excellent reader and enjoys reading a great deal. We read an article in a magazine side by side about different forms of abuse and warning signs. I asked her a series of questions each moving up Bloom’s taxonomy. I asked her questions such as: how would you summarize this article (level 1)? to how could you determine what abuse would look like in someone (level 6)? By doing this I was able to see how well she comprehended the information she had just read. She had no trouble at all. After that I had her read a more difficult article and I asked her harder questions as a way to challenge her. I found Bloom’s questions very helpful throughout the tutoring sessions and I think Jordy really enjoyed the challenge.

I also incorporated Maslow’s humanistic approach to teaching. Maslow believed that individuals have an inherent need for experiences that will help them fulfill their potential. Maslow also had a five-tiered hierarchy of needs. The third level reflected upon the need to belong and feel loved. I agree with his theory that if you feel safe and excepted as a student you are much more likely to prosper academically. I had a great deal of time to get to know Jordy
and I wanted to make sure that I created an environment where she could begin to feel accepted and loved. I took time to get to know her and ask questions about her family and friends. I wanted her to know I cared. As Jordy began to open up to me more and more I knew that she knew I cared for her. I wanted to help build up her self-esteem, which is part of the fourth level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. On the last day of our tutoring session I received the nicest card from her with her phone number inside of it. That said to me that she really felt safe and accepted by me. I have a gift for caring about people and that is why I made sure that was one of my main components for the sessions. I like to build people up and especially young people because they are so impressionable at an early age. I believe that if you teach children, and in this case Jordy, to believe in themselves they will be able to perceive further in life.

I realized many of my strength and limitations during this tutoring experience. The most noticeable strength I came across during this tutoring process was how easily and quickly I can build a strong rapport with children. Like I said earlier, Jordy confided in me with a lot of information that most people would just tell a close friend. I found it natural to teach and explain material in a variety of ways in order to get the point across in a way that Jordy could grasp it. One struggle I had was feeling behind some times. Because I was not in her classroom it was difficult for me to know what exactly she had been taught that day and how it was taught. Each day I did not know what she would necessarily need from me as far as, what homework she would need help on. However, I felt that I did a great job with being flexible. I learned to plan ahead, but make sure to have a few back up plans and stay flexible. Overall, I think because I feel called to be an educator and therefore it comes very natural to me, I did not deal with too many struggles or feel like I really hit any limitations during the tutoring sessions.
The tutoring experience for me was a very positive one. I love any opportunity I have to teach. I enjoy spending time with young people and I like the challenge that comes with not knowing what a student will bring to the table each day. I was continually amazed at the new things Jordy taught me each session and she just reminded me that I am not smarter than a fifth grader. In all honesty I look forward to teaching in the next couple years partly for that reason, the process of growing that I will experience. The tutoring process was an affirmation of my increasing passion to teach.