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Final Reflection Paper

My teaching career began in elementary school as I taught my younger sister my spelling words and multiplication tables in our basement using a small chalkboard that my dad had hung on the wall for me. Looking back, I admit that I was not a very good or patient teacher; our school sessions usually ended with me writing a big fat F on my sister's notebook paper because she got up and left before I dismissed her for "recess." Luckily for me (and my future students) I have learned many new classroom management techniques, instruction and teaching methods, differentiation, and assessment techniques that are much more effective than yelling at and failing my younger sister.

One of the most valuable learning experiences that Manchester College provided me with was placing me in multiple schools and classrooms to observe and teach. My very first education class, Intro to Teaching, was conducted at Portage Middle School in Fort Wayne; since then I have observed, taught, and worked in over eleven different schools. Through college courses such as Educational Psychology, Classroom Behavioral Management, and Adolescent Exceptional Learners and through activities and clubs such as SEA, IRC, and the Writing Center, I have had the opportunity to work with and teach first graders on up to high school juniors and even college seniors. These

experiences have given me the ability to confidently walk into a classroom of students who may or may not be eager to learn that day and teach a lesson.

Through these experiences I have also learned how important developing a relationship is with my students; often, this must happen before teaching can really occur. Students need to know and trust their educators; understand their teacher's expectations of them; and learn that no matter what they do, how they perform, or where they come from, their teacher cares about them and is willing to fight for their education. I found this to be especially true of my high school students. It was not until I introduced myself, let them ask questions about me, and continued to be polite and teach them day after day, even when their behavior was frustrating at best, that they began seeing me as their teacher. The same was true for a handful of my middle school students—one in particular that drove me crazy on a daily basis, but who I continued to work with and expect more of than he was apparently used to. By the end of my placement with him, he had performed well as a group leader, worked hard on and completed a major project, and occasionally sat through an entire class period without causing some major distraction. I was so proud of him and his progress; I knew he had it in him, he just needed a little extra push. Without developing a relationship with him, I never would have seen his potential. Before my middle school placement, I had always wanted to be a high school English teacher. Because of my experiences with students like him, I now love the idea of teaching middle school English.

Besides discovering my love of middle school students, one of the ways I have changed and grown during teacher preparation is that I now focus more on the human and relationship element of being an educator. My view of teaching as a first year student

mostly centered around my content area. I loved literature; I still do, but now I love students, which is something that I never had the opportunity to experience until I began regularly interacting with students during teacher preparation. Creating and maintaining a professional yet caring relationship with my students is now a top priority and goal as soon as I walk into a classroom because I believe it is imperative for learning to occur.

Teaching also has to occur every time I walk into a classroom; my job is not to be their friend but to be a mentor and to facilitate learning. As far as the goals and objectives of the teacher education program are concerned, I looked at them as the tools and skills I needed to be an effective teacher. I knew that curriculum, assessment, relationships, and classroom environment are the basic component of every classroom. Even though I have been working on my portfolio all four years, it was not until my January Methods Course and student teaching that I was really able to understand, practice, and execute the competencies outlined by the department of education.

One of my first goals as mentioned before was to establish relationships and an effective classroom environment conducive to learning. In order to do this I needed to demonstrate sensitivity for diversity and accept and appreciate my students' unique talents, strengths, and struggles, and I also had to effectively communicate my expectations, procedures, assignments, and content knowledge to my students. I tried to teach my content and diversify my classroom in as many ways as possible: I planned lessons in collaborative teams such as the eighth grade Social Studies and English team at Edgewood Middle School and with Katie Moore as the special educator assigned to my first period class; I had the students work individually, in groups, and in stations; I created graphic organizers, overheads, and direction sheets to help my students

understand and organize the content; I assigned role play, group and individual projects with plenty of options to differentiate between learners, as well as writing, reading, and drawing tasks all while incorporating state standards; I also incorporated technology such as using an overhead and smart board, showing clips and films relating to the material, and using resources such as the Internet and PowerPoint. To assess student learning, I created rubrics, checklists, worksheets, graphic organizers, used discussion, and gave quizzes, tests, and essay assignments. I used these assessment tools to learn where my students were struggling and to determine what I needed to re-teach and review. I actually liked having the twenty four objectives as a guide; I knew I had to spice up my teaching and create and try different things to meet all of them which expanded my abilities and comfort zone.

Objective C3 and C4 deal with teaching interdisciplinary instruction and addressing subjects matter from various points of view. My liberal arts education really came into play while meeting these two objectives. Not only was I able to apply my content area knowledge, but I was also able to incorporate music, art, and history into my lessons as well. For example, during the immigration unit at my middle school placement, the students studied the history of the United States in terms of immigration and looked at different cultures using art, dance, food, and customs. At my high school placement, we looked at the history and culture of Elizabethan England while studying Shakespeare and the theatre. In both placements, I was able to pull from general education course such as Western Civilization and Experiencing the Arts; English courses such as Shakespeare and World Literature; Communication courses such as Theatre and Society; and Education Courses such as Creative Dramatics, Classroom

Behavioral Management, Educational Psychology, Adolescent Exceptional Learners, and Middle School. It was gratifying to see how all aspects of my education at Manchester College came together to help me become an informative, effective, and well-rounded teacher. My liberal arts education will definitely be put to good use; I was able to bring my knowledge of different subjects and cultures into my classroom; broadening my students' world views is a large part of my job as an educator.

My education and experiences at Manchester College, especially during student teaching, have really helped me to grow and develop as a person. I have a deeper faith in my and my students' abilities and talents and the God who gave us our talents, a more defined purpose in life—to serve my students and help them grow and develop into productive and conscientious members of society—and a greater desire to continue my education both formally and experientially. I realize that even though I will be an educated college graduate, there is still so much to learn. I wish to help my students discover knowledge for themselves and guide them by the knowledge I possess, while still thirsting for more. I believe that is a genuine characteristic of an educated person—to always know that there is more to know and more than one way of seeing, perceiving, and knowing and to possess a desire to continually seek that knowledge.

That belief is the foundation of one of my top three goals after student teaching: to eventually return to college to earn my Master's degree in English. I hope to attain my other two goals in a more immediate fashion. I wish to continually present, create, and use new and innovative lessons and projects to capture the interest and utilize the strength of every student and to establish a working classroom behavior management plan that teaches responsibility and helps to instill in the students a sense of ownership of their

own behavior, work, and education. I feel like I was able to manage the classrooms at my student teaching placements, but I have yet to truly implement my own style and ideas. I know it may be rough at first and may require several drafts, but I look forward to shaping a welcoming classroom for all students. I look forward to my own classroom with a sense of fear, awe, and excitement, because parents and the community are sending me their greatest resource and treasure to educate, support, and impact. I cannot think of a greater honor or responsibility.