

Classroom Assessments

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Education 130

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April 1, 2007

The field experience in Education 130 has exposed me to various teaching strategies. Each school I observed was different because they had their own beliefs about how children learn best. Not all schools are going to have the same curriculum but if in the same state they will abide by the same state standards.

For our field trip, the first school I visited was Whitney Young Early Childhood School. At this school, the curriculum was based upon the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Teachers within this environment are centered upon the children's ideas and they greatly encourage questions. Another quality of this school that is noticeable is the display of artwork. The walls were all decorated with paintings and drawings, which were all created by children six years old or younger. This school does not plan every day out but allows each day to flow accordingly to the childrens' needs.

At Whitney Young, I observed a kindergarten classroom. The children were involved in a group activity when I entered the room. One of the teachers asked the students "who are you alike?" Then she had them form groups with their peers whom they shared a commonality with. All of the groups then stood up and told the class what they had in common. Some of the similarities included wearing the same color of shirt or pants, wearing glasses, or being a boy or girl. This whole activity was carried out to demonstrate the meaning of the word attribute, which means having the same thing.

Next the students split into two groups, one staying in the classroom and the other going to a different one. The group that stayed in the room retrieved their journals from their cubbies and gathered in one of the corners. The teacher then began to talk about money. She would hold up a coin, such as a dime, and ask how much it is worth and what it was called. After they had reviewed all the coins they knew, the teacher

introduced the quarter. Each student was given a quarter and they all examined the year in which their quarter was made and which president appeared on the front. One girl made an astonishing discovery, that all the quarters had 9 for the second number for the year they were minted. Next the teacher instructed the children to do their “quarter trick.” The students then placed their quarter under a clean page in their journal and colored over it with a colored pencil.

While the students were working with their quarters, I took notice of the walls and set up of the classroom. On each table were crayons, colored pencils, and markers, which most likely helped in creating all the drawings that were displayed on the walls. Along one side of the wall, toward the middle of the room, was the play area. Within the play area were kitchen equipment, clothes for dress up, and books. The children had a variety of activities to choose from when they had free time.

The children here are given opportunities to express themselves through play, drawing, and everyday learning activities. In the classroom that I observed, about half the students were African American and the other half were Caucasian. I did not see any students single out one another but embrace each other as friends.

I learned many things from this school that will help me in my future career as a teacher. One thing I learned was that children should be given time to express themselves through artwork, so colored pencils and crayons should be placed on tables or within the reach of children. Another thing I discovered was that if you want to be on a more personal level with your students you should sit on the floor with them. Lastly, I learned that students should be encouraged to ask questions, so they understand what they are learning and why they are learning that particular concept or idea.

The second school that I visited on our field trip was the Bunche Montessori Early Childhood School. At this school they teach according to the Montessori method.

Children ranging from the ages of three to six are placed in one classroom and are all taught the same curriculum. If a younger student is struggling, then an older student is encouraged to help. Other qualities of this program promote independence, self-directed learning, a calm environment, and at the center of the learning process is children.

At Bunche Montessori I observed a classroom that was engrossed in independent learning. The students were all working on different activities that suited their level of education. All the students were quiet and respected their peer's space. Above the chalkboard were signs labeled respect kindness, listen, and share, which were all present in this room. One three-year-old girl was working on matching a pattern on a card with coordinating button colors and shapes. As soon as she would finish one, she would begin another. Other children were building with blocks and some were having snack time.

The classroom was neatly arranged with labels for all the various areas, such as the practical life area. This area contained beads, beans, seeds, cups, and bowls. I assume that this area was used for measuring and counting. Next to the door was a cabinet that contained pouches that held pictures of all the children. It was the child's responsibility to place a popsicle stick in the pouch when they arrived to school. Independence and responsibility are being promoted throughout this everyday task. Additionally, there was a bathroom in the classroom. The children were allowed to go at their leisure, which also stimulated independence.

For the next activity, the teacher asked her students to gather in a circle. The children were working with the letter "y" and the sound that it makes. She gave examples

of words that started with “y,” such as yo-yo, yarn, and yak. Then she said that anyone in group P-4 who brought something yellow for share time should go get it and bring it to the circle. One girl brought a yellow crayon from home. She explained that she used it to color and then she was allowed to call on two people who had questions about her yellow crayon. “Do you have a lot of crayons?” was one question. Another student brought a yellow stuffed dog. He told us that he liked to play with his dog and that he slept with it at night. The children who brought yellow items were proud of them but did not show off their article.

All the posters in the classroom dealt with rules, shapes, and colors. There were no posters that displayed pictures of children except those in the classroom. This classroom was made up mostly of Caucasians but consisted of a few Mexican-Americans and Japanese-Americans. From what I saw, this classroom promoted a multicultural environment and did not look down upon those who were of different ethnic backgrounds.

I have learned three things from my observation at this school. The first thing I learned is that in a classroom ranging from three to six-year-olds, it is possible to stimulate a quiet and calm environment. I also learned that not all children are going to learn at the same pace, so it might benefit a child to move forward with a concept. Lastly, if you want your students to be more independent you have to allow room for self-regulating activities.

After visiting both these schools and the preschool classroom at Bluffton-Harrison Elementary School, I can see that each school had different teaching philosophies. Whitney Young promoted a curriculum that was centered on the children’s ideas but was

not fully planned out in advance. Bunche Montessori promoted independence and an orderly environment. Bluffton-Harrison planned their curriculum in advance but encouraged independence to some degree.

Self-directed learning was stressed at the Montessori school. The classroom was made up of children ranging from three to six years of age. Each student was on a different level, so they would work at their own pace. At Bluffton-Harrison, the students ranged from ages three to five but were considered preschool-aged no matter how old they were. All the students participated in the same activities and if someone needed extra help the teacher or assistant would devote their attention to that student. Whitney Young also differed from both these school in that the teachers would interact with the students as though they were friends. The teacher and her assistants would enter into dialogues with the children and offer them opportunities for discovering and reflecting upon experiences.

All three schools that I visited also had some commonalities. They were not anti-bias toward people of different ethnicities. Bluffton-Harrison was the only school that did not have any students of diverse backgrounds but they displayed posters that promoted the dissimilar cultures. Other similarity was that each classroom had at least two or more adults, which allowed for more one-on-one time.

Not all schools are going to be alike. The diversity that separates them is what attracts some parents to the programs. State standards will be the same for all schools but how the information is related to the students will vary. Additionally, children have different learning styles, so one program might work better for one student than another.