

EDU 390 Practicum Paper

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Introduction

“I feel my relationship with students has to be based on love. That means sometimes it’s very joyful and sometimes it’s not. I try to treat them as I would my own kids -- sometimes they need a hug and sometimes they need a knock upside the head, so to speak” (Nieto, 2013, p. 120). For my practicum experience I had the joy of working at the Light of Christ Kid’s Club after school program this previous school year. During my time there I had my own classroom where I was in charge of managing and educating 17 kids, first through third grade. This opportunity revealed to me what it truly means to build each relationship with the students out of love. There had to be love when I was building these relationships with the students at Kid’s Club because otherwise we wouldn’t have built as strong a safe place or classroom community. Some days in the classroom were challenging when dealing with different diverse situations, but ended up always being rewarding. Within this paper I am going to share several culturally diverse experiences I’ve had dealing with demographics of population, environment and instructional adaptations, successful interventions, connections to standards and the University of Mary’s mission statement, and lastly a summary and future application of all things I’ve learned at the Kids Club program.

Demographics of Population

The overall demographics of my classroom population were pretty diverse. As I mentioned before I was in a classroom of first through third graders, and within the group there were students who struggled with behavioral issues, and different socioeconomic backgrounds. At first I didn’t think that it would make a difference when it came to working with kids ages first through third grade. I quickly realized that the age gap really did make a difference when creating the classroom community. The third graders often thought the first graders were

annoying and “ganged up” on them during games or when we made crafts. At first I didn’t know how I should handle the situation, but after a while I used the strategy of purposefully grouping students in pairs to help form the relationship. As the year went on, I saw friendships blossom between the first and third graders and it almost became like a mentorship program.

The next form of diversity I worked with within the classroom was a couple of students who struggled with social emotional life skills and learning how to create relationships with their peers. According to Osher, Sidana, and Kelly, “learners need to learn to manage their emotions and relationships” (Taylor, 2020, slide 9). At first when I came into the classroom, these two students had a lot of inconsistency in their after school classroom routine. There were new teachers coming in and out which created a problem for them and a lack of structure. One of the students struggled more with regulating their emotions during transition time and the other student struggled more with regulating their temper. As the year went on and I gained more trust with these students, I was able to help them with learning techniques on how to regulate themselves better during the after school problem. For the student who struggled with transitions, I set timers for when we were going to change to something else and gave them a visual aid. For the student who struggled with staying in appropriate behavior, or “green self regulation zone,” I helped them work through different self soothing techniques until they found the one that worked best. The student tried taking breaths, a reward system, the one that worked best was removing themselves from the group and reading a book for a few minutes to calm down. As my time at Kid Club went on, both of these students had worked hard and grown tremendously on learning how to better control their emotions.

Although all of these students attended a private catholic school, their socioeconomic backgrounds were very diverse. I had a student whose parents were both surgeons and then a

student who was in foster care living with their granddad because their parents could not be in the picture. I also had a student who had two moms who were married both working retail, and a student whose parents and grandparents all lived in the same house with them all working various construction jobs. I didn't realize that just because these kids all were enrolled in a private school that they would have such different socioeconomic backgrounds, it was really eye opening. Some of the students talked about all the places they've vacationed, while some have never left Bismarck. I worked to create a safe environment that we were all able to share our experiences, hopes, and dreams. I made sure that student's knew it was okay that we all haven't had the same experiences in life, that's what makes us unique. Previous to my time at Kids Club, I would have never thought that the Light of Christ school system could have so much diversity in the demographics of the population.

Environmental Adaptations

The area I was a teacher in was a second grade school classroom, so I was not able to make many changes to the physical environment. Since changing the physical environment wasn't an option I was able to create a safe, open, and fun environment. As an educator I think making personal connections with the students so they are able to feel comfortable to communicate with me and other students is the most important thing, besides kid's safety. The author Treuer stated, "Communication requires a safe space for discourse, an opportunity for genuine connection, and authentic, reliable information" (Treuer, 2012, p. 5). I worked to create that safe space in my classroom by remaining calm when there were unwanted behaviors, modeling kindness to my students, taking time to talk with each one of them during snack time or games, smiling often, following through with consequences, and being vulnerable by telling the students that I was sad or disappointed with how they were acting (See Appendix A). All of

these things helped me create a better environment for the classroom since these students had several different teachers coming in and out previous in the year.

Instructional Adaptations

As I mentioned previously the students that were in my classroom didn't have a regular teacher that was with them before I came, so there was not a lot of structure for them. I learned quickly that I needed to change my instructional strategies in order for the students to have a better learning experience. My main job was to make sure that all of the students finished their homework before they were allowed to play games or go outside, which was always a challenge for them to accomplish. So one of the main instruction adaptations I made was set reading/free writing/finish your homework time.

Before I had come up with the strategy of reading, writing, and homework time, the students would come into the classroom, grab a snack, run around everywhere, grab all sorts of games, and talk really loudly. I could never get the students to settle down enough to ask them if they had homework they needed to complete before they could play games or go outside. When I implemented this instructional time I gave them choices to and various prompts if they didn't have homework to complete. Some of the prompts I gave them were to write a card or draw a picture for a priest or seminarian, a family member, or a teacher, write about their favorite memory, draw a picture of their family, or draw a picture of their favorite season (See Appendix B). They also had a choice to pick a book to read from the classroom library. I always looked at their work or asked them to tell me something they learned from their book before we moved onto the next thing. This helped me see if the student was actually engaged and staying on task. I also was able to make more personal connections with them through this process. The students seemed to adapt this strategy well and it also seemed to help students to relax and calm down for

about fifteen minutes before they played games and went outside.

Successful Interventions

At Kid's Club, family and parent involvement was highly important as well as inviting their school chaplain into our classroom. I was able to interact with several parents but there was one family that stood out to me most. In the demographics of population section I mentioned that there was a student I had who struggled with self regulation. This student's parents and I relationship grew close throughout the semester as we worked together to create a plan to help their child. One of the most rewarding times during my experience was after the child had thrown a tantrum about losing a game that they started to kick the flex seating balls around in the classroom. Although it was a frustrating situation, I remained calm, and later that evening I was able to have a nice conversation with their parents about what had happened. The next day the student came back into the classroom and made me an apology card (See Appendix C). I knew that because I had a good relationship with the student's parents, the three of them talked about the situation at home and the student knew what they did wrong. After this instance, the child never did that again in the classroom and the parents continued to check in on what was happening in the classroom. Parent involvement is so important and the relationship will continue to grow between you and the parent as long as you remain open and honest with how their child is doing since the common goal is always to help the child.

The other intervention I incorporated was visits from their school chaplain. I think it is important for students at the Light of Christ school system to create a community that involves the priests. The students are able to see that they are common people and someone to look up to. The young men in the room are able to realize that they too could become a priest someday, God willing. The school chaplain was able to come into the classroom before the school year and

after school program got cut short from Coronavirus. He came in to thank the students for the pictures and cards they had made him and just to have a conversation with them during snack time. Bringing in the school chaplain helped the students see that he could be a resource for them in the future if they are struggling with something and need someone to talk to. Our priests are always willing to talk to us whenever we need and they will continually pray for their people. I was happy that I was able to bring in the school chaplain to give the students a chance to get to know him better so they could feel more comfortable going to him if they ever needed.

Connections

During my experience with the cultural diversity practicum, I was able to reflect on our class's standards and also on the University of Mary's mission statement. The standard that I thought was most played out during this experience was "ICSI.2.S1: Create a safe, equitable, positive, and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued" (Taylor). I was able to meet this standard because I worked with the students to make the classroom a positive, safe, and equal learning environment for them. I always made sure that each child's needs were being met and if something wasn't working out for them, we worked together to better the circumstances. All of the students in my classroom worked together to support each other if someone wasn't done with their homework so they could all move onto the games or go outside after their reading time. Also, the students were all treated equally, or fairly, the whole time that I was there whether they were in my classroom or if they were outside playing. The students all had the same rules and they all knew the expectations I had of them. This standard was followed in the everyday routines of my time at Kid's Club.

The next connection to the University's mission statement, "The University of Mary exists to serve the religious, academic and cultural needs of the people in this region and

beyond” (University of Mary). I fulfilled this mission statement because I helped children religiously, academically, and culturally. The students continued to learn about religion when I had the students write to different priests or seminarians. I always explained to them a little more of what a priest does or what seminarians are. They also had the opportunity to speak with the school chaplain and get to continue to grow their relationship with him. Academically the students worked on their reading and writing skills by having time each day to read or write. They were given the opportunity to have writing prompts and also free writing experiences. Lastly, I met the children’s cultural needs by treating each student equally and also sharing experiences we have had with each other or ones that we hope to get to do someday. The University of Mary’s mission statement was practiced even at my practicum experience.

Summary and Future Application

In conclusion, I had a great experience from the Light of Christ Kid’s Club program. I was able to learn more about cultural diversity in classrooms, learn how to create or change environment or instructional strategies, and connect my experience with the course’s standards and the University of Mary’s mission statement. The biggest thing that I took away from this experience was my relationships built with the students and the parents. I will forever carry these aspects with me through my teaching career. I saw that creating personal relationships with the students helped them trust me more and work harder in the class. The students also listened to me better as we created those relationships. Creating relationships with the parents helped us work together more on making a better environment for their children. I was also able to talk with them more freely on what was going on during their home life that might affect what is happening at school. I will be forever grateful for this experience because it taught me how to be a better educator in the future.

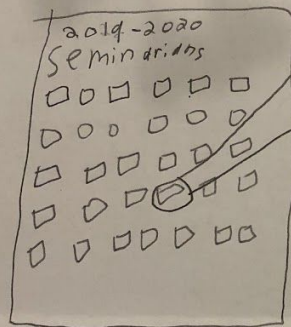
Appendix

Appendix A

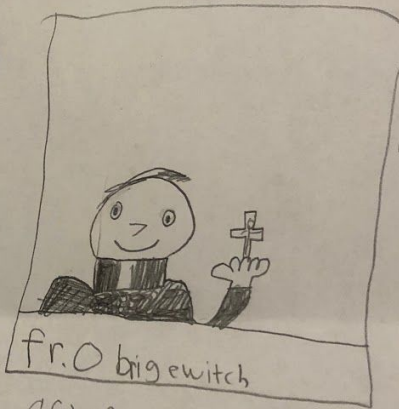


Appendix B

Dear Logan Obriewitch I hear you are already in
Theology II already! Keep working hard Logan! Keep pushing
to your goal and accomplish it! I know you will be a
very good priest, and maybe even a bishop! Keep working
toward your goal and receive Holy Orders!



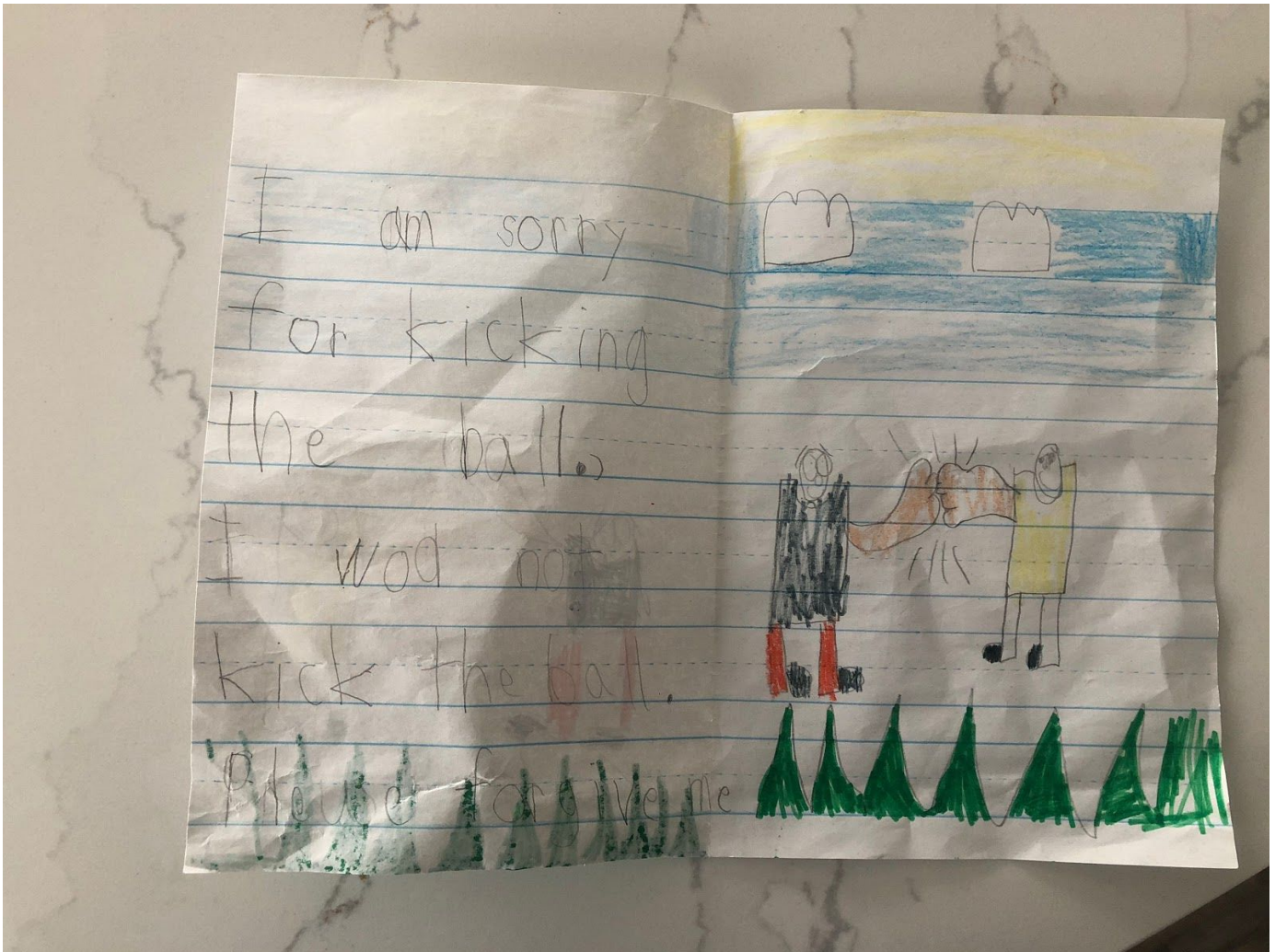
Before



from your friend, Tommy Carlson.

P.S. Your sister, Hannah, is my after school teacher!

Appendix C



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