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Major Observation Report

From September 12th, 2023 to October 12th, 2023, I got the opportunity and privilege to work with a fifth-grade classroom. I had a general idea of what to expect, but so much more had happened in such a short amount of time. Week to week I was learning things, not only about teaching, but simple facts I would not have thought about otherwise. For example, I learned that in 1903, Theodore Roosevelt visited Yosemite for a camping trip. Would I have known this without spending time with fifth graders? No, I would not. Even though this particular lesson was in Social Studies, I got to experience all different lessons ranging from English, Science, Math, and even social emotional lessons. I would not trade my time in this classroom for the world and this is why.

During my first week in my mentor teacher's classroom, I stayed in the back and observed so I could get used to the classroom. I would speak up a little bit, but only when I was asked questions. I was able to observe right off the bat that the students were interested in my life and what I had to say. On the very first day, my mentor teacher had me introduce myself and share a couple of things about myself. Once I brought up the fact that I had a brother in sixth grade (one year above the mentor classroom), I saw all of their eyes light up as they tried to guess who he was. My mentor teacher also wanted to test the waters of my knowledge and put me on the spot on the first day. He asked me to explain to the class the difference between longitude and latitude. I had no idea but took a guess since I had a fifty percent chance of being

correct in my explanation. However, I gave the class the wrong information. My mentor teacher had to correct me. Another day, I was asked to explain how culture works in America, and on the spot, I used the metaphor of an agate. An agate is a rock made up of a bunch of different rocks so I talked about how America is the rock itself made up of a bunch of different cultures.

During my second week with my mentor teacher, I was able to have discussions with him about different SEPs, as well as finalize a plan for the lesson I would later teach in week four. I asked my mentor teacher about different methods of teaching that he uses and he gave me an amazing amount of information back. He spoke with me about GoFormative, which is an online platform that helps him understand where the class is as a whole. He will assign pre-assessments that help him grasp where the class's understanding is before he starts to teach a new unit. He will switch up his teaching style depending on the class's understanding. I observed, throughout all five weeks, the flexibility he had throughout different units and topics discussed. When I asked my mentor teacher about his communication styles, he said that since he is teaching students who are about to enter middle school, he wants them to learn to take more responsibility. Of course, he will meet with parents at the beginning of the year for conferences but leaves it up to the student to be independent when it comes to completing at-home assignments. He also does "hall talks" which gives him a chance to have private conversations with his students about anything. The conversations can vary from behavior changes to a high five for a job well done on the most recent project. I like the idea of this because it will eventually grow more trust in the teacher from the students. This week as well, I was able to obtain different lesson plans to help me start to work on the lesson I would be teaching.

In week three, I was able to observe differentiated learning throughout the classroom. About half of the students in the students were more advanced than the others, leaving my

mentor teacher to struggle to find different ways to challenge all students. He has found it most beneficial to name his more advanced students “Triangle Group” and give them more challenging homework so he can test their knowledge more. I spent the whole day Friday this week with my class and I think I learned a lot more than they did. Right away, I observed a large respect factor that my mentor teacher has engraved in his students’ minds. None of the students were able to sit down until he had walked in and started his morning routine. He comes in and says “Good morning class” to which in turn, the students respond “Good morning Mr. B.” After that, all students turn towards the flag in order to recite the Pledge Of Allegiance. Then, students were allowed to sit down.

In my fourth week, I was able to teach my lesson on Thursday, and it went very smoothly. My lesson lasted roughly forty minutes and from what my mentor teacher had told me, all of the students were engaged the entire time. I wish I would have been able to let them have group discussions but other than that, I am very happy with how it turned out. All of the students, but one, told me that they understood what I was teaching them. Of course, it was not perfect, but I do not know of any teachers that are. I feel a connection with my class and I believe that also helped tremendously. If I had not known any of the students, I do not believe the lesson would have gone as it did. After my lesson was done, I felt an overwhelming sensation of “This is where I belong” and that feeling alone confirmed to me why I should be a teacher.

I spent my fifth week reflecting upon the past four. I knew when I first entered the classroom, I wanted to be a teacher and that my heart was set on that, but my reasoning as to “why” had been scarce. But in my fifth week, nearing the end of my time with the children I had helped, I felt bittersweet that I had to leave and continue in my education career. I had learned so much in that class. From PLCs, 125 hours a year of reflection, all the way to the fact that

teachers actually continue their education all the time. I learned that teachers learn and grow with their students. I found this reassuring in a sense, not just as a student, but for when I am a teacher as well. I am someone who likes to put in my all and go the extra mile for students, and improving my techniques inside of the classroom will help me with my urges to do so.

One instance with the students that I think about quite often is when a student gave me a birthday card after only knowing me for roughly two days. She had drawn a picture of me sitting in the corner holding paper and I found the picture to be bittersweet. I was originally bitter because I felt like that is how all of the students saw me, someone who just sits in the corner, and I wanted to make more of an impact in their lives. However, the more I thought about it, the general action of giving me a card was sweet. It showed how much this little girl cared for me and the fact that it was my birthday. It helped me reshape my thinking into “these students care about impressing me as much as I care about impressing them” and I used that mindset throughout the rest of the experience in the class. On my final day in the classroom, I was handed a large goodbye card that the students had put together. They wrote me a note telling me how thankful they were for me as well as all of the things they loved about me. This class has given me the reasoning that I have been searching for. I want to be a teacher so I can experience a class similar to this one.

My entire experience inside of this class was amazing. I learned so much about the world of education and what it means to me. I plan on continuing to go back and visit this class when I do not have school but they do. I had formed such a strong bond with every single one of the students and it is hard saying goodbye to that. I can only hope that I made as big of an impact in their lives as they did for me. And with that being said, I say thanks to not only my mentor teacher but my students as well.