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Diversity Practicum Reflection

While reflecting on the cultural diversity practicum, I realized how grateful I am to have the opportunity to take a further look into nontraditional classrooms and experience them firsthand. The practicum was a bit of a whirlwind, gaining vast amounts of new knowledge each day. The days went by so fast that reflecting on the experience is a great way to store all the new information. Going into the three-day practicum, I assumed we would be exposed to racial and cultural diversity, but it was so much more than that. We were ultimately introduced to racial and cultural diversity, along with different forms of schools and different methods of teaching and learning.

Most of my experiences in elementary schools have been in the upper elementary grades. I thought this would be a good opportunity to get classroom experience in a lower grade, which lead me to the first-grade wing. I was placed in Ms. Eastvold's first-grade classroom. Ms. Eastvold is a Caucasian teacher who taught in Alaska before teaching at Oak View Elementary School. Her teaching history is with preschool and early childhood, and she hopes to one day return to early childhood education where they work on emotions and social skills. I noticed that all the staff we were introduced to on our tour were Caucasian women, besides one African American woman and two Caucasian male educators. I was extremely impressed with the school during our walkthrough. The school was in a nice community, it was in great condition, and the staff were extremely welcoming.

As Ms. Eastvold and I greeted the students when they were entering the classroom, I noticed that the student's races included: Caucasian, African American, Asian, Latino, and more that I could not specifically pinpoint. Ms. Eastvold's class is composed of 29 students, with 16

girls and 13 boys. Race was not the only aspect of diversity seen in the classroom. Four of the students had Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD) but had not been tested yet for special education. This being so, these four students do not have paras. This environment puts a ton of work and pressure on Ms. Eastvold's hands. She is responsible for 29 student's education while giving these four students the attention they need. I asked her why these students have not yet been tested for special education. She told me that Oak View Elementary School does not need another African American boy in their special education classroom. She is trying to work with them and get their emotions regulated so they can succeed without the extra assistance.

Throughout the day I helped set up the room for October, helped students with their assignments, and read the class "Last Stop on Market Street." I was then asked by Ms. Eastvold if I could assist one of her EBD students for the remainder of the day. Initially, the student was hesitant to get their work done and would rather play with the fidgeting tools at their desk. After conversing with the student about their interests and hobbies, a connection was formed. After that bond was made between us the student became motivated and eager to get their work done. Throughout the day I saw a major transformation in the students' work ethic and classroom respect. In the morning, the student was noisy and talkative when Ms. Eastvold was talking, but by the end of the day, the student was respectful and remained quiet at their desk. Ms. Eastvold thanked me at the end of the day for working so hard with the student. She told me that her EBD students just need a little more one-on-one time and once that connection is formed and trust is established, those students succeed.

Observing classroom management without the assistance of paras opened my eyes to the diversity that can be seen in a classroom. Diversity is not just about differences in race and culture, it can also be seen through students' behaviors and their specific learning needs. I was

extremely influenced by my experience in Ms. Eastvold's classroom at Oak View Elementary School. I feel compelled to return to Ms. Eastvold's classroom and work with her EBD students. The main thing I learned through my experience at Oak View Elementary School is how much patience and work it takes to run a classroom of 29 first graders, four of them with Emotional Behavior Disorders.

The tour of Minnesota Connections Academy online public charter school was shocking. I went into the meeting room with an open mind about online education. We were informed that most students choose Minnesota Connections if they are an NCAA athlete in training, suffered a traumatizing social situation, if they are an actor or an actress, or if they have anxiety/depression. I believe students choose online schooling because of a traumatizing social situation or whose parents encourage them to do online schooling are missing out on developing a healthy lifestyle, communication techniques, and relationships with peers. I left the presentation closed-minded on how this type of schooling is only effective for a portion of their 2,500 students.

Minnesota Connections Online Academy greatly impacted my knowledge about diversity in the classroom. This was my first time being exposed to an online K-12 public school. Everything about the school was diverse, from the teacher's role to the student's role. The teachers teach everything from a cubicle desk and students learn from online lessons and material sent to their homes. I still cannot fathom how different this form of schooling is when compared to a traditional school. My main takeaway from the tour of Minnesota Connections Online Academy is that this form of school only benefits a small percentage of students. I believe it would benefit students who have autism and who frequently travel to pursue a career (i.e. actor/actress, athlete). I am still in awe that Minnesota Connections educators believe that education is turning online and that we should be prepared to teach the way they do someday. I

left this presentation with many questions about the future of education and how their students transition from an online school to college or jobs that require face to face interactions.

I could summarize my experience at the Avalon School as mind-blowing. I was extremely intrigued by the project-based charter school during the presentation. I found it incredible how the school does not have administration and how students complete each Minnesota standard by creating a project. I was unimpressed with the lack of structure before school started. For example, during our student-led tour, students were laying down in the hallways and at some moments we had to step over the students to get through the hallway. I appreciate how this school creates a positive learning environment for many students, but I wonder how the students would succeed in a college environment where classes are structured as a lecture, notes are taken and studied, and tests are completed.

I believe that this school is the epitome of a diverse school. The school's environment is extremely casual, with students addressing teachers by their first name and walking in and out of class when they please. The student body also shows diverse characteristics. The school is a "safe zone" for students to express their style, sexuality, and identity. I felt like I was completely immersed in a diverse environment. The main thing I learned from the tour of the Avalon School is that students will succeed and enjoy school when they are in a setting where they feel most comfortable. During our Q&A with three students from the school, they all agreed that this school makes a wonderful environment for learning.

Throughout the diversity practicum, I learned that I did not know about the forms of diversity seen in schools. I was blind to the fact that diversity could include the forms of school, ways information was taught, exceptionalities, and gender identity. Diversity in schools is so much more than race and culture. The experience I had made a tremendous impact on my

knowledge about the lives of culturally diverse students. The conversations I had with these students made the biggest impact on my base knowledge about diversity in schools. I believe this practicum made a considerable impact on my growth as an educator. It made me aware that not all students learn their best in a traditional classroom. Some students may learn best through project-based or online schools. As a future educator, I am now aware of the diversity students bring to a classroom, and the diversity a school can provide for its students.