

Diversity Practicum

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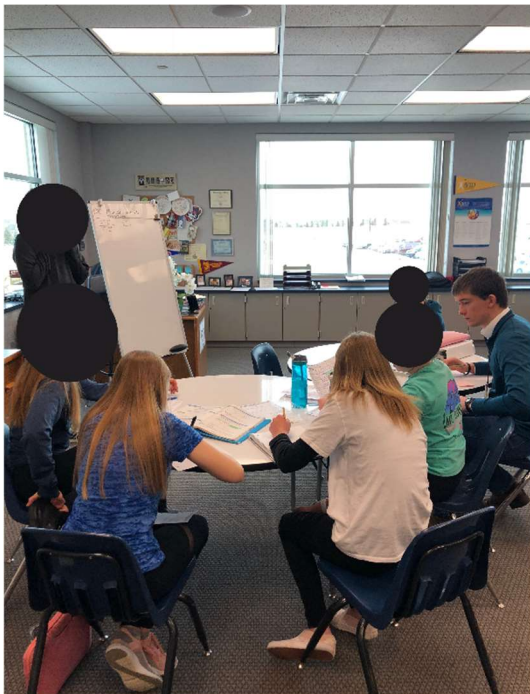
Diversity Practicum

For my Cultural Diversity Practicum, I worked with AVID tutoring in the Bismarck Public School system. I got placed in Horizon Middle School on Mondays and Wednesdays from 8:30 to about 11:40. Throughout this paper I intend to go over what the practicum demographics included, the environment that I was in, what was done instructionally for different students, talk about stuff beyond just the tutorials that I was a part of, and discuss what standards were met in my hours at the school.

The demographics of the groups that I was working with originally didn't seem all that different from what I had worked with in the past, but this time I was able to talk with my supervisor more in order to learn more about a large number of the students that I had worked with. I worked in Horizon Middle School with students in 7th and 8th grade. During the day we had four different sections of students come through the room and each one had a question to be asked and solved. Some of these classes had more girls than boys where we as the tutors had to make sure there were enough boys in each group. This was never completely flipped as there were definitely a good number of girls in each of the groups of the kids. The school is on the north side of Bismarck and has a higher population of white students, but there were several of different ethnicities with one African American and some Native Americans in the classes as well. I worked closely with a student on a specialized learning plan. I made sure to have her in my group to help her understand her question on a deeper level. "However, diversity is more than race, culture, language, and immigrant status" (Nieto, 2013, p. 139). I agree with this statement because it means that there is a difference between every person not based on the physical characteristics they poses.

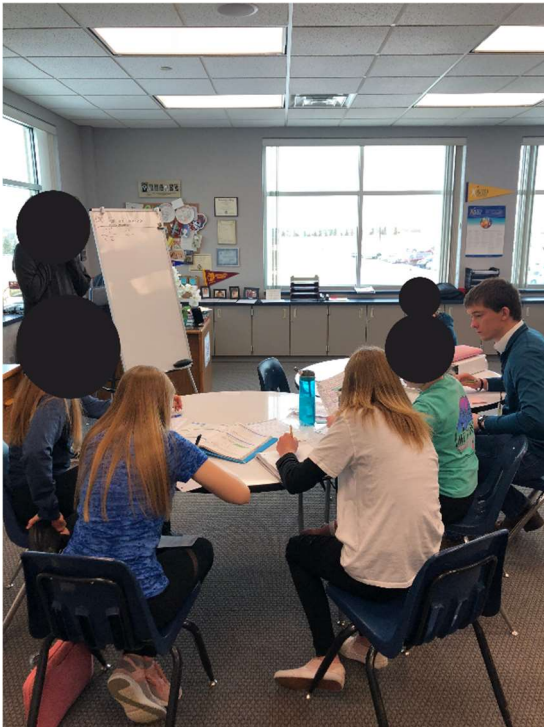
AVID works with kids to get them ready to go to college and identifies students that are in need of a boost. Many of these student's parents haven't been to college before and/or are the middle of the road students that need the boost to understand the material in their classes. AVID works to close the gap in society like Nieto says,

“Societal barriers to equal education have existed since the beginning of what is now the United States” (Nieto, 2013, p. 9). In the program they push students to break free from the stereotypes and make something of themselves. This let me see a different social class that had struggles unlike my own which was an eye opener in many ways. Even still you could see a difference in some of the student's status. For the most part one could not tell who was and who wasn't better off than the other. Most kids hold themselves about the same especially in that grade it seems. This didn't stop me from seeing some of the differences from how they were. It also didn't hurt that my advising teacher would tell me about some of the students. From some of the things that she would tell me would really let me have a better understanding about some of the students.



During days that the students had tutorials the room was set up in a specific way to help all the students see what was going on in their group. The room was divided into three different sections, so each group had a whiteboard to work on. In the picture to the left you can see the group I led and the one behind me led by another tutor. To do this there were two moveable whiteboards that were brought to the other groups in the room. They sectioned off as much as

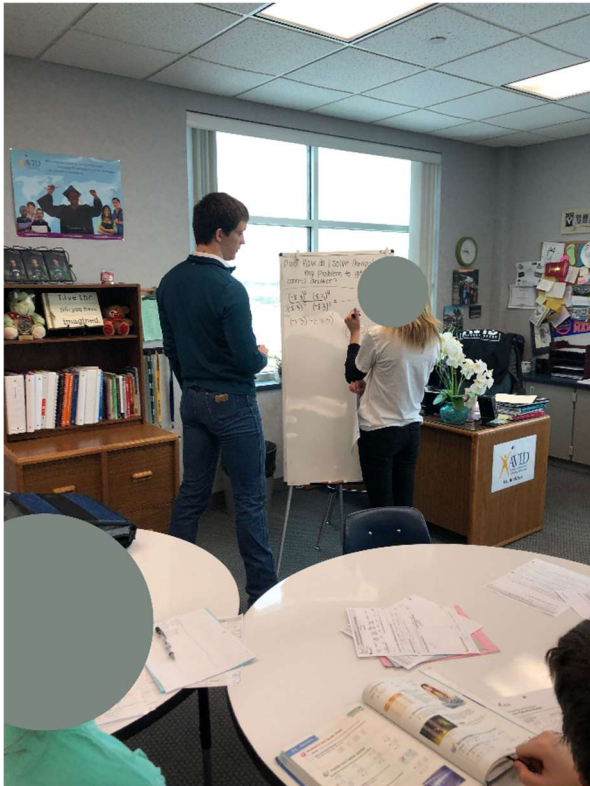
they could in order to help all the students focus on what the presenter in their group was working on. There were also tables in the room with a whiteboard as the top of them which was a great advantage if someone needed some space to try something. Both of the tables in the above picture have that top. Students also were forced to take notes on what the presenter was doing so they followed along and were able to ask questions. Another use of these notes is to have the students keep them for reference when they come across a similar problem in the future and need a brainstorm idea or a way to solve a problem. As tutors we kept track of how many questions students asked. I tried to get students to ask questions that had more substance and were helpful to the presenter. This was to keep unnecessary questions that students would ask just to ask one like “what teacher do you have?” or wait to the end and ask “does it make more sense?”, which take attention away from the problem. By taking away the prospect of the student getting a question for those kinds of questions they weren’t as likely to ask them.



There weren’t a lot of specialized adaptations for students as they were all required to do the same thing. The differences in levels came from the questions that the students brought. The picture to the left shows a student just before he starts presenting his problem to his peers. This is how students could work on different level problems if they were in easier classes compared to other students. Otherwise we as the group would have to question the student through more things if they weren’t sure of more.

This way no matter what they knew they would leave the day with a better understanding of the

material they were working on. Often there were questions that were brought to tutorials that I was the only one in the group that knew what was going on with the problem. When I got through these problems, I would give all the students credit for at least one question because they would have no inputs to add to a problem, they knew nothing about. This was my way of being courteous to the students that have not seen the material before. I also used students that had a good understanding about the problems to ask questions even if that meant asking them for their input. Sometimes they would even ask me if they were right. This was fun because then I could tell them they were right and push them to ask the presenter a question to get to that point.



One thing that I used that the other tutors didn't utilize as much I did was that I would get up and stand next to the presenter. As you can see in the picture on the left, I am right next to the student helping her through the problem she brought. One could understand seeing how this would help when needing to specifically point to certain parts of the problem and talk more one on one with the student. I used this sparingly as I wanted other students to ask questions and understand what was going on. This was an

advantage for me and the student because I could explain more at the white board than from my seat. I could use different examples or point to very specific parts of their problem rather than trying to describe what part of the problem I am talking about.

I became close with my advising teacher where she would include me in knowing some specific things about students that were in the class. One in particular I took upon myself to help as best I could because she was on an individualized learning plan. I figured it would help to get to know one person rather than jump around from group to group. Other things may not have been as important like learning how she was helping individual students who were hungry during school. There was one student who received a cereal bar from my advising teacher because the student didn't get much at home. This was her way of forging strong relationships with her students. Like Nieto mentions, "Yolanda Harris, a teaching assistant in Rochester, New York, challenges societal preconceptions about her students by forging strong relationships with them and encouraging them to develop their confidence" (Nieto, 2013, p. 92). The food was a small gesture to the student, but you could see how much of a difference was made.

I think this practicum gave me a lot of great pedagogical content knowledge because it showed me more of what teaching students who don't understand things is like. In my education I can see why it would be necessary as she states, "Of course, teacher preparation is an important part of developing and sustaining new teachers in both the science and the art of teaching" (Nieto, 2013, p. 61). Which I truly believe this experience gave me. The time I spent at Horizon was a great eye-opening experience as I was forced many times to reword questions asked so the student was aware of what I was wanting them to tell me. This forced me to break things down as much as I could for the students to understand what was happening in the problems. The information was good to revisit because it was a refresher of that material for me. Its amazing what steps become second nature in problems or what little things aren't needed in higher level math classes that are necessary to understand that math that is learned in middle school.

I think I displayed a professional characteristic throughout my time with AVID in Horizon Middle School. I always made sure to have a dress shirt with a quarter zip sweatshirt on and a good pair of jeans. This showed I took time in the mornings and cared how I looked for the students and staff at the school. I one time went and talked with the principal and entered there as respectfully as I could and offered some ideas about the parking lot situation they have there. I had talked many times with my advising teacher about it and had some ideas for him. He appreciated it because I had no need to even think about them which showed him initiative to solve problems that are present.

I think that my practicum fulfilled standard four in the syllabus well. The students I worked with over my weeks in the school were all different in many ways. I had to find ways to get the students to understand the same concept, but maybe one way worked for one student and not the other. In those circumstances the students were acquiring the knowledge that is needed to be successful, but with a different way of learning. I think this shows I can work with students in multiple ways in order to help them learn.

In conclusion this experience was a great part of my education as I spent more time in front of kids which is always helpful. The environment may not have been the most diverse culturally, but it still offered me experience with teaching students of all different backgrounds. I also really learned how I would handle information I couldn't share with others as well as how to be discrete about asking students about their homelife. Some other things I witnessed like having cereal bars for students that don't get the food they need at home is a great way to make connections with those students. The environment that was in the room was truly inspirational. It was more of a family atmosphere in the classroom and you could see it with the students and how much they respected the tutors and teacher in the room. This practicum also gave me a great

way to see the variety of how students can learn and what it will take as a teacher to get all the students the best instruction I can.

There are many things that I found very helpful for my future as an educator. I have had an idea to have collaboration tables at the back of my classroom. I now know that I want them to have the whiteboard top on them. This would be a great way to let students work through some stuff or for me to work with them to the side and not write on their paper. I really want to keep the idea of questioning students through their problems like we did in the tutorials. Rather than just giving the students the answers, they would have to understand the material themselves and I think that would be the most beneficial for them. Also, I think it would be good to teach those questioning strategies to the students I have as well. This way they start to understand the material better as well as help their classmates understand the material better.

References

Nieto, Sonia (2013). *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds*; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.