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Observation

November 21, 2013

Randal Elementary, in Independence School District, is placed right in the heart of a neighborhood filled with children. I arrived as school was beginning, 7:40am. Busses must have already unloaded the children and went on their way as I did not see them, nor find it any inconvenience to park near the front entrance. The traffic was being directed by personnel, and the speed limit was heavily enforced by radar detectors. The building was long, and the entrance framed by colorful pillars. It was a very welcoming atmosphere. When I made it to the front door, there was a bell I had to ring into for security purposes. They asked who I was, and my purpose for being at the school, for I did not have an Id that all other staff and children had to enter the school. Once I told the secretary of my purpose she let me in. The office was to the left of the entrance as soon as you walk in the doors. The school secretary was very friendly. I signed in with my name, time I arrived and the teacher that I was going to observe. She politely gave me a name tag and directed me to the classroom.

On my way to the classroom there were lingering students in the halls finishing their breakfast and throwing them in the large trash cans that centered the hallway. Finally I find Mr. Nick Younts third grade classroom. His name is very clearly displayed on the outside of the door. The room is loud with the sound of chattering children running about to find their seats to start their school day. I knock on the open door and make eye contact with Mr. Younts. He waves me into the classroom.

The classroom is a good sized room. Desks are in pairs of students put into rows facing the teacher at the front of the classroom. There are about 26 students in the class of all races. There were Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian. The class was very diverse. Mr. Younts was Caucasian. There was no dress code for the students. It was very casual, while the teacher seemed to be more formal in a long-sleeve dress shirt and tie. The setting of the room felt very comfortable.

Mr. Younts’ desk sits at the left side at the front of the classroom next to the whiteboard. There are posters on the walls that describe positive character traits, along with work that the students have completed. There are posters that display current material the children are learning. For example, in math, there are posters that go over a step by step process on how to subtract. There were alphabet letters posted on a wall with the students’ vocabulary words. The decorations were limited to learning objectives. The room was very welcoming, not cluttered, yet helped keep the students on track with selective material on the wall. I did not feel overwhelmed at all, and it was a very good learning environment for the students.

As I entered the classroom, Mr. Younts explains to me his lesson plans. He tells me that he will be teaching math. There will first be a mini lesson followed by individual groups. I find myself a seat in the back of the room to observe his lesson.

He has a firm voice, directing the children’s attention to him. He tells the children clean their desks and wait for instruction. Some children are very fast to follow his directions and receive small green papers that look like fake money. This was used to reward good behavior. There were other students that were still full of energy, excited to continue talking with their fellow classmates that did not receive the money papers. Mr. Younts repeated himself, asking the rest of the children to listen and sit down. He reminds them of their voice level, the need for it to be a zero. When they continue to talk Mr. Younts raises his right hand and says give me five. He counts down illustrating the count with his fingers. When this does not get the classe’s attention he has all the students lay their heads on their desks. The children are finally lowering their voices and cleaning off their desks. I admire Mr. Younts patience with the children. As the beginning of the day is probably more stressful than the rest of the day getting the children to settle in, he still had very good control over the class as a whole.

Once the children were all on the same page, Mr. Younts directed them to a carpeted rug at the front of the classroom. They sat in front of a smart board. I was surprised to see the lesson being taught from a smart board, as I have only seen these used on occasion in my college classrooms. The children were very responsive to this learning material, as I assume it has been a material used in their classroom setting for their entire elementary education. It was amazing to see a computer screen with the math material they were learning on being displayed and explained with so much detail. This device clearly helps to teach the children, saving the teacher time from writing out all of this on a whiteboard or chalkboard.

The lesson that came up on the smart board had an illustration of a math problem. They were learning subtraction. The example equation was sorted out with pictures of the thousand place value, the hundreds place value, and ones place value. The problem was also written out in number form, as we would see a math problem being written out. He explained the first problem as he worked it out, crossing out groups that needed to be borrowed from and giving the answer to each place value, ones, hundreds and thousands group. The children paid attention for the most part. He then went over an example having the children get involved, raising their hands to answer the equation. Most of the children that were participating seemed to have the basic knowledge of what he was going over. At times there would be children disrupting, moving about, or talking. Once warned if they did not change their behavior, they were sent back to their seats to listen to the instruction from there.

After the lesson was given on the smart board, Mr. Younts brought out a visual illustration of a grouping, or subtraction problem. He used blocks. There were large normal shaped blocks that represented the thousands place value of the equation. There were large flat square blocks that represented the hundreds place value of the equation and there were small skinny log shaped blocks that represented the ones place value of the equation. Mr. Younts put these blocks on a desk in front of the students allowing them all to see. He had a student volunteer to hold a small whiteboard with the equation also written out in number form. He had the child to mark out the groupings and write the answer, as he illustrated the equation with the blocks. The children also raised their hands, and were participating as he taught the lesson in this form. I believe that Mr. Younts definitely puts in a lot of time and effort in preparing his lessons so that it is presented in several different ways for the children to learn.

Once Mr. Younts is finished teaching the lesson, he directs them all back to their seats. He verbally gives the children their assignment, while also writing it on a small portion of a whiteboard that is not taken up by the smart board. The children were told to get into partners and work out of their hard back books for practice. He asked the children to raise their hands if they were still struggling with the concept. Seven or Eight children raised their hands and he directed them to a table in the back of the classroom. As the other children did their practice work, Mr. Younts helped the children who were struggling. He explained the problems as they worked them. There was more one on one learning being taken place, and he was able to be with them as they had questions.

In the transition of lesson to individual work, a conflict arose. A child that had earlier been sent to their seats had sat in another classmate’s seat instead of their own. When it was time for all of the children to return to their seats the child that was in the wrong seat did not seem to want to go to their own seat. Mr. Younts attended to the situation very fast. He directed both children to thier correct seats. While the one child was happy and did not cause any more disruption once getting her seat back, the other child seemed to more or less pout and refuse to work on the assignment. Mr. Younts went to this child and explained that the decision he had made was his decision, that it was the wrong one, and that there was no reason to be angry with him. Mr. Younts said to the child, “Me and you are good, now be successful,” and directed him to the back table to review the practice problems with him. I found Mr. Younts phrase, “Be successful,” encouraging to the children to do the right thing. It was positive reinforcement, and he continued to use this phrase as children were not doing what they were supposed to when asked.

When Mr. Younts was helping the children at the back table, there were several disruptions where children would tattle on other children talking or not doing their work. Mr. Younts would see what the children were doing and warn them. Once given a verbal warning several times and threatened to call the mother, a child was given a paper to fill out, where Mr. Younts told him to write down his misbehavior. I am assuming that this is something similar to a think sheet to be sent home with the parents.

When there seemed to be several students running to Mr. Younts with similar issues, Mr. Younts ended the group work and told the children to get out their individual work books and place a folder in between them and the desk next to them. This did not include the children at the back table working with him. He emphasized to the children that this would be the work to be turned in to him and to do it by themselves. Mr. Younts gave the children options of what to do after their assignment, such as reading, and wrote this on the whiteboard. The children immediately became silent and started working in their workbooks. While the silence did not last long, this measure helped Mr. Younts to be able to monitor the students better.

As the back table finished their practice work, he directed them back to their seats and had everyone, but those that worked with him, turn in their work. He announced that he wanted to see where everyone was on the concept, and he would check their work to determine if the class was understanding grouping, or subtraction. The children turned in their work and began to line up for what the children kept repeating as a special, I am assuming this meant their elective classes, such as music, art, and PE. It was obvious that the children had a very set schedule.

I was amazed at the children’s behavior. The classroom was very organized. The rules were clearly written on a large paper that centered the classroom above the whiteboard and smart board. The rules were firmly enforced by the teacher. There was also a poster of the voice levels of how loud the children should be at certain times posted above the door. There still seemed to be a huge issue with the children following these rules.

Unfortunately, the children were more disruptive than they should have been. Their behavior made it extremely hard for Mr. Younts to teach. I find it remarkable the amount of patience that Mr. Younts had with the children. He had a parental voice, reminding the students again and again to do what they should be doing, and how they should be acting. I am given a clear example of the amount of patience it takes to be a third grade teacher. He handled every incident very well, and in all of it the children still seemed to be learning the material. This I believe is an amazing teacher. He is admirable to have the ability to get across the material the students need to learn in such chaos. I am very thankful for this experience. Having not had the opportunity to be in many classroom settings with small children, this opens my eyes to a better understanding of situations that could be expected for a teacher to handle, and how they should be handled. I chose to pursue a career in teaching because, I have a passion to work with young children. I believe that they are the most important part of our future, and I wanted to be a part of getting them there. I now know that this road ahead will be challenging and at times trying. In the midst of every struggle a teacher faces in the classroom, Mr. Younts proves that against all odds, a great teacher can teach anywhere to any student. I strive to have the patience and understanding that Mr. Younts has with his students. I hope to be as compassionate and charismatic to my students as he is, yet strict enough to demand my expectations be met. I want to instill into my students the importance of what it means to, “Be Successful,” as Mr. Younts could not have said it any better.