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Observation

November 20, 2013

 C. A. Burke Elementary, in Hickman Mills School District, is a very nice school surrounded by a scenic view and children’s crosswalks. I arrived at 9:15am and school had already begun classes. Students were already in their classrooms for the day. As I am unfamiliar with some of the new procedures in the school, as I have been out for a few years, I was set back by the security system. I am glad that the school was locked to all strangers for their safety. I had to buzz in on a speaker devise to be let in by an office assistant. Once I was let into the building, I signed a sheet stating who I was and who I was observing, which was Ms. Andrea Pinkerton, a kindergarten teacher. Once arriving, her class happened to be close by the office, and taking a restroom brake. She greeted me, in a very friendly matter, and began to tell me of the class schedule.

 Ms. Pinkerton, or they called her Ms. Pink, had some children who needed to be dropped off at the nurse for a checkup, before returning to her classroom. Upon returning there were even more children who were being picked up from the classroom to get extra help. None of the children appeared to have special needs. I am assuming that with the people picking up the students, some children had a need that required personal attention that I, an observer was not aware of.

 Surprisingly, as I had never been to this school before, the students were in dress code. All children were in navy blues, Khakis, and white collared tops, completed with neutral colored shoes to match. The teachers were also in semi-formal dress code. The children were predominantly African-American children with a few Caucasian students. The teacher was Caucasian, although there were other teachers that were African-American. There was a good ratio of girls to boys in the classroom.

 The classroom was very vibrant and inviting to the small children. It was full of decorations and there were plenty of learning materials. There was an abundance of posters on the walls, from the alphabet, to numbers to colors. All of which were what the children were learning. There were even children’s work on construction paper hanging from the ceiling. Rules and procedures were hung up for the children to see. The room was fairly large with about 13 students. There were tables, with small chairs surrounding them for the children to sit in. There were trays of supplies in the middle of the table for the children to use, as well as their own school boxes. There was a designated area in the classroom that contained cardboard boxes. They were in the shape of cereal boxes, cut and covered by construction paper. Every child had one. It seemed to be where children would turn in completed work.

 Children were not contained to one area for a very long time, assuming that this helps hold the attention span for a five or six year old. Ms. Pink was teaching Communication Arts. She began the lesson by directing the children to a colorful carpeted area in front of a rocking chair. The children seemed to be excited. Ms. Pink was very patient, calm, and compassionate. She had a parental voice yet very affirmative. As I have learned in the class I am taking to become a teacher, feedback is very limited. Ms. Pink doubted her tactics in getting the children to pay attention, but she was an amazing teacher. I hope to be half as good as she was. The children loved her. They tested her at times, but there was no doubt that Ms. Pink was their world.

 During her lesson at the carpet, Ms. Pink went over small words, with three letters to each. For example, nip. She would sound out each letter of the word using her arm to help the children break down the word. Starting at her shoulder she would sound out the letter N. Then at her forearm she would sound out the letter I. Finally at her wrist she would sound out the letter P. All sounds had good, clear emphasis. The children would do the same as Ms. Pink. Over and over, she would go through a list of words in the same fashion. The children were very attentive, and all participating.

Once she finished going over these vocabulary words. She read a poem, one that the children were familiar with, and enjoyed so much, that they said “again, again”. The poem was Pease Porridge Hot, Pease Porridge Cold, and the children would say it with her. Next she asked the children if they remembered a story from the previous day of Annie and the Apple Orchard. Ms. Pink asked the kids questions. Do you remember Annie? Do you remember the apple market? The children repeated loudly “Yes!” in unison. Then she began the story for today, How to Make Pizza. There were three large flashcards that the story was on. The first flashcard had a large picture of wheat and a smaller picture of pizza dough. Ms. Pink not only read the story but had the children involved in it, calling every student by name and not favoring just one. All students participated. She asked the children what is this picture that you see? They guessed, and finally one of the children got it right. She proceeded to illustrate parts of the story with her hands, teaching and explaining what it meant to knead dough. She did the same style of teaching with the next two flash cards about pizza sauce and cheese. The children were so excited and so entranced by the story. It was almost difficult for Ms. Pink to get the children to stop talking about pizza.

 Then Ms. Pink brought out an oversized book that had a short story called, Strawberry Salad that she read to the children. She would pull out parts of the story and have them repeat it back to her as a group, teaching and helping them retain the information that they were reading. The students did very well at this. For example, Ms. Pink said, “What three ingredients do you need to make strawberry salad?” The students would each say, “Bananas, Grapes, and Strawberries.” Ms. Pink would help them to remember these key items while she read the story. To connect it to the real world, Ms. Pink would say, “Do you think you could make strawberry salad with your mom or grandma?” or “Do you think you can remember the ingredients to the strawberry salad when you go grocery shopping with your family?” The children were very attentive, and answered Ms. Pink quickly.

Finally she brought out flashcards, or pieces of paper that she had made, with words on them, that Ms. Pink called site words. The words were; can, I, see, the, like, we. The class would in unison say these words as she showed the flash cards to them. Once they had gone over the words Ms. Pink would give example sentences with these words. She then gave the class two words, can and see. She gave them a partner and told them to make up a sentence using these words and tell it to their partner. The children did this without hesitation. Once they were done, Ms. Pink had some groups share their sentence. Finally she would write sentences on a small, hand held white board and she would call on some children to read it. You could see that they had caught on to what Ms. Pink was teaching. Students would sound out words in the sentences as they were reading. The lesson was very good. I found it very beneficial to have been able to observe her teaching this lesson.

 When Ms. Pink had finished teaching the lesson, she went over a worksheet that the children were to do when they returned to their seats. She sent them back to their seats and asked for the child whose job was to pass out the papers. On the wall of the classroom, was a board that had each student’s responsibilities’, or jobs. The papers were passed out and the student worked on the assignment. While the children were working, Ms. Pink called individual students to a table in the back of the classroom where she quizzed, or tested children, one by one, on the letters and sounds.

 If a child was having trouble when she would ask them a question in front of the class, or in story time, she would say let’s let another student help you, or that is kind of right but try it this way. If a student was right when answering a question, she would say you were a good listener, now kiss your brain. Ms. Pink used a lot of positive reinforcement. When she needed to discipline the children’s behavior she would say,” Criss cross applesauce”, or “sit on your pockets”. They also had colored cards to identify their behavior on the wall for the day that she would have students change if they were repeatedly misbehaving. If the entire class was misbehaving or not listening they were warned about losing recess.

 Ms. Pink was very kind and helpful to me. When I arrived, the children seemed very interested in who I was. She told the children, “Remember I told you she was coming, she is a student, just like you. Her job is to watch you guys, like your job is to listen to this story.” When asking the students what their favorite pizza was, she also asked me. While I was not trying to be in any way a distraction to the class, Ms. Pink maintained the situation of something different in the room, very well. She talked with me about becoming a teacher, she stressed that it was difficult, now more than ever, to pursue becoming a teacher, while also showing me the hidden rewards of being a teacher. For example, the children wanted to learn from Ms. Pink. They loved her, and she was a very good teacher. She asked me if I had any questions. She expressed her favorite parts of the day being calendar time. Unfortunately, I hadn’t been able to observe this part of the day. Ms. Pink was a great teacher and I am very glad I had the opportunity to observe her as I pursue my degree to become a teacher.

 I do believe that Ms. Pink incorporated all of the Missouri Standards of Professional Educators, or MoSPEs. Ms. Pink knew her material and engaged the students in her lesson. She had several approaches to the same concept to adhere to all of the children’s needs in her teaching. From the lesson that I observed, it was obvious that the children had been working on the curriculum over a long period of time and the development in the students learning was obvious. During the story, or instructional resources, Ms. Pink made it evident of her encouragement in creating an atmosphere where students could problem solve and use critical thinking. She was effective in acknowledging the communication needs for the classroom. Her assessment process was visible when she was testing the children on their sounds and letter when they were in individual work time, while it was also obvious that she asses their individual work. They have stickers on their papers, and I observed her helping a student correct their work as well. Ms. Pink was very professional, and I believe all of her work was up to standards of the needs of her grade level. When I arrived, she appeared to have relationships with a fellow teacher in collaborating, as well as staff, such as the school nurse that I saw directly, and with the principal who she responded to, by email allowing me to observe her class. Overall, I do believe Ms. Pink follows all standards of the MoSPE’s and is a very affective teacher.

Ms. Pink kept her classroom in good order. She was able to get to her supplies at ease and seemed to have plenty of learning materials for the children. The children were always attentive to the lesson or busy doing assignments. If a student gave her any problems, she took care of it very well. The child had warnings, and while I was there at least, there were never any big issues that disrupted the class as a whole. The children were well behaved and seemed to be learning a lot from Ms. Pink. I leave the observation knowing that this is a good school, a safe school, and that the teachers, if anything like Ms. Pink are doing a very good job.