

EDEL 350 Self Study

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As I prepare for student teaching this time next year, I have noticed so much about myself has changed, but for the better. Looking back at my time at Ball State I never expected just how hard, yet rewarding, being in education really would be. Being a teacher is so much more than teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Teaching is inside and outside of the classroom. Teaching is connecting with students and their families. Teaching is being able to wear many nametags, such as a nurse or even a cheerleader. I have gained so much knowledge, confidence, and strength through my experiences in my EDEL 350 Immersive practicum.

Over the course of my Spring 2016 semester, my strengths have improved immensely in management, with-it-ness, and improvisation while working with an amazing 1st grade class at Mitchell Elementary. When I first met my students, I was very worried about my management because our class was so diverse in learning styles, ethnicity, and overall personalities. However, as I gained the respect and the trust of my students, they too gave it in return and I was able to hold my own when it came to instruction, routine, and discipline. For example, my classroom

teacher had the “Click Up, Clip Down” hierarchy of discipline in place and for a while I felt too nervous to implement this system myself. However, as I become more comfortable, I was able to, and the students began to see me as a real teacher who set high expectations for them. Being able to spend all day with my students helped me to really get to know them very quickly. This helped to strengthen my with-it-ness, meaning I was able to pick up hints or actively see when students were struggling or misbehaving while other things in the classroom were going on. I was becoming more and more aware of my classroom and everything that was going on at all times of the school day. Finally, being able to teach multiple lessons throughout the semester, I had to work quickly on my feet and make a change on a lesson in seconds if I needed to. There were times when my perception of how the students would experience my lessons was wrong and that allows me to accommodate and change my thinking to match their needs. Sometimes that happened in seconds, and sometimes it happened over the course of the entire day. Overall, I never imagined how quickly the transition from a Ball State student to a Ball State teacher mindset would be. On the other hand, I figured out my weaknesses and areas that I could definitely improve on.

My weaknesses include organization, time management, and modeling. My classroom teacher gave us assignments to do outside of our Ball State courses, which I needed to prepare for everyday. This became

very hard for me to keep track of at the beginning until I put forth more effort to making lists, tapping into my creativity, and putting forth the effort to seek assistance from other people. I invested in a new planner that was only used to help keep myself organized for just my classroom and ensure I was on top with things every day I was there. Another area of improvement was time management, but it is so easy to lose track of time. Sometimes I would spend too long on one portion of a lesson and too little on another. It is a really hard balance that I probably will not feel completely comfortable with until I am a few years into my teaching career. Finally, being in a 1st grade class requires so much modeling because they are looking to the teacher for almost everything. I had to model the way I interacted with students, the way I spoke to make sure I was clear and proper, and especially in my handwriting since they were just learning to write. It's important for me to at least be able to write correctly so the students can learn to do the same because they are always watching me. All of these things that I consider weaknesses about myself will only grow with time and practice, but I'm so thankful that I had the time to discover them and discover them early.

Another component to being a teacher is that it is important to be culturally responsive to your classroom. Being culturally responsive involves actually knowing your students, where they come from, and the environment they currently are living in. For a teacher who lives on the

west coast, it would not be wise to connect every unit or lesson to agriculture or farming because those students are not immersed in that environment every day. It would also not be wise to never get to truly know your students other than a space at a desk or a name on the attendance sheet. If that were the case, how would a teacher know how to engage his or her students without knowing what their interests are? How would a teacher be able to know what the students need to work on, what they excel at, and why those things happen? How can a teacher advocate for his or her students if they do not know them? Being a teacher and trying to ensure the success of your students takes a group effort that includes the parents; this means getting to know them as well because they are a huge part of a child's culture. It's not enough to only communicate at parent/teacher conferences, but rather viewing them as a partner working together to help each individual student grow. It is important because a teacher is one person, with one view, and one mindset. If teachers allow themselves to reach beyond themselves for their students, I truly believe they can do something greater than they thought before and it can be such an amazing impact for a student. These are all things I experienced during my EDEL 350 Immersive.

I was able to witness the External Developmental Assets such as support, empowerment, boundaries and expectation, and constructive use of time at work while at Mitchell Elementary. The faculty and staff at

Mitchell Elementary worked together to form such a strong support system for each other and the students. My classroom teacher worked with the special education teacher to help students with IEP, and worked with the counselor for students going through difficult situations at home, and even specialty parents. For example, we did a unit on the life cycle of a chicken and one parent was a farmer who brought in eggs and an incubator. The entire class was able to experience a chick being hatched right in the classroom. When walking through the main entrance of Mitchell Elementary, you can see numerous posters about empowerment. Students created their own posters that expressed positive self-esteem, teamwork, and reaching your goals. They had many events including the Young Authors Award where every student participated in writing a short story and 12 stories from any grade level were nominated as the top, best stories. Within the classroom, boundaries and expectations were addressed multiple times a day because first graders are at the beginning levels of becoming a well-rounded individual. A first grader needs to be someone that a kindergartener can look up to, someone who can show the second graders that they are ready for the next grade, and also be able to think individually and strive for greatness. However, when striving for greatness students need to be able to choose constructive uses of time. This means the students need to be immersed in creative activities, like the chick hatchings they experienced. Students need to be a part of the

community outside of their school such as youth programs like The Boys and Girls Club, or even religious communities like Sunday school.

Students also need to use their time constructively at home. This can be done by reading a book with family or independently. Spending time with family is very important because this is where they spend most of their time and can actually seek support, empowerment, and boundaries and expectations outside of their school.

Being a pre-service teacher at Mitchell Elementary was a life changing experience. I accomplished so much and became someone I thought would take years to build, but with such an amazing staff and encouraging classroom I learned that I have the potential for so much more. I feel so prepared for student teaching. Though it will still be challenging at times, my experience at Mitchell Elementary has equipped me with great tools and resources for the obstacles to come. My EDEL 350 Immersive experience will be one my favorite moments in my Ball State University career.