

Week One: October 16, 2019

Oh it feels good to be back in the classroom! I am in a grade three and four classroom in Chase. I spent half of the day in that classroom and the second half of the day in a grade one and two classroom. The grade one and two class has had teacher transitions since the beginning of the school year, which was noticeable in the behaviour of the children and organization of the classroom.

Today I watched a young boy in grade three put his hand up in response to the invitation to answer a math question on the board. He was called upon and then given just a few moments to respond before the teacher called on the next student. The student became obviously upset and when his sounds and behaviour started to show this the teacher said, "just ignore him – we're all allowed to be mad but how we share those feelings isn't always okay."

From this observation I recognized that some students need a bit more time and encouragement in order to respond and participate. They also might need further encouragement and support to get to a place where they can verbalize their response. I also observed that our student's emotions are fragile and how we treat students' effects their overall experience in school and probably outside of school.

In the future I hope to remember to pause: to take a deep breath and give the student a bit of time to respond to the question. If they are unable to respond I will prompt them and help them explain their thoughts and thinking as a way of helping them get to a place where they have an answer to share. I will also work towards never embarrassing a student and to treat them with the respect and dignity that I want and which they deserve. I had a difficult time watching this student be embarrassed and not supported twice and while I'm aware that I don't know the rest of the story about this student I recognize that how students are treated may make or break their educational experience.

The grade one and two class was described by teachers in the school as the "worst class of students" and shared with me that they have spent much of the year so far running up and down hallways swearing. I was informed that they've gone through two teachers already with TOC's in-between and now have a third hired teacher starting today. The behaviour was a lot and it was inspiring to see the newly hired teacher begin to set boundaries and expectations for the class. I observed both respect and friendliness alongside firmness. I see the potential of what this teacher will bring to these students and their educational journey and experience. I'm also aware that this teacher has a lot ahead of her over the next few weeks and I hope to have the opportunity to check back in with her near the end of my practicum to see how things have developed and unfolded. Her hug at the end of the day with tears slowly falling from her eyes captured both her passion and exhaustion. It was beautiful – I was inspired by the dedication of this teacher.

Week Two: October 23, 2019

My Teacher Mentor was away today so a retired teacher was teaching the class. The classroom management that I saw inspired me. It was a full day in grade three and four with a joint salmon cycle activity with a grade six class and then the opportunity to observe the Vice Principals PE class with another grade three and four class.

The Vice Principals class was organized, respectful, on task and fun. Watching the students arrive in the gymnasium and take their seat at the designated gathering location, participate in attendance, listen to the structure of the day and then jump into the warm-up is exactly what I hope to model one day. The space and supplies were ready. Students were treated fairly, were held to expectations, and distracting behaviours were dealt with in a non-embarrassing way. There is one young boy in this class who spent most of the time doing his own thing: twiddling with the lego in his hands, rolling on the floor, and acting out in ways that were calling for attention. The Vice Principal let him do his own thing as long as he wasn't disturbing others, and when he jumped in to participate with the class his presence and participation was acknowledged positively. This boy knew what to do, what was expected, and wanted to play the game. When he participated he was held to the same expectations as everyone else. Watching him interact with this student was so helpful to observe. He had great classroom management and respected his students while holding them to expectations. And I believe that the way he treated the boy who was acting out helped that child to transition into participation. (I also acknowledge that the gymnasium is a different physical space than the classroom and therefore such time and space can't always be provided for in the same way.)

I learned through this observation one way of how to teach and teach well. I learned how to interact and engage with students, how to hold expectations while creating an atmosphere of respect and fun, and saw the example of one way of dealing with distracting students and their behaviours. With the one student I described I saw the Vice Principal building a relationship. He encouraged this student, gave him space, connected over topics of interest and also gently corrected some behaviour. He was respectful and through that a noticeably healthy relationship between teacher and student is being built.

I hope to remember this learning and these examples as I move forward in my education and teaching. 1) Be prepared, have your supplies ready and know what you plan to teach. 2) Set routine and expectations and hold students to them. An organized and well-managed class will be a fun and successful class. 3) Be respectful, even when (or maybe especially when) a student's behaviour makes you want to respond in a different way. 4) Build relationships, it is all about relationships. And 5) Stay positive and patient.

Weeks Three & Four

I taught my first lesson in the classroom during week three of practicum (Oct 30) and then my second lesson during week four (Nov 6). While I went into both lessons feeling prepared and confident I was also anticipating a certain level of chaos, better described as student disruptions. Upon reflection I had two wonderful first time teaching experiences. Even in the midst of acknowledging how much more there is to learn and how different being the primary teacher would be it felt good, familiar and natural to be teaching. I was pleasantly surprised by the engagement of the students and through their engagement felt like I was getting to know them while also teaching them material that is important to their education.

One of the pieces I was most proud about was how I honoured and respected every contribution each student made. Even if the response was not accurate or not what I was looking for I was able to remember that each contribution is an equally important contribution to the overall learning of the class. It felt good to be able to provide patience and honour to students. Observing student behaviour reminded me of how important building relationships with students based on respect and trust is. While I've observed this in past situations in my life it was good to be able to begin living into this model and understanding.

I learned many things from the students and even more things from the feedback from the observations each week. A few of the pieces that were shared with me that I want to intentionally remember as I continue to teach and learn how to teach include:

- Use personal examples – make the connection!
- Recognize all student contributions equally
- Continue to tie in Indigenous connections
- Where appropriate, provide drawing as an option opposed to just writing (UDL)
- Teacher presence: both through attire and physical presence (walking up columns while students are sharing)

I'm looking forward to continuing to work with this class of students for the next three weeks and also look forward to the day when I'm able to spend more time with a group of students to better be able to get to know them, learn from them and support them in their learning!

Weeks Five and Six

Over these last two weeks I had the opportunity to observe (for 1-1.5 hours each) a Kindergarten class, a grade K/1 class and a grade 1/2 class. These young primary grades are so different than the grade 3/4 class I've spent most of my time in. And yet, while there are significant differences I was able to see that classroom management is equally as important in each of the grades I've observed.

The Kindergarten classroom was starting their "Wild Wednesday" where they spend the whole afternoon outside when I arrived. It seemed that the class was struggling with the "normal" routines and expectations and I appreciated the opportunity to observe the teacher reminding and showing expectations, providing prompts and asking for a change in behaviour. At some point in this process during the beginning of our time outside the teacher made the decision that it was best to go back into the classroom and try again next week. Watching the teacher make this decision and manage this process was an eye opener into the decisions that sometimes need to be made, even if the decision is actually more work than going with what is happening in the moment. (ie: getting Kindergarten students lined up again, inside, outdoor clothes off and hung up with indoor shoes back on and then settled on the carpet: more work than just sending the class to the playground!) Making the decision that is the "best decision" means that expectations and consequences for behaviour is being modeled and learned and students are engaging in an important learning opportunity.

I joined the grade 1/2 class immediately following recess. Students were lined up in the hallway, entered the class when everyone was ready and took their spot on the carpet. The teacher was consistent in her expectations and waited for everyone to be ready. She then guided the students in a quiet time of breathing and feeling. She had students touch different parts of their face, hand and chest and focus on breathing. Then the students were invited to lie down and a song was played. While observing this entry into classroom and transition time from recess (and later learned they do this after lunch as well) I recalled my own grade one experience; we entered into the classroom after recess and lunch to a dim classroom. We sat at our desk with our heads on our folded arms and listened to either music or an audiobook. I remember feelings of pause and calm.

Both of these experiences showed me some important things I hope to remember and engage in as I move forward in the teacher education program and one day into the classroom:

- Transitions are important;
- Consistency is important;
- Times of calm and pause can be helpful;
- Always model what you expect and want to see;
- Sometimes the difficult decision is the best decision for everyone.

Reflections on growth during this practicum

This practicum has been very helpful in beginning to experience the planning that goes into teaching and being in the classroom. I appreciated the opportunity to see a variety of teachers teach, to observe classroom management strategies, see various transitions take place, notice changes in student behaviour depending on circumstances and to be present in the classroom and school.

I saw firsthand how important building relationships with students is and noticed the impact teachers had on students when they had had the time to put into connecting with the students. It was eye-opening to see how important this is. I saw connections between the Child Development course and the classroom. For example, noticing and praising positive behaviours changed the behaviour of other students. We learned this in class and I was pleasantly surprised to experience how effective this was. I also experienced the concept of “with-it-ness”, the idea that teachers need to have the ability to know what is happening in the classroom all the time from wherever they are positioned and in the midst of whatever they are engaged in. It was nice to see course material and classroom expectations connect.

Two areas of growth and one goal:

Star: In teaching my first lessons I was not consistent in giving good examples of what I was looking for from students and often missed showing samples of what we were working towards with our work. I made improvement in this area and I not only incorporated these pieces into my lesson plans and teaching as the practicum progressed but I also learned first hand why this is so important.

Star: As my lessons progressed I felt that I became more confident in giving clear instructions and expectations to students. I provided options whenever possible but also set boundaries and expectations when required. In the early weeks of practicum I was often giving options to students when trying to correct behaviour when there was not actually an option but one expectation.

Wish: I want to become better at remembering student names and getting to a place where I can differentiate learning based on students strengths and learning goals. I observed that a significant part of classroom management is knowing your students by name and from there learning important details about them. My goal is that in my next practicum I will have an effective strategy for learning and remembering the names of students in the class.