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Reflection Paper

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### Cultural Diversity Practicum

While pulling into the parking lot on my first day of my Cultural Diversity Practicum I was immediately shocked by simply looking around. Parent teacher conferences had just ended that morning, and as I saw parents walking back to their vehicles I began to realize that this practicum would definitely be a culture shock. I felt as if I was in for a treat as I saw the students make their way up the sidewalk. They were so cute, yet there was a great amount of diversity that I just wasn't used to. As I got out of my car and made my way inside, I began to become very nervous because I really wasn't sure what to expect. As my heart beat rapidly, and my hands shook increasingly faster, I started to realize my views on cultural diversity were about to change and frankly, they were going to impact my teaching career throughout the rest of my life.

Upon entering the school, I was greeted by the principle who was a kind woman that was very excited to have us in her school. In all honesty, I believed that I was going to have a difficult time adjusting into this new school because it was so diverse. I was so thankful and even relieved when I realized the students and staff were so welcoming throughout the week. I felt as if everyone did such a fine job having a stranger observe in the classroom for three days and the students were great! They were so kind and polite...they were good listeners and hard workers...and they were even dedicated and eager to learn as Mrs. Pitkanen maintained control of her classroom.

Moving on, the school itself, Zanewood Elementary, is located in Brooklyn Park, which is very close to the Twin Cities. The closer you get to the Twin Cities, the more and more diverse the population becomes. The classroom that I was placed in consisted of mainly Black, Asian & Hispanic students. I was shocked to find out that there was only one White student in Mrs. Pitkanen's classroom. I had obviously known that this was a culturally diverse practicum, I just didn't realize that over 50% of the school was African American. I also did not realize the white students would be the minority in this school setting. There are also a lot of Hispanic children throughout the school as well. They often speak in their native language, which makes it difficult to communicate at times. I feel as if it was eye opening to understand the backgrounds that these children come from. Mrs. Pitkanen shared stories with me about some of the challenges she faces with these students because of their backgrounds and how they were raised.

In my eyes, I feel as if it is great that Zanewood Elementary is so diverse, because it allows for others to become more comfortable and adjusted to interaction amongst others rather than your own race. Although Mrs. Pitkanen is a white female teaching in this school district, I noticed that much of the staff was diverse as well. In my previous practicum, there were little African American staff, in fact, there was little diversity overall. However, throughout this practicum, the staff is much more diverse. I believe as if it was easy to understand that most of these children are growing up in poverty. The students come from low-class/ low-income families that receive assistance from the state/government. I spoke to the Assistant Principle and he stated that 89% of the student body received Federal Student Lunch Assistance, meaning over three quarters of Zanewood Elementary receives free breakfast and lunch each and every school day. I

feel as if it is great that the school offers this for the student body, yet it makes me sad just knowing the poor conditions in which these children are growing up in.

As I continued to observe during my practicum, I noticed that the attention span/level is very short/small. I feel as if it is important for teachers to change up their lessons/lesson plans in order to ensure that the students will stay focused and on track. I like that Mrs. Pitkanen took “brain breaks” with her students in order to ensure that they are getting a motor break throughout the day. I think this is important because young kids need the opportunity to let off steam and blow off some energy as well. Mrs. Pitkanen introduced me to a website, [www.gonoodle.com](http://www.gonoodle.com), in which this site allows for students to get up out of their seat, dance, wiggle, sing, move around, all while simply just keeping kids focused and motivated for the next lesson. This site is definitely something that I am going to use in my own classroom, and I am excited that it allows for so many different ways to stimulate the student’s brains, while having fun too.

This practicum allowed for me to observe diversity in the school system. It really had me thinking about these children and the strong amounts of diversity in this area. I went home wondering if these children were going to have dinner that night...I wondered if they would come back with their homework done and clean clothes on their back. Surprisingly, all of my answers came true and I was so thankful to know that. Although these children live in lower class communities, I think the stereotypes make me get ideas in my head that aren’t always correct. The students that I worked with were a really great crew! I could not have been placed in a better class because I had an absolute blast the entire time!

Frankly, I am so blessed to have had this opportunity to experience a Cultural Diversity Practicum such as this. It allowed for me to understand where these children come from and the different backgrounds and cultures that exist within our school systems. Who knows, I could even be teaching in a setting such as this one someday throughout my teaching career. Being in this diverse of a school reminded me of the movie, "Freedom Writers." My practicum teacher proved to me that she is here to inspire these students just as the teacher did throughout the movie. I would like to follow in these footsteps because I would like to inspire my students just as much as Mrs. Pitkanen, if not more. These students are our future. It really is as simple as that. They are going to be the ones who will make an impact on the world in a few decades, so I believe it is our job to teach them how to become successful while they are young. This classroom has taught me how to inspire students, how to be a successful teacher, and how to make an impact on the children of our future.

I believe as if this classroom has influenced me continuously throughout the past three days that I was there. The students challenged me to become a better teacher in my future. I was so impressed by how much work the teachers put into bettering the students and creating schedules in order to ensure the students are getting the attention they need in certain areas. I was also very impressed that the teachers actually took the time to create IEP's and 504's rather than just throwing something together. I learned different ways on how to deal with the kids, and different ideas to try when the children are struggling in certain areas. I learned what works and frankly what doesn't.

I also learned that teaching and learning is a continuous process. We are going to learn each and every day whether it is from our colleagues, friends, family, or even our

students. I believe as if our students are going to be the ones we learn from the most because they will be teaching us how to learn about ourselves in many different ways. They will be showing us the ways in which their brain works. They will be providing us answers as to what type of learning works best for them based on their scores and actions. The thing to keep in mind is that we are going to make mistakes along the way, but we must learn from these mistakes in order to better ourselves in the future.

Overall, I feel as if this practicum provided a great way for soon to be teachers to become aware of the diversity that exists within a classroom. I learned that there is also much more to a school than teachers and students. Teaching is hard work and it requires strength and dedication, along with numerous other qualities. Having the opportunity to work with Mrs. Pitkanen's class is something that I will remember forever because it was an incredible experience. This opportunity has provided me with so many more explanations, ideas, and even insight on how to deal with diversity in the classroom. I had a wonderful time during these three days, and could not have been more thankful to be placed in Mrs. Pitkanen's classroom.