

Middlesex County College

## Observation Journal Entries

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Upon entering James Monroe Elementary School, the welcoming staff and new design of the school elicited happy and nurturing feelings. As a fire recently destroyed the school, the new design with many windows for natural light and clean landscape provided new opportunities for learning and growing for every individual. Upon entering the main office, the staff focused on the security and safety of those inside through a system to enter the building. Upon entering, the office staff were always helpful, kind, and made the time more efficient and successful.

Throughout the halls, children's work was displayed along the walls that demonstrated growth and learning in many ways. Upon arrival in the kindergarten classroom, bright colors brought happy feelings all throughout the room. Different colored tables, colorful bins for storage and a designed carpet with each letter of the alphabet in a shape, made the classroom feel welcoming and enjoyable. Furthermore, the design of the classroom was most beneficial for learning and movement with space for children to move about different areas of the room without issue. The two teachers were nurturing and welcoming to all students in the inclusion class and treated me well. The classroom environment was conducive for learning, socialization, and independence. The needs of children were met as all furniture was appropriate for children's height to build their sense of autonomy and independence. With the posters and colorful environment, the children were also able to express themselves safely in an accepting and open classroom.

Through the ability to express oneself, children were unique and accepting of their classmates, especially as the teachers demonstrated acceptance and understanding in their communication between students and coworkers. The design of the classroom—with open flow of movement from one area to another, and decoration with color and creativity—combined with the accepting nature of the teacher will be important determinants for my decisions in my future classroom. The modeling and environment of the class provoked learning and individuality for all.

As the learning environment impacted the emotions of the children, staff and visitors, the routines inside the classroom impacted their actions. Entering the classroom, the teachers had created a routine to best facilitate the children's actions for a successful day. In the beginning of the school year, a routine was established and followed for successful transition in the class throughout the school year. The routine helped guide children's actions and provided them the chance to be in control of their actions. One of the most important routines was the time between entering the building and settling into the classroom. The routine for the kindergarten students was to enter the room, unpack their backpacks and take off their jackets at their seats. Next, they took their iPad and placed it in the chair pocket and gave their homework folder to their teacher. Finally, they placed their backpack and jacket in their cubby and sat down to work on their iPads. This transition made time available to help children with questions or needs, teachers could supervise the children easily, and decreased behavior issues because the students had a set of actions needed to be done. The routine helped manage behavior as entering the classroom with friends and teachers promoted a large amount of socialization and opportunity to move about the classroom. Instead of chaos erupting once children entered the room, they walked nicely and interacted as they settled into the classroom. By organizing the beginning of the day with easy guidelines, the students settled and were ready to begin the day on a positive and calming note. This adjustment period was critical for success in the rest of the day. As this time followed, the use of routine helped children understand what was to occur during the day and provided a sense of comfort in regularity. As routines were proven to be very helpful in guiding children's actions, I learned how to make the time most beneficial for the students and the teachers. The use of routines benefits the teacher and students with their actions and expectations to make the day more enjoyable and productive, thus I must consider the best routine for the students I will teach.

The inclusion kindergarten classroom required two teachers to work together in the classroom. As the two teachers I observed had been working in the same class for six years, their cooperation and communication skills were very strong and beneficial. The strong understanding for one another and ability to discuss ideas openly allowed for new teaching opportunities and lessons to be made and considered. Further, their understanding of one another provided support throughout the day and within moments of need. Through cooperation, both teachers could supervise the children and enforce classroom rules together to define the authority of the teachers as a unified team. The unity of the teachers also modeled good friendship and social skills to the students for their development. As age five is a key time for the development of close friendships and the increase in stronger social skills, the modeling of good friendship enabled students to develop their skills positively. As the teachers were successful together, the students benefitted from the combination of ideas, creativity and perspectives that each teacher provided. By supporting one another and having open discussions, new learning experiences were provided for the teachers and the students. In addition to the teachers within the classroom successfully cooperating, all the staff in the building were accepting and helpful to one another. In one instance, a student was acting out within the inclusion class. The general education teacher and I took the kindergartners to the library as the special education teacher handled the student. Upon arrival to the library, the second-grade teacher learned the situation of the kindergarten class and invited the kindergartners to be read to by the second graders. The cooperation between the two kindergarten teachers, librarian and second-grade teacher enabled a tough situation to become a more positive experience. The cooperation between staff had a significant, positive impact on the students and staff. When becoming a teacher, I hope to have the opportunity to work within a building with positive staff connections like the staff at James Monroe.

The experience of visiting an inclusion kindergarten class provided new learning opportunities for all the students. As the needs of each child are normally individualized, the needs of some children were greater in this class. By both teachers modeling good behavior and teaching all students together, all the children learned the lessons successfully together. Overall, the lesson was taught in a large group setting and as children needed help in the following work, the teachers would support and reteach the child. This system was successful in introducing the information and creating autonomy in the students. By addressing all parts of the lesson to all students, the special and general education child were treated equally and given the same guidelines. Through the large group lessons, children did not treat each other differently or view any other students differently; therefore, the students participated as a group and were accepting of any differences. The welcoming and accepting nature of the class was reflected in the lessons which further benefitted all children. Every student received the same explanations, teaching and directions as the rest and were given the opportunity to first try on their own. As students struggled, the teacher would then facilitate the learning by teaching in more individualized ways. Rather than separating the children for specific learning styles, the students could learn with their peers and solely received the assistance necessary. By providing equal learning opportunities and aid, all students were treated fairly and seen as alike rather than different. The focus on treating all children alike rather than different was a major factor in the teaching of children's social skills. By focusing on similarities, the teachers provided an accepting and understanding environment that facilitated positive social interactions. When teaching in the classroom, the focus on acceptance and understanding of others will be a major factor in the teaching of my lessons and discussions. As the United States grows in population, the teaching of acceptance is important for social interactions from the time in my class through their futures.

Learning about each student and their family individually was necessary in the inclusion class due to the specified needs of some students, but also for a greater understanding of the backgrounds of all the students. As the children in the classroom came from many backgrounds and home situations, diversity among the students was very noticeable. Many children in the Edison school district came from numerous ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. By understanding the families and children, the teachers could find ways to communicate and connect to the children. In addition, the families of children with more serious needs had to be more well-known to work with the child more effectively. Each child's background impacted their ways of learning, understanding and developing. All people have their own perspectives, thus learning about the children and their perspectives was important for assessing and deciding how to teach lessons. By incorporating the perspectives and understandings of the children, the information being taught could be better understood and applied. Further, teaching about the different cultures and perspectives of children provide new learning opportunities of acceptance and understanding in the classroom. Having a diverse classroom provided opportunities for children to learn more when interacting with others and responding to class discussions as well. With accepting and understanding teachers, the students observe positive behaviors that also impact their response to those who differ from themselves. Teaching diversity and acceptance was important for positive social development in the five-year-olds. Through early opportunities of interacting with others and learning to accept differences, children become more well-rounded and understanding as they grow. Observing the positive reactions to diversity and the importance of acceptance in the classroom highlighted the benefits these lessons early for future success. New Jersey is very diverse state and the United States is a diverse country, thus these lessons impact all students throughout their lives.

As diversity and individual needs were unique to each child, especially in an inclusion class, communication was important between teachers and parents. With class time limited to two and a half hours for the half-day kindergarten program, both teachers worked to offer multiple opportunities for parents to engage with the teachers and the class. The more traditional ways of communication were a large portion of communication, including emails, conferences, and written notes. In addition to these types of communication, the kindergarten teachers expanded further in opportunities for connection and communication. For example, when it was a student's birthday, parents were welcome to come in and read to the class, donate a book, or bring in a special craft. These opportunities offered the parents and teachers chances to connect. Another strong source of connection was with the use of an application called Seesaw. Students could work on a lesson and then post a picture with a recording explaining what they made onto the application. Through teacher's approval the post could be seen by other students, the teachers, and parents who had the app. This provided a technological way to connect parents to the classroom to see what the students were doing in the class. Finally, the teachers also held different night events for students and parents to come and partake in. One night was Math Night which parents and students worked together on age appropriate math problems. Also, a language arts night was held where the teachers introduced an activity with sight words—words for students to know and learn throughout kindergarten. As learning time was limited for the kindergarteners, the teachers created folders with words for students to practice and learn at home with parents. Both Math Night and Sight Words Night provided opportunities for parents to collaborate with the teachers in the educating of their children. Communicating with parents in different ways provided opportunities to strengthen student's learning and connect the important realms of school and home.

Technology played a major role in the classroom as each student and teacher had an iPad, and there were two computers and a promethean board for the teachers that were used daily. Technology was used by teachers and students every day for learning opportunities. The students used their iPads with different learning applications and programs for an average of fifteen minutes a day. One program, Lexia, was required to be successfully completed by the end of the school year. Further, for some students who had finished Lexia, the teachers provided other developmentally appropriate learning applications. Following several daily activities, such as calendar, the students would sit in front of the promethean board for morning message that sometimes included a video. The promethean board was then used for a lesson and explanation of the activity connected to the lesson. The daily use of iPads and the promethean board increased lesson participation and the use of technology in the classroom. Similarly, the use of technology also aided in learning opportunities with new sources of media easily incorporated in the classroom, including videos and pictures. Moreover, the use of technology in the classroom was important in children's individualized learning and in group lessons, thus providing new learning opportunities in the classroom. As technology aided the children in learning each day, the teachers controlled the time using technology with paper and pencil work due to the health concerns of technology. In contrast to the health concerns, the integration for technology in schools has increased because the use of technology has been highlighted as important knowledge in the evolving workplace. Thus, the use of technology in the workplace led to the increased importance to have children learn how to use technology. In my classroom, I would like to incorporate the use of technology in short, controlled time spans to help children learn how to use, however, technology should not be relied on for all lessons and activities. Technology lessons should be used for new learning opportunities important to teach in the class.



Socialization within the classroom occurred often among the students and the teachers. Children interacted at their tables and within lesson discussions to learn about many different topics. When interacting, many children learned about others and themselves by talking about their lives in many ways. The teachers allowed children to discuss and talk to others which provided the students with opportunities to learn, cooperate and resolve conflicts on their own. In conjunction with the sociocultural theory by Lev Vygotsky, the children learned different perspectives and ideas from their interactions with peers. By discussing, questioning and resolving issues through communication, students began to develop more social skills to aid in their future interactions. Furthermore, the children also learned more while communicating with peers when needing help with the activity they were doing. Many times, the children asked their classmate or teacher for help and were guided through the problem to determine a solution. During these interactions, children gained experience and knowledge through the zone of proximal development by learning with the assistance of a more experienced peer. Socialization provided learning opportunities that were individualized and specific to the children, thus creating relationships between children. Close friendships began to arise in the classroom due to higher amounts of talking and impacted the way children responded and acted. Communication about opinions and ideas also led to more creative thinking and ideas for children in the classroom. Because of the large opportunities available to children through communication, the allowance of socialization in the classroom has become a large factor in my own opinion on how to teach. As I value children's ability to communicate and interact in the classroom, the benefits were very visible within my observations. Communication impacted the children in many developmental and cognitive ways that strengthen them as individuals as they talk to others. By involving students in discussions, students become expressive and learn about themselves too.

Along with Vygotsky, the theorist B. F. Skinner had a strong presence in the classroom for the correction of student's behavior. The class rules were enforced through a system of a street light where green represents continue good behavior, yellow represents a warning for negative behavior and red represents bad behavior that must stop. The whole class followed rules based on respect for others and following directions and were reinforced through the street light. This system allowed students to know what was expected, especially as the teachers modeled the behaviors. Although this system was beneficial, two other students demonstrated the importance of Skinner's ideas. One student with behavioral problems had a system to help stabilize and control his behavior. He had a chart including columns for the major parts of the day: Lexia, calendar, question of the day, message, math, snack and reading/writing. He would earn a star during the portion of the day he was well-behaved. Each day had a goal number of stars necessary for him to receive time at the end of the day to do a choice activity on his own. Based on how he was doing throughout the week, the stars required ranged from three to five. Because of the end goal of free choice activity, the stars and choice activity acted as reinforcers for good and acceptable behavior. A simpler chart of earning stickers for good behavior was used for another student in the class. These tactics reinforced good behavior and made bad behavior less likely as they did not lead to a payoff. Overall, the three systems in the classroom decreased poor behavior in the children thus allowing more time for learning. B. F. Skinner was a beneficial theorist for the students in the class with behavioral problems, however modeling and correcting good behavior was more successful for the children without behavior issues. In my own classroom, classroom rules will be created with the children and then enforced throughout the year. The use of Skinner's behaviorist theories is more individualized for specific children; thus, I may use Skinner's theories in specific situations.

Due to the kindergarten program being half-day, two different classes occurred during the day. The morning class, from nine to eleven-thirty, and afternoon class, one to three-thirty, differed in several ways. Both classes were kindergarten, however, the morning class had more students and more energy, in contrast to the relaxed afternoon class. Each class required different strategies and control based on the differences. In the morning class, there were more children in the classroom and more talkative students than the afternoon class. Furthermore, the morning class had a student with behavioral problems who required more supervision and control, thus causing more distraction to the other students. In contrast, the afternoon class included two autistic children for a portion of the class and a student with numerous issues. The smaller afternoon class provided better modeling and behavior management for these students than in the morning with the larger group of students. Throughout the morning, the teachers were more guiding to students to behavior appropriately, however the afternoon the teachers facilitated more as the children were more relaxed and behaved. In addition, the morning class normally had more excitement and energy throughout the class time, yet the afternoon class students were more relaxed and calm. With a break for prep time and lunch, the teachers had time to transition from the more energetic morning class to the calmer afternoon class. In both classes, the teachers responded appropriately to each child and modeled good behavior to engage the class in learning. Having been exposed to both classes, I learned how to adjust to the children based on their individual needs. Each class is unique based on the different children involved and no two classes are the same. The uniqueness of classes provided opportunities for teachers to improve and grow each day based on constant change within the children and the situations that arise. The ability to adapt and be flexible was very important for the teachers as situations arise in classrooms that are not planned for, but provide new learning opportunities instead.