

School/Community

My practicum school is located in a neighbourhood primarily of a high socioeconomic status with some lower income also. The school is in the northern part of the city. There is not a large mix of different ethnicities within the school yet there is a variety. The main groups are Caucasian, Asian, and East Indian.

The school has a staff of 33 personnel with approximately 430 students. The school starts at kindergarten and ends at the grade seven level. There are six split-level classes this year; containing two different grades such as 6/7. In addition to those six, there are eight to twelve single classes, depending on how many kindergarten classes there are. Usually the kindergarten teachers have both one morning and one afternoon kindergarten class and there are two kindergarten teachers this year.

The community is actively involved with the school. One way the community helps the school and its students is by participating in the block parent program in their homes. They also support the school with fundraisers such as magazine sales, chocolate sales and similar ideas. Local businesses contribute their services and products for raffle draws. The school encourages the community to contribute; it is part of their mission.

The school's primary mission is to further the educational philosophy the ministry of education and the local school district has established. This philosophy maintains that schooling is not the sole responsibility of the teachers. For students to receive the best education parents are to work with the school to provide learning experiences. The school's goal is to instil in each child a desire to continue a life long learning process that will enable them to contribute as responsible members of society.

Parent's goals, according to the school, are to ensure the child attends school daily and that the child is prepared to work and participate. Preparation means adequate supplies to do schoolwork in addition to being prepared physically and emotionally to do the work. The parent should be prepared to work with the child and teacher to carry out a suitable education program, to work with the teacher to help their child develop responsibility, self-discipline and respect for the rights of others. Parents can also participate in the school by joining the PAC, being a parent helper in the classrooms when needed or volunteering in the library. There are parents who come into the school to listen to students read, help ESL students practice their English, and aid such as that. Field trips are another area that the parents become involved. The parents help drive the students to and from and help monitor while at the destination.

The school has a webpage that contains a school calendar to keep students and parents informed along with other useful information. It has contact information for emergencies and the monthly newsletters. This allows more communication between the school and the community. The webpage contains a parent/teacher handbook. There is also a calendar with everyone's class activities listed, such as field trips or if people are coming to the school for a special event. The calendar also lists Pro-D days and vacations.

The school offers many programs to the students giving them a variety of options beyond the class work. They can join the choir, band or fine arts, such as drama. They can also sign up for physical activities. For example, my sponsor teacher is responsible for the cross-country team along with basketball for the children grade three or older. Also, when the students are in grade three they have a chance to join track and field. All

students are encouraged to pick a few activities to try out for the first round. That way they have a chance to try something and be involved in something they may not otherwise try.

The school also offers a self-manager program to the students grade four and above. This helps develop a student's positive self-image through self-discipline. To be a self-manager they are required to fill out forms that highlight the qualities they possess to be a self-manager. Parents and the student's teacher must approve the application, along with another staff member who is not currently their teacher. The students carry out these steps through their own incentive not a teacher directing them. Being a self-manager allows the student more freedom in the school without teacher supervision in certain areas of the school. Students cannot just wander the halls; their behaviour has to be conducive to the school's learning environment. The students can go to the computer lab, the library, or stay in the classroom. I have also seen children playing with building blocks and doing crafts in the hallway with other students. If their behaviour is not conducive or they break a school rule, they can have their privilege taken away. The schools goal with this program is to get all students eventually to be self-managers. This is an excellent way to learn self-discipline and be role models for the other students. Students are able to apply every month to be a self-manager. Not all students want to do this though; some just want to go play outside and do not see any reason to attempt it. In addition, some parents I have talked to do not find their children need to because they would like their children to play outside in the fresh air. On the days that the weather is bad, the principal calls it an inside day and they offer activities for the students to do. They play a movie in one room, open the library up for quiet activities. On regular

weather days, they also offer activities indoors on certain days for certain grades. They announce this over the intercom in the morning and have the schedule posted on the door of the rooms. For example on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the computer lab is open during recess for grades four and five. Teachers can also volunteer to stay in and supervise the students in the gym if they so choose to. I have done that with a few of my students so they can play basketball. I like doing this on occasion for them as rewards. I also like to see how they interact outside of the classroom and with me there as just a supervisor, not giving direct instruction.

Instructing

For the students that require assistance with learning, there are many staff members available. There are counsellors at the school and learning assistance teachers. In my sponsor teacher's class there are a few students who attend the resource room for math help and two students who attend for both math and reading. This has done wonders to help those students. It gives them the one on one help they need and a slower pace to finish at their own pace. One teacher teaches French to help the staff and students with help in that area. There are school-based resource teams for students who need help with social skills and anger management. That team consists of the learning centre teacher, the administrative officer, a counsellor, the classroom teacher, and the parent and student. They usually meet on Wednesday mornings before school. There are people available to work with the parents, staff and students to help make the school a fun, functional place for all involved. There are a few rooms set aside for those purposes.

Some of the students in my sponsor teacher's class are independent workers. These students are working ahead in the math text. They do the text work ahead of the

other students. They take the test when they finish the end of a chapter. When I will be teaching in my practicum, these students will be working independently across the hall from our classroom with my sponsor teacher. Since the year is nearing the end, and these students will be moving on to secondary school, a former student of the school offered to come help those students. He comes by the school to prepare the students for what math is like there and to help them challenge the exams. He is volunteering his time to them and they are appreciating the extra help so they can advance through the grade eight math.

Sponsor Teacher

My sponsor teacher uses many forms of invisible discipline in her classroom management. She counts backwards from five to get their attention before beginning a lesson. Before switching tasks, or when the time is up for working on an assignment, she gives a five-minute warning. This eases transition and helps with more cooperation from the students since they have had time to prepare mentally to finish their current task. Most often when transitioning between tasks she allows them to get a snack. This helps to keep them energized and allows for talk and movement. She has an overhead timer, which normally she uses for timed drills but is applicable to many different tasks, such as counting down how much time left to be ready for the next task.

Regarding monitoring the behaviour of the students, she uses visual and verbal cues to regulate behaviour. For example, when a student is talking while she is teaching she will look them in the eye to show her disapproval silently. A verbal example is she will say their name to get their attention if off task. She will also pause in her teaching while looking at the talking students until they cease their talking. She avoids drawing a

lot of attention to the students. She respects her students and treats them accordingly. She is very aware of the student's behaviour whether she lets them know it or not. She will remember the actions of the student's and if it is not appropriate to talk to them at that moment, she will have a conversation with them in private. She employs that tactic often as the group of students are all friends and those reprimands can mean a lot to them socially. When she had to talk to students regarding behaviour I consistently saw her do this in a one on one setting, not in front of the whole class. She would tell them their behaviour was not acceptable in front of the class but would have a discussion with them later. With some infractions (gum chewing, for example), she has the students write lines. If a student uses mild inappropriate language (words such as crap) she writes this down on the board and the next day they have to stand in front of the class and tell jokes.

Another method she employs is using her proximity. She will walk around the room and stand next to the off task students. This will silently remind them to focus. I have seen this method used by many people over the school year; I even used it myself! Before she starts a lesson with the class or when reminding them to bring the noise level down, she will address the class by saying things such as: "Ladies and Gentlemen", "Grade Sevens", "Division 2". She tries to get the students to learn to be responsible for their own behaviour. A prime example of this was one student who chose to use class time to make a hockey net out of a pizza box from his lunch. He also drew a rink on paper, which he attached to his desk with tape. After school, she approached him regarding this. She told him that since he chose class time to do this in he was to stay after class time to remove it. She allowed him to keep the net but in a cupboard away from his desk. I thought this was a good lesson, since she did not do this in front of the

class, saving him from embarrassment and since removing it took up part of his after school time this would make him reconsider this behaviour. She did not have to say a lot to get this message across to him.

She writes out the plans for the day on the white board so that the students are aware of what they are going to do right away in the morning. This allows for maximal use of instruction time. She also writes this out so the students can copy it to their planners. Some of the routine tasks she has made into magnets and has them hanging on the side of the whiteboard to save time from writing those out everyday. She changes this everyday after school so it is ready the next day. She also has all the days of the week and months of the year written in French that she changes everyday.

My sponsor teacher involves the class when handing out papers. She has set up a committee within her classroom for students who like to volunteer for these jobs. Sometimes she chooses one student from each side of the room to walk around passing out papers. This way she can still talk and focus on teaching while the papers are circulating. Some students finish their work earlier than other students do so they come to the teacher and offer their assistance. She sometimes has these students pass out corrected homework. My sponsor teacher made small lists with all the students' names on them to use when receiving assignments. The students highlight their name when they handed in their assignment. If students were collecting homework for her the helper would do this task. This was a great way to give the students a feeling of worth in the class and something extra for them to do when done with their own assignments. It also gives the teacher extra time to help the students who need assistance. Later on in the year, she had two of her students walk around with a clipboard checking for homework. This became

part of the routine so it saved everyone time. They do this during announcements every morning.

When a lesson is over and there is something required of them to turn in; she tells them to put them in the appropriate folders and then bring them to her turn-in area. She keeps sort of dish tubs on the side of the room labelled with post-its saying what was to be turned in. “Book Reports” for example.

When leaving the class the students have to sign a paper posted right by the door. The teacher attached a pen to this paper to make it easier for the students to sign in and out. When they re-enter the room they cross off their name. Later in the year, she took down this paper. She was better able to recognize her class; and who was missing from the class. She asked that the students just come to her when they need to leave, and not leave without asking. That way she knew for sure who was gone. In addition, this allows her to be in better contact with the students to make sure that only one student is leaving to the washroom at a time. When walking in the hallways the rule is to walk quietly on the right side and if in a group, they are to walk single file. This is emphasized often to the grade sevens so they can role model the behaviour for the younger grades.

My sponsor teacher works to include all students and make them feel that their opinions are valued. There are not a lot of risk takers in the class so she attempts to bring those ones out of their shell a bit when asking questions open to the class. One or two students in the class always raise their hands to talk and answer questions. She does call on them but does not have them dominate the class. If a student answered the question differently than she expected, she handles this tactfully. She says things such as “that is one way to look at it” or “I never thought of it that way”. For example, when going over

healthy eating habits and monitoring what we eat, one student gave an example of what some Olympic swimmers do; which is eating and then causing themselves to get sick. She said that while that may be what they do, we could not do that in our class. She then talked about why that is not healthy activity, taking an aside from the wellness activity they were planning as a class. She could have simply said no we cannot do that, that is a bad idea but she reframed it to illustrate the difference from a healthy habit and a destructive habit. His “wrong answer” became an important topic and therefore was important.

When going over assignments, doing corrections or explaining a new one, my sponsor teacher makes this a group discussion. She does not stand in the front of the room and talk by herself. She gives the students time to discuss answers among themselves and with her. Part of the curriculum is that the students have to do oral speeches and my sponsor teacher decided to have the students participate in the choosing of the topics by having them write down ideas on slips of paper. The slips go into a jar and when it is their turn to talk the student will speak for a few minutes about the topic drawn. She did apply certain limits to what they could write on the paper so that everyone could speak about the topics. She tries to keep the learning interesting. Once when giving a spelling pre-test, she stopped and talked about her dog, how he would climb out of their yard and walk along the top of their fence like a cat. This was nice to see, since spelling tests can be boring and this lightened the mood a bit for everyone. The discussion related to the word list and yet was still a break. I liked this as it showed the class a part of her that was not “teacher” and bonded her more to them. They all had stories they wanted to share about their pets and odd behaviour.

I did not witness my sponsor teacher extending or adapting any projects for specific students. The grade seven teachers were going to have the classes break up into different groups based upon the individual's math abilities, platooning the students. I think they have since decided against this to avoid having any students or parents feeling that the teachers are labelling their children. They did not move the students around to different classrooms for different instruction time based on their ability. The class does have about three different levels of abilities in it, especially in relation to math. Some of the students always stay in the classroom for math instruction. A few leave the class to get help with learning assistants. These students work with the learning assistant on a modified program for them. A few of them leave for independent math work. The independent workers stay in the class during math time but work on their own homework quietly during the lesson. They work through the book on their own and take different math tests than the rest of the class. During my time in the practicum, my focus will be on the group of students who stay in the class, my sponsor teacher will have the independents and the IEP students will be in the learning centre. There are a couple students who require modified English work, and this will be incorporated into my planning of my poetry lesson. They will turn in fewer poems to me at the end of my practicum. One of the students I believe will want to do what I have planned though as she is creative and enjoys that sort of project. When I did my Groundhog Story in the beginning, she was not required to do it yet she turned in a wonderful book to me. She will have the option available to her.

When the teacher is doing assessment, she watches for how much they are trying in class. She watches for how much effort they are putting forth in trying to understand

what is being taught. She looks for effort on the homework assigned. For every assignment she gives to the students, there are the givens they have to include which is their name, the date, and it is to be in handwriting. The rest of the criteria she goes over beforehand and distributes rubrics for them to know what is expected of them. To get four in her class, a student has to go above and beyond; really WOW her she says.

This assessment is beneficial to me in many ways. It allowed me to analyze what my sponsor teacher does so when I am teaching in the classroom I work towards the same goals. It also made me more aware of what to expect from the school as a whole regarding their expectations of staff and parents. We expect the staff to work hard at making the learning fit the students and help them to succeed. We expect the parents to participate in their children's success in whatever ways they can, the more they can help the better. We expect the staff and parents to work together for the students to succeed, having open communication regarding how the students are doing. We expect the staff to support each other in times of need and to create a positive atmosphere for the students. Now this is an ideal type of school described here yet it is something to strive for and work towards, even if possibly unattainable. There are always variables and exceptions to the rule. If or when we encounter those exceptions, we adapt the plan to fit the needs of that individual. That is when working as a team within the school is most needed.

Being able to observe the classroom operate was the most beneficial to me. Being immersed in a functional classroom and then reviewing what I learned to write down those experiences gave meaning to what we are learning in our education classes. Watching what we discuss as a class happening in real life, I was able to see why some things work and why others do not. It gave me many ideas on how to handle different

things that I may encounter as a teacher. One of the things I learned that was a great help to me was to create shortcuts for things that you do often as a teacher; such as collecting homework, taking attendance, writing out the daily plans and having classroom helpers. My sponsor teacher is very organized. She has envelopes for everything. She has many baskets on the counters labelled to collect the assignments. She has baskets for staplers, scissors, glue and tape. Whatever the students might need, they are easily accessible to them and always kept in the same location.

This assessment will help me to plan later lessons especially regarding the little things, such as how distribute papers. In addition, it helped me learn how to call on students effectively so that all are involved. Since there are a range of abilities in my practicum class and the willingness of some to avoid speaking out I will plan for how to involve them more without risking scaring them.

I am very excited to apply what I have learned from my observation and this assessment. This assessment amazed me as to how much I really learned in the five days I was in the class. I did not realize how much until I set out to write this. It was very valuable. This was even more helpful the second time. It really helps to write down what you know and analyze what it is you have seen over a few months. It made me realize that I have learned plenty about teaching and that there is so much more to learn also. Also seeing how much I was able to add to this assessment shows how much growth I have made and I am curious to see how much I can grow as I go through years as a student teacher and later a “regular” teacher.

Something I forgot to add earlier was that my school also does “buddies”; big buddies and little buddies. My sponsor teacher’s class for example is buddied up with a

grade three class. Every year this school combines two grades together to work on certain projects. This is a beneficial program for all the students I think. It works well for the big buddies to be a mentor to the younger students. It is beneficial to the little buddies to get a chance to work with the older students and learn from them. I think it is nice for the little buddies to know that the older students are not scary and intimidating. I think that because of having such a wide range in age in one school it is important to have connections between them in this fashion. That way when they are out on the playground and need help, the little buddies might be able to find their big buddy and get help instead of being scared of them. It also creates a community feeling to the school. It is nice for the classes to combine and meet each other more often than just at assemblies and concerts.

Learners

In my sponsor teachers class there are twelve boys and eighteen girls. They are grade seven students ranging from age twelve to age thirteen. This group as a whole is very talkative and puts talking with friends as a priority over doing school work, having students work one on one or in small groups is good, having the whole class together is more of a challenge when teaching

- 1) friendly student, little nervous and reserved, goes to learning assistant for math, average reading ability, did well on groundhog book, wrote above what was asked of them, socially has a few friends, goes to band class
- 2) Fast runner, average math ability, plays lacrosse, average reading ability, has a few friends, happy student, has siblings in the school, goes to band class
- 3) IEP for math, on a modified program, quiet with the teacher, social with a few people, not very good social skills, goes to band class; has a younger sibling at the school
- 4) artistic, does well in many things, is reserved about her abilities, shy when presenting, works hard and gets good grades because of it, has trouble with math but wants to succeed and is trying hard, has many friends and also sings well, goes to band class, very tidy and organized

- 5) learning assistant for math, has a wonderful smile, lots of off task behaviour and forgetting work at home but does get work turned in, socially has a couple of friends, goes to band class; concerned about appearance
- 6) plays sports well, average student though I think she could do better, I have faith in her, she is very social, very polite and helpful to the teacher and friends, goes to band class; has a younger sibling at the school
- 7) helpful works hard, did wonderful on her groundhog story, went above and beyond requirements, is guarded to avoid letting people in and risking getting hurt, has a couple friends in class, parent helps out at school everyday, regular math class and good reading skills, goes to band class
- 8) positive attitude, helpful, social but quiet in class, advanced math, does well in english, tries hard and it shows, goes to band class; has a younger sibling at the school
- 9) sometimes happy, sometimes not, hard to read sometimes; guarded, gives up in math class "It is so confusing" goes to learning centre for help is social with a few people, goes to band class; plays basketball
- 10) positive student; helpful to friends and teachers, plays basketball, tries hard in school, is quiet in class but will talk if called on, in regular math class, goes to band
- 11) happy student, an actor, wants attention, puts on an act for friends, smart; basketball player; leader, knows own learning style, raises hand in class often, in regular math class, in drama class
- 12) positive student, quiet, English not first language, in regular math class, friends with a couple people, goes to drama
- 13) ESL student, independent math, works hard on projects and has very good work habits, takes pride in whatever work they do, has a couple of friends, quiet student in class, helpful and always smiling
- 14) not very good socially; does not fit in with peer group; needs assistance in keeping on track; does most work on time or early; does not use class time well though; often doodling or chatting with those nearby; has loud outbursts; often very inappropriate, easily distracted by others; has been referred to school based team but mom is not working with school well; some think it is autism but mom not in agreement; mostly socializes with younger children at recess; in drama class; dad died a few years back
- 15) artistic, on an IEP/modified program; works with learning centre most of the day; does like to take part in projects even though not required to; very helpful smiley student; a pleasure to be around; did wonderful job on groundhog book; in drama class;

16) wonderful person when one on one; harder to manage when part of a group, especially when with friends; very socially focused and distracting to friends in class time; has learned when to move away from friends to stay on task; regular math class; basketball player and very active in many sport activities; fast runner as are other siblings; in band class; not very organized desk; constant mess around desk and floor; has a younger sibling in school; older sibling left to secondary this year

17) positive attitude; very smiley; talkative in class sometimes; not a risk-taker; in regular math; does not like to run in the school runs but does well when tries;

18) goal is to be social, not to do school work; could do well if focused more on school; in regular math class; plays basketball; does not work to potential; is a likable person and fun to talk to; younger sibling at the school

19) very positive attitude and enjoyable to be around; also does not work to own potential; in regular math; has friends, acts as class clown for their approval; plays basketball; talkative in class

20) artistic, attends many hours of dance class after school, sings, dancing is main focus, does hard work also in school; in advanced math; has friends and works hard to stay with them; strives for perfection; has two younger siblings at school

21) works very hard; very helpful in class; dependable; offers help often; pays attention in class and wants to succeed; in drama class, wants to act; has younger sibling at the school

22) often off task and talking; independent math; works hard when focused; parents work hard to instil work ethics; many friends and is a leader; basketball player; needs help organizing; constant mess around desk; always losing pencils etc.

23) social; keeps on task; in regular math; very helpful in class; wonderful groundhog story; plays basketball good influence on other students; in regular math class; in band class

24) uneasy socially; has a couple good friends; not a risk taker; quiet in class; never raises hands; puts projects off until last minute; is working on time management in regular math class; in band class; has a younger sibling at the school

25) very meek and modest; does well in class; does not take risks in class; will talk if called on but will not raise hand; in regular math class; in band class; has a few friends in class; helpful to teacher

26) learning assistant for math; very talkative and often off task; has a twin in class; turns in incomplete work often; does not put much effort forth; often late to class

27) learning assistant for math; very talkative and off task frequently; has a twin in class; also turns in incomplete work;

28) very polite hardworking student; wants to do well; very modest student; when reading groundhog story in class I saw how much achievement was wanted, proud when got a good grade on it; good at basketball; regular math class

29) very polite and quiet student; independent math; English not first language; works hard to achieve top potential

30) new student; working well to fit in and make friends; told by last school needs assistance in all areas; English not first language and parents hardly talk to school/teacher;